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Experiences and perceptions of women towards inequalities in the labour market of the Republic of Croatia

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Master in Sociology

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of Sociology

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I am beyond grateful to all wonderful women who participated in this research. This work would not be possible without the patience and the guidance of my excellent mentor Renato Miguel do Carmo. Last but not least, I would like to thank to all my friends and family who have been there through the whole process of making this thesis.

Resumo:

A entrada massiva das mulheres no mercado de trabalho, no século passado, contribuiu para alterações sociais significativas. Esta tese visa apresentar e desenvolver várias abordagens sociológicas sobre o tema da desigualdade de género no mercado de trabalho e tópicos relacionados.

Esta pesquisa analisa as percepções e as experiências profissionais das mulheres em relação às desigualdades laborais no contexto da República da Croácia. Através de uma análise de conteúdo de 20 entrevistas, foram identificadas quatro dimensões determinantes: a disparidade salarial, a desigualdade de género, as formas de discriminação e de segregação das mulheres, o preconceito e o assédio sexual. Estas dimensões são sistematicamente analisadas e ligadas ao quadro teórico.

Palavras chave: *género, desigualdades, disparidades salariais, discriminação*

Abstract:

With women entering the labour force in the past century, the labour market has undergone significant changes. This thesis aims to present various sociological approaches to the theme of gender inequality in the labour market and related topics, foreign and Croatian.

This work analyses the perceptions and experiences of women toward inequalities in the labour market of the Republic of Croatia. By means of a content analysis of 20 interviews, four different dimensions were chosen: the glass ceiling and pay gap, gender and gender inequality, discrimination and segregation of women, prejudice and sexual harassment. Those dimensions are systematically clarified, and linked with the theoretical framework.

Keywords: *gender, inequalities, gender pay gap, discrimination*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in the labour market is an often theme of many worldwide discussions, and still, it represents a common issue in the Republic of Croatia. One of the key goals and priorities of the development of Croatian society is the establishment of gender social equality. In order to achieve the convergence of gender inequality as successfully as possible, Croatia introduced several institutional mechanisms. Institutionally, mechanisms for monitoring, developing and regulating issues of gender inequality were inaugurated, such as the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality. The Law on Gender Equality and laws on combating all forms of discrimination against women were also established. Moreover, Croatia has signed the UN convention on eliminating all forms of discrimination against women- CEDAW (Galić, 2009).

The leading change is the growth in the number of women in education and gainful employment, although this is offset by the different ways women are involved. Such as the dire conditions of almost half of the employed women working part-time and segregation in occupations and individual branches (Walby, 2005). Although many measures have been taken, the issue of gender equality is still questionable in the Croatian labour market.

The subject of this master thesis is: Experiences and perception of women toward inequalities in the labour market of the Republic of Croatia. The goal of this thesis is to raise awareness of the gender inequalities that occur in the labour and to define the current situation regarding gender inequalities in the private sector of Croatia.

The aim of this master is to answer the research question: Have respondents experienced gender inequalities in the labour market of the Republic of Croatia?

A following hypothesis were selected for this research: (1) Respondents believe that the glass ceiling and the pay gap exist in a company they work for or worked for. (2) Respondents were faced with stereotypes and discrimination based on their gender, in a company they work or worked for. (3) Respondents have experienced any kind of sexual harassment, in a company they work or worked for.

Moreover, this work presents various sociological research, as well as different sociological approaches on the theme of gender inequality in the labour market and related topics, foreign and Croatian. It has four chapters: theoretical framework, statistics, methodology, findings and conclusion. The theoretical chapter is also divided into four important categories: gender and gender inequality, discrimination and segregation of women, glass ceiling, pay gap, prejudice and sexual harassment. The Statistics chapter studies statistical Eurostat data on gender pay gaps, underrepresentation of women in higher positions, discrimination and stereotypes of working women in EU countries. Also, it displays data from local Croatian studies. The methodology part explains the statistical methods used for this thesis. The findings section shows answers from the participants of the qualitative research conducted for this thesis, which are interrelated to the theoretical framework. The conclusion is the final part of this work in which everything being said in this paper is summed up.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 GENDER AND GENDER INEQUALITY

Throughout history, men and women consistently had different positions in society, the role of men was more powerful, wanted and important than the woman's role (Galić, 2011). Virginia Woolf, famous writer from the twentieth century, emphasized how important is for women's freedom to have an approach to professions and the ability to earn and own her money (Woolf, 1984; Tommasi, 1997).

In the second half of the twentieth century, the position of women has significantly improved, especially regarding economic independence (Leinart, Novosel, 1999). More opportunities on the market labour for women created a consciousness about their various abilities. Prior to that period of time, women's role was primarily related to the private sphere and households. This change was due to the action of the first wave of feminism, which fought for basic political civil rights in the context of possible education for women at all levels and the growing demand for women in the labour force (Walby, 2005).

The major step of the transition from the private to the public sphere has affected not only society as a whole, but was also of psychological importance for women's self-awareness (Leinart, Novosel, 1999). “The relative positions of women and men within occupational division of labour are fundamental to debates on the relationship between class and gender” (Jackson, Scott, 1991:85). In the 1970 the resurgence of feminism questioned belief that existing differences between man and women were ordained by nature (Leinart Novosel, 1999).

“Inequalities are by nature multidimensional and, for this reason, are not circumscribed merely to a sector of society (such as the economy, education, health, etc.” (Carmo, 2021). Göran Therborn is a Sociologist who explained the theoretical view of the concept of multidimensionality. Theborn mentioned three types of inequalities: Vital inequalities, resource inequalities and existential inequalities. Vital inequality is “the type of inequality which refers to human beings as living organisms who experience a differentiated set of vulnerabilities in terms of their health and physical and mental well-being that, in turn, depend on a set of socially produced conditions with starkly unequal institutional and organisational responses (for example, in terms of the quality and comprehensiveness of the public health services, among others)” (Therborn 2006, 2013; Carmo

2021). The second one classifies the unequal distribution of resources (economic, social and cultural). “The last type refers to existential inequalities, meaning the unequal recognition of human individuals as persons. In this case, the focus is on the inequalities arising from oppressions and restrictions to individual and/or collective freedom, discriminations, stigmatisations and humiliations, illustrated by phenomena such as patriarchy, slavery or racism (Costa, 2012; Carmo, 2021). These three inequalities are connected and harmonious with the definition of Intersectionality as “an analysis that affirms that systems based on race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnic identity, nation and age mutually form the constructive features of social organisation” (Aboim, 2020; Carmo, 2021).

Rousseau differed two types of inequalities, natural and political. Natural arises from the nature of individual physical diversity, while political or moral is formed as a result of social relations. Further, he explains how it is necessary to consider physical diversity, but eliminate political or moral (1978).

Plenty of various theories arose around the concept of gender inequality. Giddens (2007) mentions five different approaches: functionalism, feminisms, black feminism, radical feminism and liberal feminism.

For functionalists, sexual division and gender differences are responsible for the integration of society and its stability. Feminists do not except gender inequalities as something natural and normal. Black feminists pointed out a difference in experiences of white and non-white women regarding to gender inequalities, ethnicity and class are essential factors to understand oppression they are dealing with. Radical feminists approach, study patriarchy as a male's systematic domination, and claim that it is men's responsibility for the exploitation of women through patriarchy. For liberal feminists gender inequality needs to be explained in a phrase of cultural and social attitudes, such as pay gap, glass ceiling, discrimination and sexism (Giddens, 2007).

It is crucial to explain the difference between sex and gender, sex is biologically determined, while gender is a social structure (Rodin, 2003; Vasiljević, 2011). “The concept of gender was adopted in order to emphasize the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the social ordering of relations between women and men introduction gender” (Jackson, Scott, 1991:1). According to Giddens (2007), the term of gender is linked to all differences between women and men, femininity

and masculinity, in a historical, cultural psychological and social way. Giddens (2007) argue that no such society exists in which women have more power than men.

Moreover, gender is a product of everyday interaction “it denotes hierarchical division between women and men embedded in both social institutions and social practices” (Jackson, Scott, 1991:1). Gender is one of the key dimensions of identity, as well as expectations, norms, perceptions, values, feelings and behavior which society pressure on biological sexes with a different models and mechanisms. We also deconstruct gender ourselves “as members of a certain social community, according to the cultural role models it presents to us, but also according to our personal affinities” (Milić, 2007: 136; according to Galić, 2011: 11). Since the childhood, girls are tough to dress up, play cooks or play weddings, while boys play with the cars, guns and a different tools, which is example of how society seemingly unobtrusively create gender roles.

Moreover, gender is also “sociological in that it focuses our attention on the division between men and women and the hierarchical relationship between them” (Delphy 1993; Jackson, Scott, 1991 20).

Sociology analyses the notion of gender on two analytical levels and meanings: relations of social inequalities (stratification) between gender groups based on categories of social power and descriptive differences between gender groups. Gender social stratification and the division of labour cause the unequal position of men and women regarding wealth, reputation and power. On the other hand, gender differences based on biological differences are one of the key foundations of social inequality (Galić, 2011). With women in the labour market, many tasks and expectations “of them as workers are highly gendered, defining them as women and workers secondly” (Jackson, Scott, 1991). In addition, Sexual division of labour causes consequences for both women and men.

One of the consequences produced by different positions in the labour market is the existence of gender inequality. It is frequently visible in the underrepresentation of women in higher working positions in companies and organisations (Leinart Novosel, 1999). Many women aspire to higher managerial positions but still bear the responsibilities for the household and children, maintaining the patterns of inequality (Bilić, 2007). Equality in general, particularly equality between men and women, represent one of the most demanding areas of regulatory activity (Vasiljević, 2011).

Croatian Act on Gender Equality¹, defines: “Gender equality means that women and men are equally present in all areas of public and private life, that they have the same status, the same opportunities to exercise all rights and equal benefits from the achieved results” (2008).

2.2 DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION OF WOMEN

Workers are often discriminated against, especially women (Potočnjak, Grgić, 2014). The concept of discrimination is differently defined in international documents and numerous definitions of discrimination exist (Vaslijević, 2011).

In convention of suspension regarding all types of discrimination, specific discrimination toward women is defined as: “discrimination against women means any exclusion or restriction based on sex, the effect or purpose of which is to violate or annul the recognition, or achievement of women's rights regardless of marital status, based on equality between men and women, human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, socio-cultural, civic or any other area of public life” (Gomenian, 1996; Vaslijević, 2011).

Discrimination is divided into direct and indirect. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favorably than another person of the opposite sex would be treated in the same or similar circumstances. Indirect discrimination is produced if a practice or neutral legal norm directly and openly puts a significantly higher percentage of one sex at a disadvantage. Unlike indirect discrimination, which is discernible and relatively easily remedied by the various existing laws, direct discrimination is more difficult to prevent and detect and often is unnoticed in the courts and mechanisms of the law protection disadvantage (Vasiljević, 2011).

In the field of discrimination, the norms of European law are divided into three groups: equal treatment, social security and equal pay (Craig, De Burca, 1998; Ellis, 19998; Perišin, 2003; Bilić, 2007). Generally speaking, the concept of equality and prohibition of discrimination stands for

¹ Act on Gender Equality, Official Gazzete, 82/08, Article 5. – Zakon o ravnopravnosti spolova, Narodne novine

differentiating allocations or preferences in employment regardless of the foundations of such unequal treatment (Bilić, 2007).

In Croatia, a labour Law came into force in 2010, in which anti-discrimination provisions were reduced to the prohibition of sex discrimination in pay, and unequal treatment with regard to the duration of employment and working hours, protection of dignity and the status of assigned worker (Potočnjak, Grgić, 2014). Furthermore, discrimination most often occurs to or minorities "visible groups". Race and ethnicity, as well as age and gender are visible characteristics which can be easily used for the purpose of segregation (Vasiljević, 2011).

Segregation is a specific form of discrimination, it represents the separation of persons on one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination without justifiable reason (Potočnjak, Grgić, 2014). Gender segregation is an elastic and persistent feature of the workplace. It refers to the concentration of women and men in different jobs, occupations and companies in the labour market (Galić, 2011).

According to Hakim (1979), two types of segregation are distinguished: horizontal and vertical. "Horizontal segregation exists when men and women quite commonly work in different types of occupations. Vertical segregation in occupations exists when men usually work in higher category occupations and women work in lower category occupations or vice versa. The two are logically separated" (1979:19).

Theories of occupational segregation were formed in order to clarify why both women and black people generally dominated in specific sectors of the labour market and not others (Phizacklea, 2002).

Thanks to the entry of women into the labour market in large numbers, the labour market has undergone a major transformation that has affected gender roles in society. The amount of feminized occupations has increased, which impacts negatively on their reputation and wages. Due to the mentioned changes, horizontal segregation is a common phenomenon, men dominate in leading management positions and skilled jobs, and women dominate in domestic-like jobs. On the other hand, vertical segregation is also happening, men are employed on influential positions, and women are in jobs that have little social power and little chance of advancing. At the same time, women face the glass ceiling in male-dominated organizations (Galić, 2009).

2.3 GLASS CEILING, PAY GAP AND PREJUDICE

The term "glass ceiling" became popular in 1986 by Wall street Journal when Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) reported on business women. Glass ceiling is symbolic name for the form of discrimination in the workplace (Jergovski, 2010).

This indicates a situation where qualified and capable women cannot be promoted to leadership positions because they are reserved for men. The word ceiling signifies the existence of a certain limit in the hierarchical advancement, which is controlling a woman (sometimes race or ethnicity minorities) from advancing regardless of qualifications. Such a restriction is often invisible to a woman until she is stuck beneath it, which is the reason why is called glass.

For women, professional mobility towards higher and better-paid jobs is gradual and more difficult than for men, therefore women remain in lower positions in the hierarchy of a certain occupation (Bourdieu, 2001 according to Birešev, 2006).

One of the reasons why it is harder for women to advance to higher positions is the inability to join men's groups formed within companies that are important for opening up opportunities and gaining knowledge that is key to progress. Thus, women are excluded from informal networks within the company, which leads to a lack of information that facilitates business and expansion. The existence of a glass ceiling is closely linked to the pay gap as well as to the prejudices and stereotypes that women encounter in the market labour (Jergovski, 2010).

According to EU laws, pay gap between men and women is defined as the difference between the average earnings of men and women. The pay gap is evidence of vertical and horizontal gender segregation, also direct discrimination towards women. It is caused by patterns of employment, structure, part-time jobs, pay regimes, stereotypes, unequal access to education and professional development. For example, the pay gap includes distinctions in wages between men and women per hour and the difference in work evaluation. Although, women dominate in some areas in the labour market, health or education or retail, more men than women have higher salaries and thus the overall difference in income distribution increases and time spent at work. (Pojmovnik rodne terminologije, 2007).

“The best confirmation of the insecurity of the position given to women in the labour market is without a doubt, the fact that they are always paid less than men when everything else is the same.

They get fewer jobs with the same diplomas, and especially that they are proportionally more affected by unemployment for a certain period - which is a consequence of their almost certain exclusion from power games and career prospects” (Bourdieu, 2001 according to Birešev, 2006: 209).

On average, men earn more than women and thus contribute to disproportionately high levels of poverty, especially when talking about female-headed households (Dunn, Skaggs, 1999; Chant, 2003; Galić 2011). Namely, it has been proven that female poverty levels significantly exceed male ones (McLanahan and Kelly, 2006). Women are represented above average in lower paid jobs (Galić,2011).

In order not to remain unemployed many women will do part time jobs as well as temporary jobs (Vantaggiato, 1997). Even though part-time jobs and flexible working hours provide women with the opportunity to have time for the family, while gaining economic independence, such jobs are an indicator of gender inequality in the workplace. They significantly determine the development of a woman's career (Pojmovnik rodne terminologije, 2007). In most EU countries, women who work temporary and part-time jobs account for more than half of the workforce (Giddens 2007).

Bourdieu explains that all the work of women in the household, which survives even with the increasing employment and advancement of women, has the function of contributing to the symbolic upgrade of the productive role of men (Bourdieu, 2001 according to Birešev, 2006). Women often fail to fulfil themselves in both professional and family roles due to family worries and work at home. Neither companies nor states are trying to reconcile family and work obligations (Galić, 2011). Women are expected to put their household first, which often causes difficulties in progression in their professional careers. According to Lisa Haker family oriented policies are good for campaigns and all companies should implement them. Thanks to them, employees get the opportunity to become more loyal and loyal, and more productive at work because they do not waste time balancing work and family obligations (Lisa Haker, 1996). Nevertheless, gender segregation is connected with stereotypes that give women traditional features such as: the label of emotionality, the main roles for raising children as well as the inability to think rationally (Galić, 2011).

Prejudice is a mostly negative attitude about a group and its members. It is a matter of generalization which leads to unreasonable categorization of a group and its members. Open

prejudice stands for a clearly expressed attitude towards the other group. If the attitude is not shown, but still actively influences the behaviour of one group or an individual towards others, it is a hidden prejudice (Pojmovnik rodne terminologije, 2007).

Stereotypes belong to the subtype of prejudice. Stereotypes are also generalized perspectives about someone else. Most often it includes physical and mental characteristics that are supposed to define primarily individuals, and then the whole group of that individual (Pojmovnik rodne terminologije, 2007).

Women's relation to the domestic sphere presents a big problem for women in the labour market. "The way women do or do not fit into the schema of paid employment and organizational life is seen primarily as a correlate of their marital status and, more important still, whether they do or do not have children" (Cockburn, 1997; 180).

To avoid women with domestic ties and negative effects on a company's business regardless of a woman's efficiency and ability, bosses mostly hire men and place them in leadership positions. A common prejudice against women is that they lack the abilities and ambitions of a leader, although there is no statistical evidence to support this (Jergovski, 2010).

In business organizations, female employees are perceived as less valuable because there is a possibility that they will stay at home if they have a sick child or spend time on maternity leave. Women who work on higher, leadership positions are expected to take over responsibility, but at the same time to listen to the advice of men. In addition, they are constantly under the watch. Also, they need to prove their competencies, points, strength and experience. Besides, they need to be careful about their physical appearance and expressing emotions (Višnjić, Ređep, Hainš, 2018).

2.4 SEXUAL HARRASMENT

A Few years ago, Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was exposed for sexually harassing his female colleagues. There are many cases of sexual harassment in the workplace that have not attracted media attention. Sexual harassment is still a huge problem that is being hushed. It is a direct shape of discrimination and a horrific event for the victims.

To describe the phenomena of sexual harassment, I will use the following definition. According to United Nations Secretariat (2008) “Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behaviour, it can take the form of a single incident. Sexual harassment may occur between persons of the opposite or same sex. Both males and females can be either the victims or the offenders”².

Some of the behaviours which are examples of sexual harassment are: rape or attempted rape in the workplace; undesirable pressures to provide sexual services; undesirable touching; undesirable sexual views or gestures; sexual telephone calls or sending sexually explicit material; unwanted sexual teasing; comments of a sexual nature; personal questions about social or sexual life; reference sexual comments about a person's clothing, physical build, or appearance; imitating kisses; standing in close proximity to a person; sexually suggestive signals; hugging and kissing as well touching and rubbing against another person in a sexual sense (Dulović, 2012).

² <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordination/antiharassment.html>

3. STATISTICS

3.1 EUROPEAN UNION STATISTICS

Eurostat data for the European Union from 2020 showed that there are not any significant differences when it comes to the education of men and women in lower education levels compared to higher education.

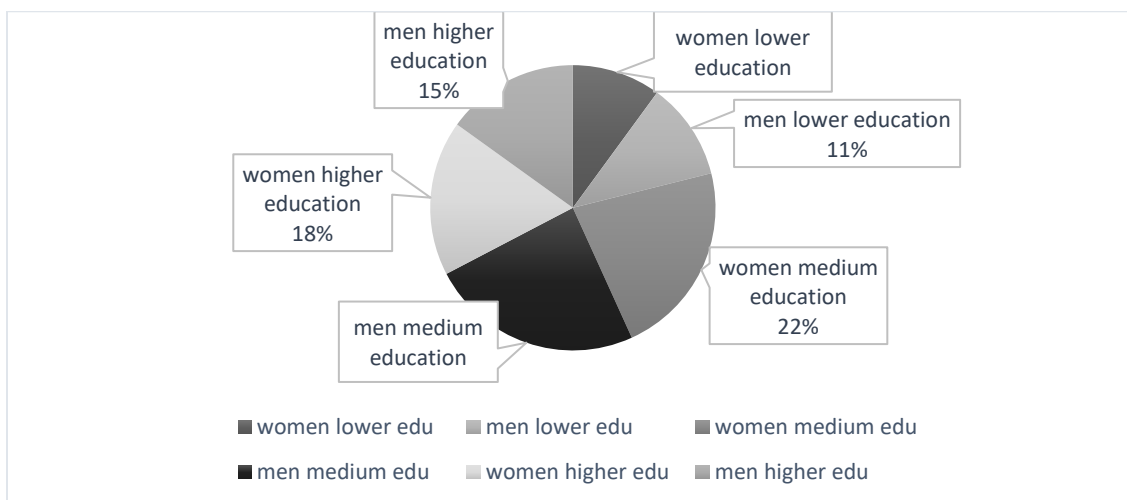
When it comes to lower education, in a pattern of women and men aged 25 to 64 in the EU 11 % of men and 10 % of women had at most completed lower secondary education in 2020.

48 % of women and 44 % of men in the EU had completed most upper secondary education or post-secondary non-tertiary education. Almost all Member States confirm this pattern.

In a category of tertiary education in the EU, 30 % of men had completed this level, compared with 35 % of women. The share of women with tertiary education was higher than the equivalent share of men in almost all Member States, with the largest gap between men and women detected in Sweden, Slovenia, Baltic Member States and Finland.

In Croatia in 2020, 23.1% of both genders have finished tertiary education. Tertiary educational attainment of women was 41%, when Tertiary educational attainment men was 26.5%.

Figure 1. Representation of women and men finished educational levels in EU countries (2020)



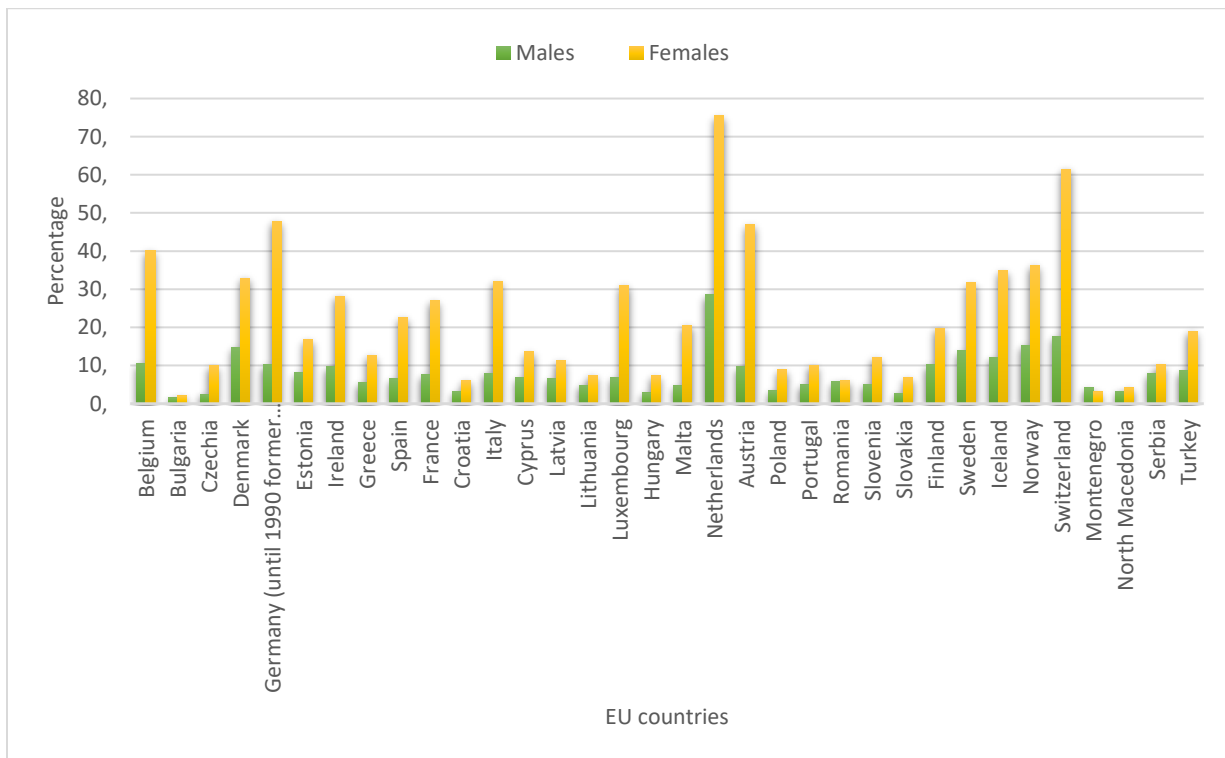
Source: <https://ec.europa.eu>., Accessed 15 April.2022

In the EU in 2020, on average, the employment rate of men (73%) was higher than that of women with (63 %).

Part-time work is a significant characteristic of compromise between family life and work. Looking at data for the EU in 2020 it is visible that almost a third of women (30%) in employment worked part-time. Compared to the only 8% of men who worked part-time. Variety exists among the Member States.

The highest share of women working part-time was 76% in the Netherlands. This trend was followed by Germany with 48%, Austria with 47% and Belgium with 40%. When the Netherlands had the highest share of men working part-time, 29%, Denmark had 15% and Sweden 14%. Bulgaria was the country with the lowest share of 2% of both women and men working part-time. In Croatia, 6,1% of women worked part-time and only 3,2% of men.

Figure 2. Overview of the ratio of women working part-time in EU (2020)

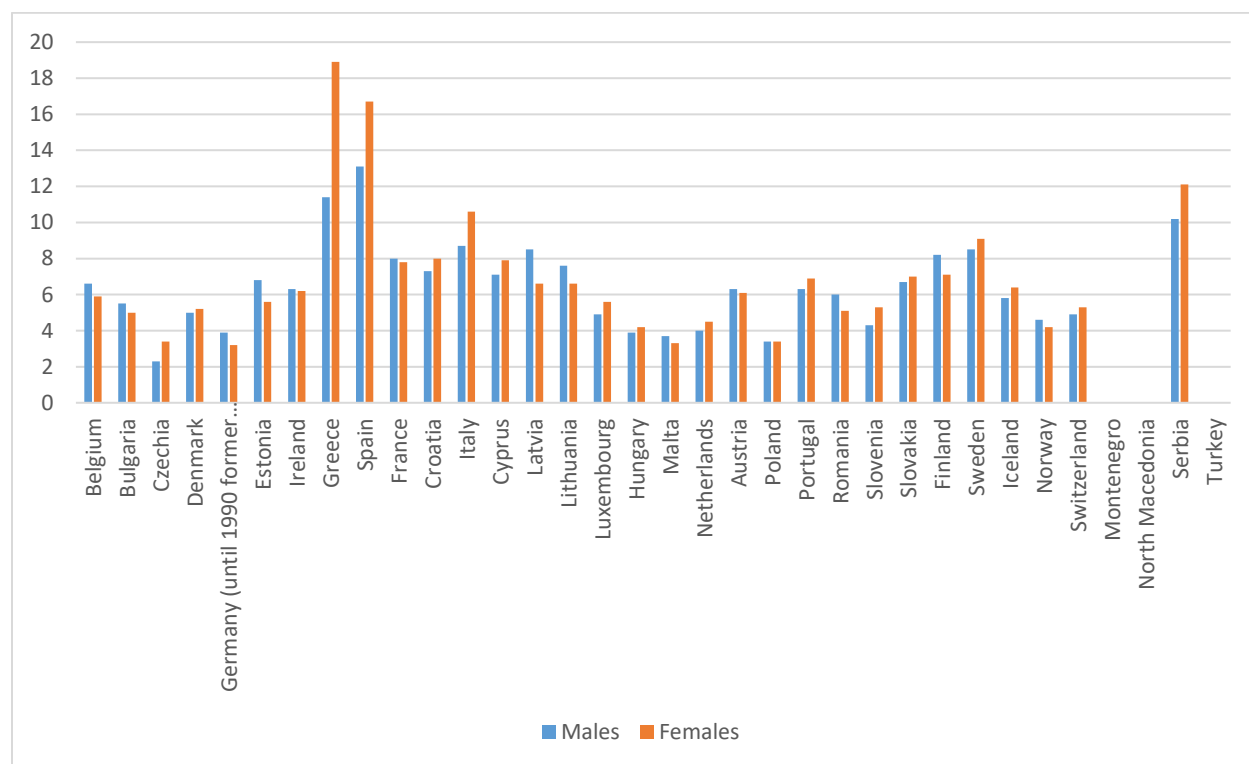


Source: <https://ec.europa.eu>, Accessed 15 April.2022

The unemployment rate in the EU in 2020, was 7.4 % for women and 6.8 % for men. “In fifteen Member States, the unemployment rate was higher for women, in ten it was higher for men and in Cyprus and Sweden it was even”³

The largest differences between female and male unemployment rates, where the rate was higher for women than for men, were observed in Greece (19.8 % for women and 13.6 % for men) and Spain (17.4 % and 13.9 %). The opposite pattern was observed in Latvia (7.1 % for women and 9.1 % for men) and Lithuania (7.7 % for women and 9.3 % for men). In Croatia the unemployment rate was almost the same for men and women (7.6 % for women and 7,5 % for men).

Figure 3. Overview of the ratio of women and men unemployment rates in EU (2020)



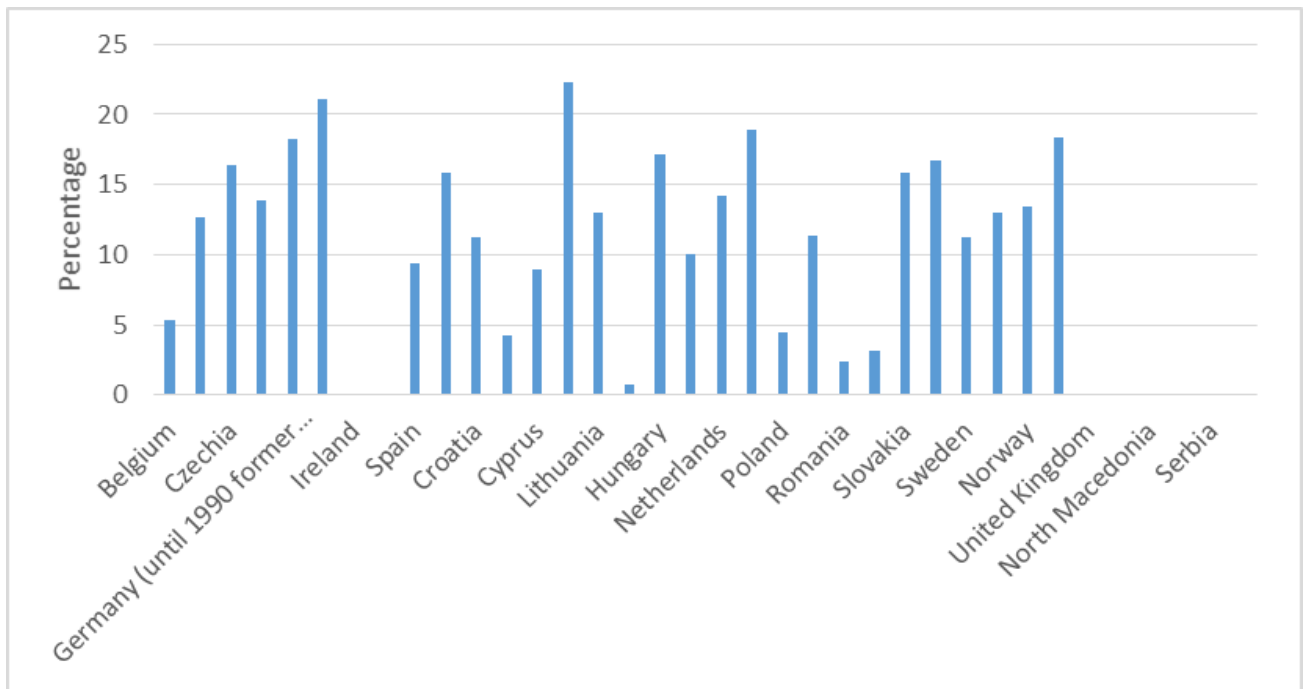
Source: <https://ec.europa.eu>, Accessed 15 April.2022

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/womenmen/bloc-2b.html?lang=en>

Comparing women’s and men’s hourly earnings in the EU in 2019 existence of pay gap is visible. Data showed that women earned 14.1 % less than men in their average gross hourly earnings. This phenomenon was confirmed in all Member states, with some differences between states.

“On average, women earned less than men in all Member States, however this gender pay gap varies. The largest differences were observed in Estonia (21.7 %), Latvia (21.2 %), Austria (19.9 %), and Germany (19.2 %). On the other hand, the smallest differences in earnings between women and men were found in Luxembourg (1.3 %), Romania (3.3 %), Italy (4.7 %) and Belgium (5.8 %)”⁴. In Croatia situation women earned 11,5 % less than men in their average gross hourly earnings.

Figure 4. Representation of differences in earnings between women and men in EU countries (2020)



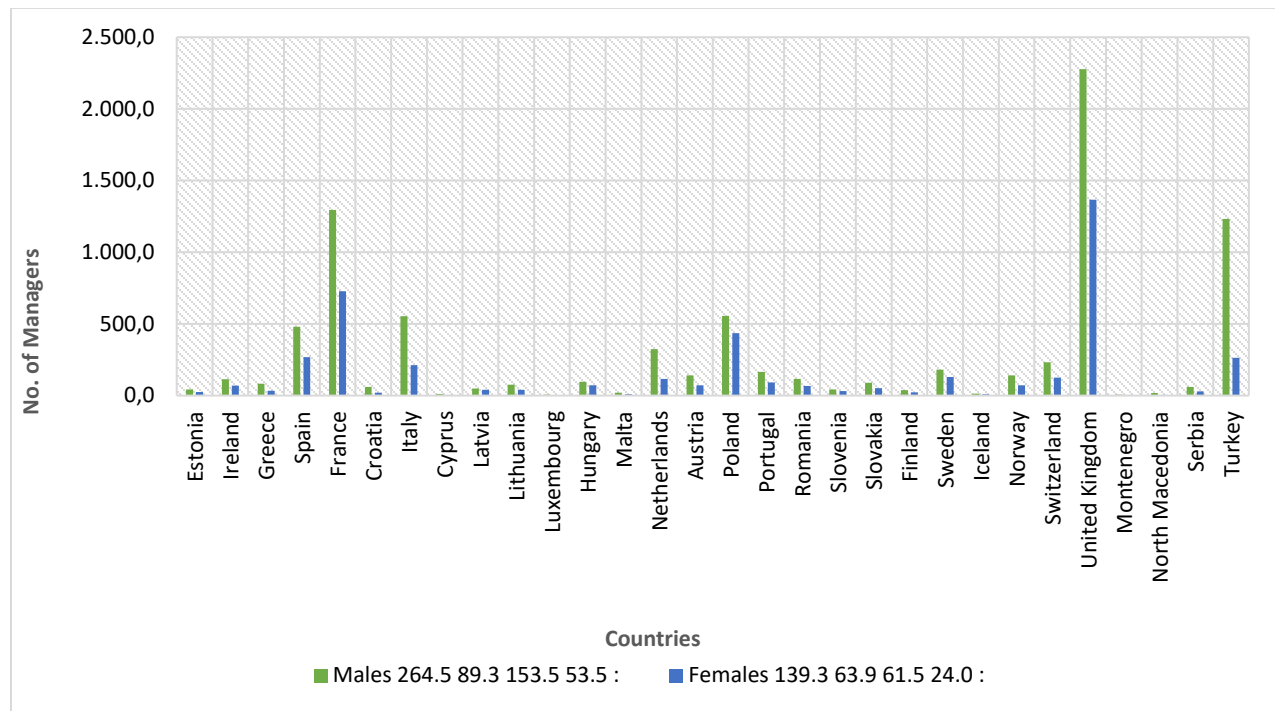
Source: <https://ec.europa.eu>, Accessed 15 April.2022

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/womenmen/bloc-2d.html?lang=en>

Almost 9.5 million people have a leading position in the European Union (EU): 6.2 million men (65% managers) and 3.3 million women (35%).

According to Eurostat data from 2020, the largest percentage of women at managerial positions in 2020 was recorded in Latvia (45%) and Poland (44%), followed by Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovenia and Sweden (all 42%). Croatia has the lowest share of female managers (24%), similar to the Netherlands and Cyprus (Eurostat).

Figure 5. Overview of women and men managers in the EU (2020)



Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/doc.](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/doc/), Accessed 15 January.2022

3.2 CROATIA

In 2018 The Croatian Gender Equality Ombudsperson started the EU project “Equal Rights - Equal Wages - equal pensions”- Expanding the scope of implementation of actions and legal standards of gender equality to achieve gender equality and prevent poverty in Croatia. Moreover, she

conducted various research in the period between 2018 and 2020. In 2020 she made a report of surveys on the gender gap in salaries and pensions, gender prejudices in the labour market and the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.

According to the ombudsperson, the share of women in the average active population was 47.5%, while the share of men was 52.5%. In comparison to the ombudsperson's data, the data from the Croatian Labor Force Survey conducted in the third quarter of 2020, revealed that the women's employment was averaged 41.3% and the male employment rate averaged around 54%. Given data indicate continuity of the long-standing high gender gap in the employment rate, as well as stagnation compared to the previous period. "By comparing Eurostat data for the first three quarters of 2020 and the average in 2019, there is a significant decline in the number of fixed-term contracts time or about 17% concerning both sexes"⁵.

Moreover, an older survey conducted by the Gender Equality Ombudsperson entitled Representation of Women and Men in Management and Management Positions in Business Entities in the Republic of Croatia in 2011 showed that women hold an average share of 29% of all management positions.

At the same time, in business entities with two levels of management positions (106 entities), women hold on average 23% of management positions at a higher level and 41% at a lower level. It is similar for business entities with three levels of management positions (239 business entities).

Data from the Social Bureau of Statistics⁶ showed an extremely low share of women in agriculture, forestry and fishing (28.4%), mining and quarrying (12.9%), water supply, wastewater disposal and waste management and environmental remediation (21%), construction (10.3%), transport and storage (23.7%). On the other hand, men were unrepresented in education (21.1%), health protection and social welfare (21.9%) and financial and insurance activities (30.9%). As in the previous reporting period, the predominant orientation of women in activities is related to services,

⁵ Ombudsperson report, <https://www.prs.hr/cms/post/392>

⁶ Data from the Social Bureau of Statistics (DZS) for the year 2020

and a small share in industrial activities and agriculture. The men dominate the field of industry and agriculture.

DZS data (in 2018) showed that men earned an average of HRK 9,196 (1222 EUR) per month, and women HRK 7,970 (1058 EUR), which revealed an average wage gap of 13.3%³⁵. However, when it comes to the construction industry the analysis indicated that women received a higher net salary. The biggest pay gap of 24.6% is present in the field of financial and insurance activities, as well as social welfare and health care activities, in those activities women are dominant in lower positions with lower salaries.

All in all, the pay gap in the Republic of Croatia, in companies with 10 and more employees, (in 2019) is 11.5%, while the average at the level of the European Union (EU27) is 14.1%.

4. METHODOLOGY

For purpose of this thesis, twenty semi-directed interviews were conducted with a sample of twenty working women. The recruitment of the participants was based on a sample of twenty working women, two different age groups (23-35, 36-50+) from both the public and private sectors.

The condition was that all participants are Croatian females who work more than 6 months in a company in Zagreb which has more than 10 male and female employees. All interviews were conducted in the Zagreb area, participants were volunteers who signed consent which guarantee restricted access to confidential data.

As a previously mentioned, the goal of this research is to answer the research question: Have respondents experienced gender inequalities in the labour market of the Republic of Croatia?

A couple of hypotheses were also devised before the research: (1) Respondents believe that the glass ceiling and the pay gap exist in a company they work for or worked for. (2) Respondents were faced with stereotypes and discrimination based on their gender, in a company they work or worked for. (3) Respondents have experienced any kind of sexual harassment, in a company they work or worked for.

To achieve these objectives an interview script was designed covering four following dimensions: socio-demographic, pay gap and glass ceiling, stereotypes and discrimination and last but not least, sexual harassment.

A total of twenty interviews with conditions set out by the study were held between May and July 2022. Moreover, this included recruitment, interviews and transcriptions. Since this research is qualitative, the transcribed interviews were thematically divided and descriptively analyzed in MaxQDA content analysis software.

A first sociodemographic dimension was important to find out basic information about education, profession, and contract, type of firm, changed job, marital as well as children status of chosen participants.

Figure 6. Representation of educational level in two age groups

AGE GROUP			
EDUCATION	23-35	36-56	TOTAL
Primary	2	2	4
Secondary	5	0	5
Higher	3	8	11

Despite the different age groups it is visible to see that the number of people who finished only primary education is the same in both groups. Also, the fact that more women from the second group finished higher education is not surprising because some of the participants in the age group 23-35 are still students who work part-time.

That is the reason why it is an important matter to clarify the professions and positions of participants.

In this research, only two participants had similar jobs, which was teaching, but one was a high school teacher, while the other was in college. The others were from various fields: design, journalism, chemistry, mathematics, public relations, IT, arts, selling, veterinary, banking, pharmacy architecture, design, psychology, sport, economy, law, and finance.

When it comes to working positions only the minority (N=3) are the CEOs, the position of the manager is also not so common (N=5), and others are in lower positions meaning that they do not have people under them. In comparison between the two groups, all participants who are managers were from the age group between 36-56+. From the younger age group, most of them are on lower positions (N=9). Almost all participants work in private companies (N=18).

A difference was found in the contractual situations between the two age groups. In the younger group, some participants had a student contract (N=3) and the rest of them had a long-term contract (N=7), while in the other group an equal number of participants had a long-term contract and mandatory contract. Furthermore, in the group between 23-36, no one among the participants was in marriage or had children. In the second group, more than half participants had children (N=6) but a smaller amount had spouses (N=4).

5. FINDINGS

5.1 GLASS CEILING AND PAY GAP

As previously mentioned glass ceiling refers to the often invisible restriction that stops women from getting to higher positions regardless of qualifications. More than half of the respondents work in companies where men are in the leading roles. Numerous factors condition the existence of the glass ceiling. When asked about the presence of the glass ceiling in Croatia and its causes, a significant number of interviewees perceived the glass ceiling as a by-product of traditional society and patriarchy. Furthermore, the presence of patriarchy refers to “existential inequalities, meaning the unequal recognition of human individuals as persons” (Costa, 2012; Carmo, 2021).

A: “I think that the glass ceiling exists in Croatian society. It happens because Croatia is a very patriarchal country where women cannot achieve the maximum of their careers. After all, men think they are more capable and clever and that it is not appropriate for women to be in leading positions.” (M.R. aged 54)

Some interviewees think that the glass ceiling exists but depending on the occupation. It is noticeable that most women who share those opinions work in areas that in Croatia statistical proved to be represented more by men, such as IT, Math, Sports, and Finance.

A: “I think that the glass ceiling exists in some types of jobs. In the It sector where I work, women are definitely underrepresented. I think that maybe the attitude of women is not fierce enough; we often feel discouraged and alone. One reason is that we are too gentle, and the other is that we feel isolated.” (K.G aged 25)

Besides patriarchy, tradition and certain occupations, many interviewees mentioned some behaviours and features that are sometimes lacking amongst women.

A: “I am a mathematician, so I always check the numbers, 45% of women graduate, and only 10% are CEOs. I think it happens because of our patriarchal and traditional society. Nevertheless, because women also urge to have everything perfect and lack confidence, men have more confidence. If you take a look at some banks, it is visible that women are in HR, bookkeeping and marketing, while men take leading positions.” (N.K. aged 50)

Regarding the experiences with the glass ceiling, respondents had various experiences. Generally, more respondents from the first group aged 23-35 have never experienced a glass ceiling than those from the second group. Many respondents from the first group perceive that as a lack of working experience;

A: “I have never experienced the glass ceiling, not yet, because I do not have much experience, and I mainly worked as a student.” (M.D. aged 25)

This respondent, aged 55, works in the sports industry, and she faced a glass ceiling throughout her all career, she decided to share her story:

A: “Yes, I have experienced the glass ceiling. I work in a sport where women are not equal to men for many reasons. Sports are mainly made for men, especially in Croatia.” (I.R. aged 55)

Q: “When did you experience it? Was that at the beginning of your professional career?”

A: "I first started my career as a bike racer, and I have not felt accepted because it was only a few women in that sport at the time."

Q:"How that impacted your career?"

A: "I became the first woman in the executive border of the cycling federation, and they slowly started accepting women step by step in cycling in Croatia. Shortly after, I became a head coach of women's cycling, and now I also work as a secretive general. At first, it was a bit awkward for all the others because I was the first woman in that role. Usually, administrative generals are men, and administrative staff are women."

Q:"Do you think that situation is improving for women in sports in Croatia?"

A: "I think that situation will improve in the next few years. There is a tendency toward equity for men and women in the cycling world."

For women in Croatia, an additional problem arises when re-entering the workforce after a break due to childbirth (Nestić; 2007). This often leads to conflicts and problems in balancing family and work roles (Čudina-Obradović, 2011; Galić, 2011). "The choice between two careers began to depend on the expectations placed on the woman, while the permanent employment and career of the man is not questioned in any way" (Milić 2007; Galić 2011).

A: "I experienced the glass ceiling when I decided to go for parental leave, after that, I had to do a less important job than my previous one. That happened in the middle of my career, after ten years of experience." (A.G. aged 48)

Q:"Do you think there is a way for a woman to break a glass ceiling and how to do it?"

A: “I do not think that women is the one who could change that, it is a society that should change. I think that society should encourage women when they become mothers to fight for themselves. Overall, I don’t think that situation in Croatia is so bad, in comparison to the countries such as Japan and USA, but it is also not as great as it is in Scandinavian countries.”

Many researchers indicate that the professional gender segregation of the workforce is one of the main factors affecting the inequality of wages between men and women (Giddens; Ineghart. Norms 2003; Walby, 2005; Chant, 2003; Shelton, 2000; Galić, 2011).

Generally, respondents believe that the pay gap exists in the Croatian labour market. However, responses differed when asked if they personally knew of a case where a man and woman have the same professions but different wedges.

A: “I don’t know anyone in my environment.” (J.R. aged 23)

A: “I happened to know one case because one of my colleagues has been married to my friend, and even though his wife and I are teachers longer than he, he has a bigger paycheck.” (S.K. aged 56)

A: I don’t know, but I have seen a lot of public data about salaries that confirm the existence of the pay gap. (M.R. aged 54)

Q:”What is your opinion on the evolution of the pay gap in the labour market in Croatia?”

A: “I think that situation is slowly getting better every year.”

In the neoliberal economy today, we are witnessing significant changes in the organization and structure of work (Perrons, Fagan, McDowell, 2006). Interestingly, one respondent aged 44, which is the CEO of one journalistic company, completely denied the existence of the pay gap:

A: “I think that the gender pay gap does not exist. Pays are measurable and depend on the content you deliver; if you are not good, you won’t stay for long. If two persons have different paychecks but are in the same positions, it can only be because of nepotism or immoral actions.” (A.L. aged 44)

5.2 DISCRIMINATION AND STEREOTYPES

The work of men and women is evaluated in different ways and approaches to employment, which often leads to gender discrimination during job interviews (Castells, 2000). A minority of respondents were asked very inappropriately about private lives during the job interview. Which are the clear examples of direct discrimination:

A: “I have been asked about my marital status and planning for kids. It was always subtle, but once I was in a job interview and a male asked me if I was married, I said no. Then he asked me if I had a boyfriend, and I repeated the same answer, after which he said: It is such a shame that you do not have one. If you had, I would have asked you who he is and what he is doing, and then I would know who you are.” (M.D. aged 25)

A: “They asked me in my first job interview who will watch my kid and do I plan to have another one.” (A.G. aged 48)

One respondent explained that in some Croatian companies while filling out the form for the job, you are obliged to put marital status and number of kids, it happened in all companies in which she had worked, and she worked in three different firms.

Majority of women who have experienced discrimination experienced an indirect type, which is more complicated to detect and prevent:

A: "It manifested in a way that men's opinions were more valuable. In general, aggressive behaviour is more acceptable for men than for women." (V.B. aged 43)

A: "My work was underestimated as well as my knowledge because of my gender." (M.P. aged 24)

Gender segregation in the labor market is still present, as are stereotypical divisions (Galić, 2011). Generally almost all respondents have been stereotyped at their workplaces or the places they used to work for. It is attention-grabbing that a lot of respondents share the similar ideas about most common stereotypes about women in Croatia.

A: "I was in a leading position very young, and people assumed that I got there based on my relationship with the manager, not my skills."

Q: What is the most common stereotype about working women in Croatia?

A: "If a woman is louder, they will say she is hysterical; if men are, they will say he is fighting. If a woman is quiet, they will say she is stupid; if men are quiet, they will assume he is intelligent and that he is watching the situation. I think it has deep roots in our society." (N.K. aged 50)

A: "Women should do certain kinds of jobs, more female jobs." (P.R. aged 25)

A: "Women do everything with emotions." (H.K. aged 35)

A: “Women are less ambitious and need to take care of the family and the household.” (G.K. aged 53)

All those stereotypes are indicators of the previously mentioned patriarchy that still seems visible in Croatia. Bourdieu explains that all the work of women in the household, which survives even with the increasing employment and advancement of women, contributes to the symbolic upgrade of the productive role of men (Bourdieu, 2001: Birešev, 2006: 205).

5.3 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment in the workplace is usually caused by gender work context, which refers to male-dominated workgroups and the organizational climate within which employees see an organization as tolerant of sexual harassment (Hulin, Fitzgerald and Drasgow, 1996).

Q: “Do you think that sexual harassment often happens in the labour market of Croatia?”

A: “Yes, very often, men feel entitled to all kinds of things because men are in a position of power, and we live in a very traditional conservative country which encourages men to feel like that and to do those kinds of horrible things.” (S.J. aged 34)

Q: “What should companies do in Croatia to prevent sexual harassment?”

A: “People should be more educated and do workshops and obligatory readings because it is related to social relations and building a healthy working relationships.”

A: "Training, education, sanctions atmosphere in which victims should do comfortable to speak up." (S.K, 56)

A: "Companies should educate their employees on how they should behave, and if there is a case, they should definitely investigate it. If it happens a lot, they should fire that person. There should be sanctions on a county level if the person is fired because of sexual harassment." (N.Š. 23)

A company needs to have a safe working space for everyone; in the first example, the respondent connected this topic to tradition and conservatism. Also, she mentioned that men are in positions of power. All three answers suggest education, training, workshops and sanctions if those behaviours occur within the company. The third respondent even proposed sanction on a county level.

Unpunished sexual harassment creates a hostile environment and an atmosphere of threat and fear, especially in cases when the behaviour is repeated (Borić, Šinko and Prlenda, 2009).

Q: "What do you think women should do when it happens"?

A: "They should talk to the manager who could do something about it, mention it to someone at least." (T.D. aged 23)

A: "Report. It should be more reported and talked about. Also, women sometimes blame themselves for being sexually harassed, for ex: Wearing too short skirts." (N.K. aged 50)

A: "Women should value themselves and their bodies more. Vulgar comments should not be attractive to them. They should strongly respond to them, also in disturbing situations, call the police." (M.P. aged 24)

Generally, all respondents agreed that sexual harassment should report to the company lead or the institutions. The first response was the most common. The second respondent perceived that the woman is responsible for her behaviour which is a cause of sexual harassment. On the opposite side, a third of respondents said that women should never blame themselves.

Q: “Have you ever experienced or known women that had been sexual harassment?”

A:”Yes, I have experienced comments and touches from my customers while I worked as a waitress. I mentioned that to my colleagues, and I just ignored it and moved away.” (T.D. aged 23)

A:”Both. I experienced comments on appearance, I pretended it did not happen, and for other people, I do not know.” (V.B. aged 43)

A: “No, but I called out a guy harassing young colleagues.” (A.L. aged 44)

The first example was a woman who worked as a waitress in her teenage years. The second answer is from the respondent, now a CEO, who experienced it when she was promoted to better positions. The third interviewee is also in the CEO position and described how she dealt with sexual harassment in her company.

6. DISCUSSION

It is of great importance to explain two significant limitations of this thesis. The first one is the lack of new data for Croatia. Besides represented data, there are not many previous studies in this research area, especially about sexual harassment. The second limitation is the number of perceptions in thesis research, representing only 20 women. Also, it cannot be guaranteed that women honestly answered questions about sexual harassment, which is still a sensitive topic. Last but not least, the scope and depth of discussions in the paper are compromised on many levels compared to the works of experienced scholars.

To further discuss this work, it is essential to mention the hypothesis in the methodological part: (1) Respondents believe that the glass ceiling and the pay gap exist in a company they work for or worked for. (2) Respondents were faced with stereotypes and discrimination based on their gender in a company they work or worked for. (3) Respondents have experienced any kind of sexual harassment in a company they work or worked for. At first glance, we could say that all three are confirmed, but the situation is much more complicated, so it is necessary to explain each one further.

In some parts of the interviews, respondents shared the same perceptions but different experiences. Especially while being asked about the glass ceiling. We also have to consider that younger women from the age group 24-35 have less experience than women from the second group aged 35-55. Some of the younger participants were aware that maybe lack of working experience is why they haven't faced the glass ceiling yet.

Women who worked in mainly "men" fields like IT, Math, Sports, and Finance - which are statistically proven to be more represented by men, had problems getting onto higher positions throughout their careers.

In addition, being a mother has also been an obstacle that prevents some women from making progress. Often it seemed like they had to choose between their careers and their children, mainly coming back to the workforce after using parental leave. None of the participants mentioned that qualifications are crucial for progress, yet they mentioned that sometimes women lack some features that men have, such as bravery, confidence, determination and capability to stand for themselves.

Many interviewees agreed that the gender pay gap exists in the Croatian labour market. On the other side, only a few respondents knew of cases of the pay gap or had experienced it alone. If we look closer at the small number of women who experienced it, we can conclude that there is no difference in perception and experiences between the first and second age groups. Only the person who denied the existence of the gender pay gap concluded that the pay gap could only be possible due to some immoral actions or nepotism. All respondents pointed out that the pay gap is changing, in the past pay gap was more concerning than now.

With all that taken into consideration, we can confirm the first hypothesis. Respondents believe that the glass ceiling and pay gap exist in the company they work for. Nevertheless, that does not mean that all of them have experienced it.

When it comes to discrimination, more respondents have experienced indirect shape of discrimination than direct. Direct discrimination was the most visible during the job interviews. Once again, the topic of motherhood was a primary subject of discrimination. Moreover, respondents felt indirect discrimination regarding the valuation of their work and opinion, which was observed as less valuable than of their male colleagues. Also, sometimes violent behaviours seem acceptable when men do them, which is perceived as ordinary men's behaviour.

Respondents were faced with stereotypes and discrimination based on their gender in a company they worked for. Stereotypes are a type of discrimination, however, discrimination can come in different shapes.

The topic of sexual harassment was the most difficult for respondents to talk about since it is still perceived as taboo. It was interesting to compare perceptions and experiences. Most women from both age groups deem that sexual harassment exists, but while speaking of experience, only a few experienced it. Mostly it was in the form of inappropriate comments and, in rare cases, inappropriate touch from colleagues or customers. Almost all respondents shared the same idea about preventing that kind of behaviour. They recommended more education, as well as more workshops and more support from the side of the company. They also agreed that women should report it to their higher-ups or institutions. The third hypothesis is not confirmed, from these interviews, it can be concluded that most women had never experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. They perceived it as an existing problem in the Croatian labour market, but only a few have confirmed that it had happened.

All in all, answers from both age groups did not differ drastically, only in cases related to the glass ceiling, especially the social conflict that appeared when women were also mothers.

However, the relationship between traditional norms and Croatia in modern days is complex and deeply embodied throughout our history. The survey of women in employment on marital status, the number of children, and the expectation that a woman is more involved in the family than in her career show the presence of the tradition of Croatian society. Women's problematic professional advancement indicates the glass ceiling's persistence and symbolic violence. It is interesting to see how all dimensions are genuinely connected and how often tradition, patriarchy and motherhood were mentioned in every aspect of the interviews. This shows the multidimensionality of this topic. As previously mentioned in the theoretical part, "Inequalities necessarily imply multidimensional and systemic processes where they cross creating dynamics of intersectionality" (Costa, 2012; Carmo, 2021).

Due to the statistical data, in comparison to other European countries, Croatia neither have the worst nor the best situation regarding gender inequalities in the labour market in Croatia. Even though research previously mentioned limits, most of the testimonials confirmed already given data and trends in the EU.

8. FINAL REMARKS

The European Union considers promoting gender equality an essential activity for progress. Equality between women and men is a fundamental value driver of economic growth. Every few years, the Commission publishes a document on proposals to address unequal pay, inequality in decision-making, and the promotion of equality and equity outside the European Union.

In Croatia, the latest trends in the European Union are monitored every year, and accordingly, the Croatian Ombudsman for Gender Equality considers cases of violations of the principle of gender equality and case discrimination committed against men and women by state administration bodies, unit bodies, local, regional (regional) self-government, and other bodies with public powers, committed by persons employed in these bodies. She also participates in numerous projects funded by the European Union and/or others international funding sources. The goal of the Croatian authorities is to reduce the difference in wages, equalize pensions and thereby achieve a balanced Croatian economy. Inequality affects women as individuals and has consequences for society as a whole.

Companies are also those who should prevent and immediately react if gender inequalities appear. Here is some suggestion of what I consider essential for companies to implement in the near future.

All employees should be equal, regardless of age, gender or social status. Differences should be accepted tolerantly and not invade colleagues' intimacy and privacy. In case of gender inequality or any other, the employee should contact his superior or HR.

In order to encourage women to achieve higher positions, companies should introduce career counselling as well as mentoring and coaching. Through various programs for the development of female leadership and programs on recognition and appreciation of diversity, the company ensures a healthy working environment. Also, employees should be given various general workshops on gender equality. Furthermore, enabling women to learn technical and professional skills such as finance, project management, strategy, and information systems support them in progress.

At the beginning of employment, employees should receive a rulebook that determines inappropriate behaviours. Abuse and sexual violence must not be tolerated as well as humiliation

and disrespect. Many abuse victims find it difficult to report the case, and companies should allow victims to come forward through anonymous surveys. Existing EU rules 2022 on protecting workers against sexual harassment should be implemented, and the public should be better informed about them. In addition, a legal framework should be developed with a set of preventive and reactive measures against any type of harassment in the workplace. When unwanted behaviours happen, the responsible person should immediately bear the consequences. Ignoring gender inequalities encourages such behaviour and creates a hostile environment.

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