

**Absent Voices:  
Missing Female  
Perspectives  
in CEE**

# Authors

**Alexandra Martin**, Head of GLOBSEC Brussels Office

**Sierra Ballard**, MSc Student, Leiden University, Former trainee, GLOBSEC Brussels Office

**Linda Tothova**, Policy Assistant, GLOBSEC Brussels Office

# Acknowledgements

The Report on Absent Voices: Missing Female Perspectives in CEE could not have been initiated or finalised without the former CEE Her Project Coordinator, Martina Šinkovičová, and former Project Assistant, Lenka Suchánková, whose contribution to the report proved crucial throughout the investigation. Furthermore, we would like to thank our colleagues John Barter, Zuzana Pisoň and Kevin Karabin for their support to the CEE Her Initiative and their enthusiasm expressed since the initial start of the project.

As for the activities carried out under the umbrella of CEE Her, these could not have been accomplished without the participants and discussants at various CEE Her events and remarkable mentors and mentees who took part in the CEE Her Mentorship Programme. They provided the CEE Her team with insightful input and inspiration for the final recommendations.

Lastly, the financial support of our donor, the Open Society Foundations, has been invaluable in having this report published.

We hope our work will serve as a starting point for a broader conversation in the region about equal opportunities, access, and gender sensitive policies that will enable more female professionals to be accessing top level positions in private or public spheres.

Design by:

**Dominika Rafayová**, Graphic Designer, GLOBSEC

©GLOBSEC All rights reserved. March 2021

# Abstract

The Report on Absent Voices: Missing Female Perspectives in CEE, produced by GLOBSEC with the support of the Open Society Foundations, aims to shed light on the level of gender equality and female participation in the public and private spheres in Central Europe and advances a series of recommendations for the creation of a more inclusive and equitable landscape in key sectors. The report scans leadership environments of the Visegrad Four countries in the realm of five topic streams, namely, Future of Europe, Defence & Security, Economy & Global Order, Digital Future and Sustainability. The analysis focuses on better understanding the gender composition of selected Public sector bodies, Non-Governmental Organisations, Conferences and Businesses to highlight where female voices are marginalised, isolated or absent entirely in Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The overarching goal is

to raise awareness of the level of gender disparity in the region, and consequently provide concrete recommendations on how to improve the rate of female representation and participation in the future. Following this investigation and the findings it offers, it is no longer disputable that gender diversity should not only be a target to meet for political correctness, but rather a common interest. Therefore, the Report endeavours to set the path towards amplifying the female voices in areas where they had been absent or silenced thus far. The data gathering and the process of analysis took place from June to October 2020, following a mixed research methodology. Most data acquired came from direct sources in the national languages of the countries surveyed, providing this document with an accurate representation of the realities on the ground.

# Introduction

Amid a general atmosphere of increasing economic deficits and global inequality following the Covid-19 pandemic, asymmetric demand for greater women's involvement in domestic affairs and questioning of political legitimacy across the globe, this Report on Absent Voices: Missing Female Perspectives in CEE is dedicated to enhancing female voices in influential policy-related debates.<sup>1</sup> The Report explores where the female voices are absent in countries of Central Europe (CE), while simultaneously sheds light on areas where the female leadership would be widely beneficial for the society if women were provided equal opportunity to participate. More specifically, the Report on Absent Voices scans leadership environments of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries and examines gendered representation in the public, private and nongovernmental sphere, in five key topic streams – Future of Europe, Defence & Security, Economy & Global Order, Digital Future and Sustainability.

The primary objective of the CEE Her Initiative, the umbrella of this report, is to drive change and improve the significant underrepresentation of women in leadership, participation, and ownership in both the public and the private sectors. The findings of this research detailing sector representation disparities will enable an accurate assessment of the conditions of female leadership in CE and provide a basis to begin addressing gender disparity through an organised platform and policy recommendations. Drawing on the unequal gender representation in various topic streams and sectors, as shall be illustrated, we believe that precisely the difficult challenges the world currently faces require female brainpower in the decision-making alike.

The ensuing call to action represents the mission of the wider CEE Her Initiative which seeks a widespread reform by sparking a debate on the matter of female leadership in the region. With a clear vision of the importance of gender diversi-

ty, as a part of the project Enhancing Women Voices in CEE Debates, the Matrix on Absent Voices will be supplemented by the creation of a roster of female experts in the CEE region available as a key resource to policymakers, advocates, conference organizers and beyond. The underlining rationale behind this is to offer a public tool for the promotion of female leadership in order to amend the challenging reality shown in this project. In the case of CEE, there are unique regional challenges to the issue of gender equality. In the V4, the role of women and traditional gender values remain influenced significantly by its communist past and specific historical legacies which did not allow for significant opportunities for the female side of the dividing line<sup>2</sup>. Traditional family values have historically aimed for female voices to be silenced to the extent to which occasional woman's involvement in influential debates was considered a niche.

The final part of this Report on Absent Voices compares the sectors and topic streams where the female leadership and representation is insufficient or barely existent; and the topics and sectors which currently earn the most attention. To this end, the investigation is concluded with policy and organisational recommendations to fully utilise the power of female voices where these are unheard and thus cannot be benefited from. In all, it is time to enable a conducive environment for women to be part of the conversation, an effort that will require greater awareness at all levels, smart policies, political will and a change in the male-dominated culture that continues to entertain this loop.

1 Note that the concepts of “woman” and “female” are used hereafter interchangeably to describe the same phenomenon of female representation.

2 <https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/gender-and-europe/gender-and-revolution-in-europe-19th-20th-century/gender-communism>

# Key Findings

- The highest proportion of female leadership across the selected categories was concentrated in traditionally female-friendly topics such as Sustainability, Digital Technology, and Future of Europe
- The female leadership in the fields of Defence and Security, and Economics remained the lowest
- The topic streams of Future of Europe, Sustainability and Economy & Global Order dominated the conference platforms in CEE
- The topic streams with the highest concentration of female leadership were conversely the least prevalent or occurring topics in governance and conference agendas

## Public Sector

- On average and across categories, Hungary was the lowest ranking country for female leadership and representation in the V4
- Of the examined categories, the public sector was the lowest in female top representation with 17.52%; with conferences earning the highest numbers of female participation
- Gender disparity was apparent especially in the V4 governance related to Defence & Security, where women were present merely 2.44%
- Topic streams with the highest proportion of female leadership were Digital Future and Sustainability, at 33.33%, respectively

## Non-Governmental Organisations

- To highlight the discrepancy, across the V4 only 21.43% of top NGO board positions were held by women
- Organisations that focus on Future of Europe scored the highest (22%), Economy & Global Order followed as second (17.65%) and Defence & Security scored the lowest (9.1%) in regard to women's presence
- This category ranked second to last in female representation across our investigation of sectors, followed only by the public sector of V4 governance

## Conferences

- Overall women made up only 26.72% of conference speakers and participants in group discussions together
- The actual number of females occupying a speaker rather than participant roles was on average 25.3%
- The highest percentage of female representation was in conference platforms related to the Future of Europe topics

## Business Leadership

- The V4 countries fall significantly below the World Bank average for European and Asian countries
- Across V4, only 22.23% of firms surveyed had a female top manager and only 16.08% of firms enjoyed a majority female ownership

# Why Is There a Need To Examine the State Of Absent Voices In the V4 Region?

The fight for gender equality is a global fight with a regional front and a domestic impact. According to the Wilson Centre's Women in Public Service Project, while women in 2020 made up 49.7% of the world population, they held only 22% of public offices.<sup>3</sup> In terms of a global average, this disparity in gender access to leadership is not unique to the public sector and is only exacerbated by a confounding pay gap, by which women earn on average 81 cents to every dollar, in turn making the median salary for men roughly 19% higher.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, while the prevalent pay gap is merely a single instance of the above-mentioned disparity, solutions must follow on all the levels where implications of this imbalance are likewise present i.e., international, regional and domestic levels.

Social reform has done a lot to make the issue of gender inequality more transparent. At the international level, gender equality constitutes one of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all UN Member States to be achieved by 2030. Goal No. 5 to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", among other targets, aims to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" and "adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels".<sup>5</sup> Despite these visible attempts and ambitious yet rightful objectives, gender inequality has been considered a normalcy across a wide range of decision-making fields, owing to, inter alia, a perseverance of structural and short-term conditions associated with economic, political, social and cultural predispositions.

At the EU level, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed the Gender Equality Index, an indicator that measures gender equality in the EU Member States. It helps to monitor the progress of gender equality over time and compare countries in similar ways linked to gender balance. In the 2019 Index, the EU28 reached a score of only 67.4 out of 100 (full equality between men and women). According to the more recent data of EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2020, even this European average has only increased by half of a percentage point since the 2019 score.<sup>6</sup> This implies that despite progress, men remain at a significant advantage throughout the European Union and while there may be a widespread assumption that the female voices are no longer absent in public domains, this is not mirrored in official positions consistently. The numbers also indicate that despite the progress towards gender equality the EU has achieved thus far, the

**“Either the millennial men solve this, or we can say goodbye to the past 40 years.”**

**Maithreyi Seetharaman**

**CEO & Founder Facultas Media and former Co-Chair Most Powerful Women Summit**

CEE Her Side Event, GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum, 2020

3 <http://data.50x50movement.org/>

4 <https://www.payscale.com/data/gender-pay-gap#section02>

5 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

6 <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2020-key-findings-eu>

**“We are missing half of the population if we exclude female voices, and issues are not to be solved by only 50 percent of the world’s brain power. If we work on the margins, we stay on the margins.”**

**Ambassador Bridget A. Brink**  
**U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia**

CEE Her Side Event, GLOBSEC  
Bratislava Forum, 2020

path towards making female voices present has been uneven across individual Member States. In other words, the EIGE’s Indexes have repeatedly declared that concerns regarding gender disparity in CEE policy-making debates are supported.

The Visegrad Four ranks among the regions with the worst results published by EIGE, with all V4 countries below the European average score – the Czech Republic at the 21st place with the score 55.7%, Poland at the 24th place with 55.2%, Slovakia at the 26th place with 54.1% and Hungary at the 27th place with 51.9%.<sup>7</sup> To foster a more inclusive and cohesive European Union, this shortcoming by the V4 should be addressed in an organised manner. While improvements are being made and the European Commission has refocused its attention to the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2024<sup>8</sup>, the much-needed reform is not coming at the pace it must. According to the World Economic Forum’s 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, at the current pace of reform, it will take 99.5 years to overcome gender inequality and to achieve full parity between men and women.<sup>9</sup> To put this in context, if this issue is to be addressed in a way that yields long-term results, it shall take four generations

to even the gender imbalance observed in the key areas of employment and social affairs. All this, assuming there shall be no setbacks.

As this report will show, across all societal groups, we can see that although gender diversity is associated with multiple benefits, public and private sectors are still lagging and marginalising female voices. The data show a significant lack of female professionals in many sectors as well as a shortage of females in senior-level positions across the board. Even with some progress being made on public sector diversity in recent years, women are still a minority among elected representatives and remain under-represented in political conversations on key issues. Women are thereby absent from conversations that directly affect about 49.7% of population. While improvement in the private sector, corporate leadership and governance, has been quicker than in the public sector, there is still much ground to be made up and more arguments to be articulated.

A targeted investigation and analysis of the status of gender equality in the V4 countries is warranted as we aspire to accelerate progress and enable women in leadership.

**“In regard to female representation, we are still in the pre-awareness stage.”**

**Katarína Matheriová**  
**Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission**

CEE Her Side Event, GLOBSEC  
Bratislava Forum, 2020

7 <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/compare-countries>

8 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12114-Gender-equality-strategy-2020-2024>

9 [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)

# Research Design and Method of Data Collection

The Visegrad Four nations, as the potentially significant cultural and political alliance of Central Eastern European countries, were selected as the focus group of this project due to their economic prevalence and political influence in the CEE region. The choice of case studies was also based on the countries being sufficiently functionally similar and thus suitable for this comparative analysis.

Ensuing research on V4 Absent Voices began with the evaluation of a variety of leadership positions across the public, private and non-governmental sectors. The data collection for this project took place between June and October 2020, utilising resources available on the official websites of selected institutions and organisations as well as official conference agendas. Further research was conducted through open-source investigation, media monitoring, and when necessitated, through direct contact with conference organisers to confirm the accuracy of data collection. The data acquired was consequently rounded to 2 decimal places for the purpose of clarity. Finally, the objective was for the Report on Absent Voices to reflect a strong external validity while proving that no selection bias was present during the investigation.

The data collection sought to detail which decision-making positions are occupied by men and women and in which sectors, along with the composition of conference speakers at the most important conferences in the region. Examining leadership positions across the public, private, and non-governmental sectors, this report investigates not only the proportional representation of women's voices, but also the hierarchal positioning of female leadership roles.

After creating a matrix of government positions, conference line-ups, and Non-Governmental Organisations' (NGO) boards, the proportion of female representation for each cabinet, board, and conference was evaluated both on cumulative totals, on the hierarchal distribution of roles, and by a topic stream. The raw data of proportional representation was then

utilised in combination to evaluate the level of female representation in any government, conference, or a topic stream. The method of proportional representation allowed for ease in cross-comparison of countries and categories as well as in drawing an overall conclusion of the status of gender representation inequality throughout the V4.

## Research Targets And Examined Sectors

Inspired by the groundwork of the Open Society Foundation's End to Manels investigating the representation of female leadership in conference settings throughout Europe, this project aims to analyse a wider scope of female representation across the V4. In addition to our interest in the area of CE, we believe the status of female voices in leadership varies greatly not only by region but also by sector. In an attempt to understand the nuances challenging female leadership and to assess the most critical areas of reform we define four distinct categories which we believe to be the most influential: the public sector representation, non-governmental organisational leadership, conference participation, and business leadership. The rationale behind this selection of sectors touches upon the assumed impact of these on actually influencing viable policies – either through provision of direct recommendations, advocacy, financial means or otherwise supporting the evolution, quality and value of policy outcomes.

Firstly, in the Public Sector, the Report on Absent Voices concerns itself with the composition of the V4 governments and selected public institutions. Detailing the concentration of female leadership by sector, gender ratio of representation in government positions is evaluated by cabinet composition. Public institutional breakdown includes a detailed investigation into each country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance, as well as into the National Banks, Embassies, Permanent Missions and respective Parliaments. This exploration evaluates the proportion of representation in above mentioned branches of government and the characteristics of positional representa-



tion in a hierarchal structure of leadership. In addition to appointed positions, this analysis in investigating the nexus of government and politics, explores the distribution of female leadership in elected positions.

## “We can only influence the policy-makers if we have the data.”

**Annemie Turtelboom,**

**Member of the European Court of Auditors,**

Soft Launch of the CEE Her Database, 2021

Secondly, for Non-Governmental Organisations, the broad sector of NGOs is analysed both inter-organisationally and through the platforms of outreach and influence. The investigation of NGOs entails the evaluation of gendered leadership on the local and any international advisory scale, if applicable. For each country, the Report on Absent Voices defines a set of 5 most significant NGOs. The NGOs have been selected based on their influence and operating scale within the host country and their relevance to the topics of interest. Though an equal distribution of these topics in NGO selection would be desirable, the selection of organisations is balanced with their relevant influence in the respective countries.

Thirdly, in the promotion of women’s voices and expertise, Conference platforms hold the potential to serve a great role in endorsing women’s leadership. Regardless of the field or subject matter, the CEE Her Team believes that an equal voice for women is demonstrable in a balanced participation in dialogue by both male and female participants. To evaluate the status of conference representation we have selected the top 3-5 conferences hosted in each country relevant to our topic areas in the last 1-5 years. These conferences are broken down based on the proportion of women to men in both speaker and participant in a moderated group discussion, and cross ref-

erenced with their topics and subject matters. The hierarchy relevance of the individual topic streams is measured based on the occurrence of the topics i.e., how much the topic streams were represented at the conferences.

Fourthly, to analyse the female presence in Business Leadership in the market of each country vis-à-vis the top 10 companies of each state, the companies are defined with reference to Fortune 500 and the Deloitte “Central Europe Top 500” market rankings.<sup>10</sup> Due to the difficulty of dividing these companies on the grounds of this Report’s pre-selected topic streams, the companies are analysed separately on their own merit regarding female representation. With 7-11 most relevant companies of each nation defined, based on the access to available information, we will evaluate the proportion of women leaders in roles such as CEO, CFO or President of the Board, but also construct an imprint of the areas in which such representation fails. Ultimately, the Report makes use of the World Bank Gender Data Portal with relevant data from 2019 on economic opportunity in areas of female participation in firms’ ownership, majority stakes in their ownership, and top managerial positions in these firms.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of the Report on Absent Voice is three-fold: first, the report offers a realisation that what the Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 urges states to pursue i.e., “the empowerment of all women and girls”<sup>12</sup> is yet to be achieved in CEE and more so in specific sectors; second, the attestation of gender disparity in the topic streams along with policy recommendations provide concrete evidence of the current state of female underrepresentation and ways to amend the imbalance while explaining how the society as a whole might benefit from greater women’s inclusion; third, the conference organisers, employers and governance committees’ members are encouraged to take inspiration and show willingness to act on these results. To this end, the CEE Her Team endeavours to likewise implement these findings in present and future activities carried out under the auspices of GLOBSEC. Namely, the final product of data and analysis will be merged with the CEE HER Database, distributed through the CEE HER Mentorship Programme and promoted on social media platforms related to both the Open Society Foundation, CEE HER Initiative and GLOBSEC.

10 <https://www2.deloitte.com/ce/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/central-europe-top500.html>

11 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/datatopics/gender>

12 <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

# Public Sector

There is growing evidence that women's leadership in the political decision-making process is beneficial to an overall government function. While contributing with a perspective to change the status quo of political issues, women's political power has proven to promote bipartisanship, equality, and stability with women being more likely to question prevailing and long-established conventions and practices.<sup>13</sup> Female lawmakers are likely to advocate for policies related to equality and social welfare which in turn promise to enhance an inclusive society for the benefit of all. By championing issues on gender equality through parliamentary caucuses, such as combatting gender-based violence, promoting gender-equality laws, and electoral reform, the presence of strong female positioning in the political realm not only demonstrates the value of such equality but actively paves the way for the future of greater gender equity.

According to the 2019 UN Women data on women in government, as of January 2019, only 20.7% of global government ministers were women. In February 2019, only 24.3% of all national parliamentarians were women and globally, in 27 States, women accounted for less than 10% of parliamentarians in either single or lower houses. As of June 2019, only 11 women served as Head of State and 12 as the Head of Government.<sup>14</sup> Among these ministers, the most held portfolios by women were heavily weighted in traditionally gendered topics related to social issues, welfare, and sustainability. While this evidence does not serve to criticise the composition of individual countries' authorities and their functioning since we cannot account for intervening factors impacting on these numbers, there is an observable pattern of female underrepresentation.

The evaluation and investigation of gendered public sector leadership explores the composition of governments, public institutions, and cabinets of the V4 countries. While many traditional evaluations of female representation in the public sector reference only the composition of lower houses of government, we believe a deeper analysis is warranted in evaluating the hierarchal access to leadership. This tailored assessment, inspired by the SDG Gender Index launched by Equal Measures 2030<sup>15</sup>, we hope will allow us to assess women's ability to participate in the

greater national political systems of the V4 and their access to higher positions within political parties and government institutions.

## GENDER EQUALITY IN V4 GOVERNANCE

Of all categories evaluated in this study, the public sector was on average throughout the V4 the poorest ranking category related to gender equity, with females holding only 17.52% of all public positions. Due to the likelihood of societal organisation reflecting the state of public offices in regard to gender equality and female representation, it would be advantageous to acknowledge the possibility of the public reflecting the status of women's roles across the countries of V4. If this assumption holds true and there are tangible benefits to incorporating women's perspective in policies that directly influence societal progress, the area of V4 governance ought to be carefully re-examined.

In the evaluation of the hierarchal structure of public leadership, our data revealed a clear disparity in the presence of females in high level positions with almost an absence of any female Prime Ministers, Deputy Prime Minister or Deputy Governors with Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic having amongst the Deputy Prime Ministers one woman each. State Minister positions are only 15% female and only 9.10% of state secretary roles are served by female professional. While women found a nearly equal representation at 41.67% in vice committee chairs, the presence of only 19.36% of female senior chairs reveals an obstacle to women in ascending in leadership power.

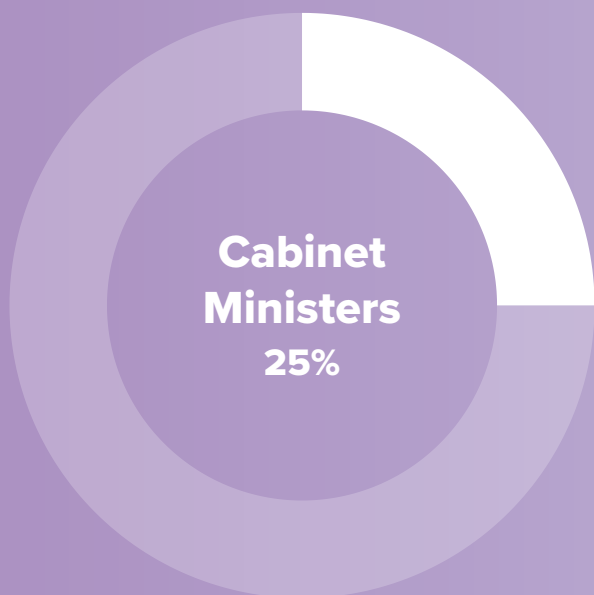
Women's leadership in this study was found to be heavily concentrated in ambassador and representative roles. Large decision-making positions were overwhelmingly male-dominated and when women were found appointed as permanent representatives, these roles and with them associated duties were limited to placements in only the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and United Nations offices.

13 <https://www.cfr.org/article/womens-power-index>

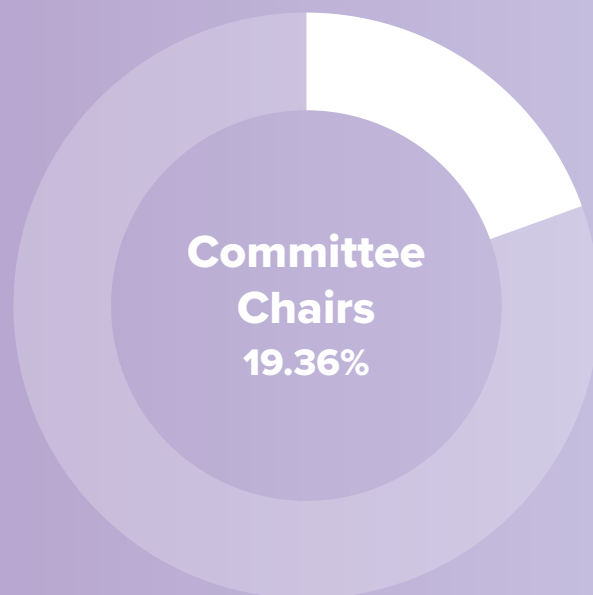
14 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

15 <https://data.em2030.org/2019-sdg-gender-index/explore-the-2019-index-data/>

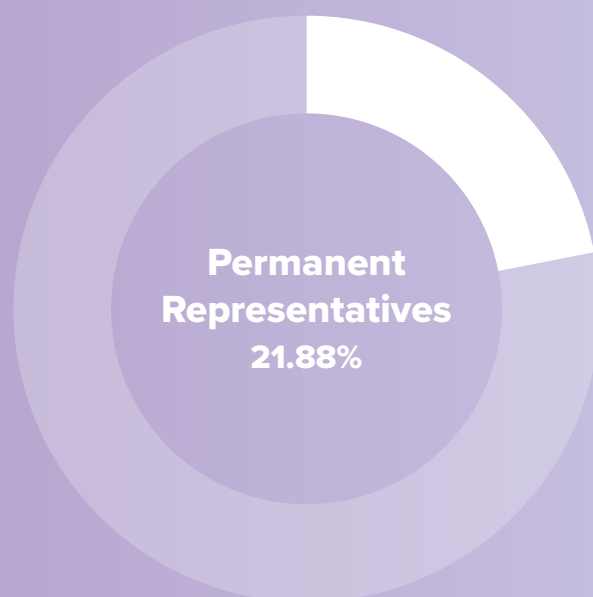


**Figure 2. Detailing of position hierarchy**

(even fewer acting as heads of cabinets)



(with 41.67% as vice-chairs)



(data acquired on the OECD, UNESCO and the UN positions)

**None of the Defence Forces were led by a woman**

# Non-Governmental Organisations

Worldwide, in 2019, the average composition of NGOs' staff was 70% female, while 70% of the leadership positions in these organisations were occupied by males.<sup>19</sup> Despite the traditionally liberal association of NGOs which work on social issues and progressive research topics, there is a clear disparity in the level at which women are given access to the work of these organisations with leadership positions being hardly ever attained. Paradoxically, according to a study carried out by Pew Research Center on women and leadership, there is little evidence of any distinction between men and women in key leadership traits such as the ability to innovate or intelligence.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, it is suggested that women excel in compassion and organisation matters. These are types of skills that may be of particular utility to the sensitive work of NGOs. The missions of NGOs in addressing and researching progressive issues surely serve to be advantaged by the diverse and liberal perspectives educated women have to contribute to boardroom discussions and at the upper management level of these organisations.

In evaluating the gendered leadership status of V4 non-governmental organisations, a set of 5 most significant NGOs per country were defined. Though an equal distribution of these topics would have been optimal in the selection of organisations, to ensure the organisational selection was balanced with relevant influence in its respective country, relevance to topic streams was cross-referenced with the Global

Go To Think Tank Index Report ranking of "Top Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe"<sup>21</sup> in making the final selection of organisations. While the investigated NGOs were selected with consideration of their relation to our topics of interest, as think tank NGOs are often diverse in their topic involvement, in evaluating their gendered composition of this sector we chose not to differentiate based on thematic representation.

As for the female representation in NGOs across the V4 countries when divided based on the selected topic streams, the organisations that focus on Future of Europe score the highest (22%), Economy & Global Order follows as second highest (17.65%) and Defence & Security scored the lowest (9.1%) in regard to women's presence. Contrary to the expectations, when focused on the individual V4 countries and their respective NGOs' leadership, the Czech Republic scored 15.63%, Hungary 22.22%, Poland 33.33% and Slovakia 26.19% of female directors. In terms of the actual composition of NGOs' boards, 21.43% of board positions were held by women. Of this composure, when distinguishing between international and local advisory boards, women were represented 13.89% internationally, while 26.56% locally. In regard to more specific appointments for the given positions, 16.67% of directors, 20% of deputy or managing directors and 50% of vice-presidents enjoyed a female presence.

## % of Women in Thematic Representation



19 <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2019/03/women-campaign-questions-lack-female-ngo-leaders/>

20 <http://womenofhr.com/the-benefit-of-more-women-in-leadership-roles/>

21 [https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=think\\_tanks](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=think_tanks)

# Conferences

In the promotion of women's voices and expertise, conference platforms hold the potential to serve a significant role in endorsing women's leadership credibility. Regardless of the field or subject matter, it is believed that an equal voice for women is achieved through balanced participation in dialogue by both male and female participants. Across topics, there are significant differences in perspective to be contributed through the presence of expert female voices. It should not go unnoticed, however, that some topics have become typified as extraordinarily male on conference agendas, with almost a complete absence of women engaged in speaking roles. According to the End to Manels report by the Open Society Foundation, the share of men in speaking roles exceed 75% in six topics alone: Foreign Policy; EU; Crime, Terrorism and Security; Economic Situation; Environment, Climate, and Energy Issues; and Technology. The average gender composition of individuals completing tertiary education in the European Union demonstrates a nearly equal share of highly educated men and women at around 24%.<sup>22</sup> This indicator would suggest that the supply of experts in the professional sphere is nearly perfect in gender equality. Thus, European high-level conferences have a responsibility in providing diverse perspectives in creating innovative ideas and in fully encompassing this diversity of expert opinions in doing so.

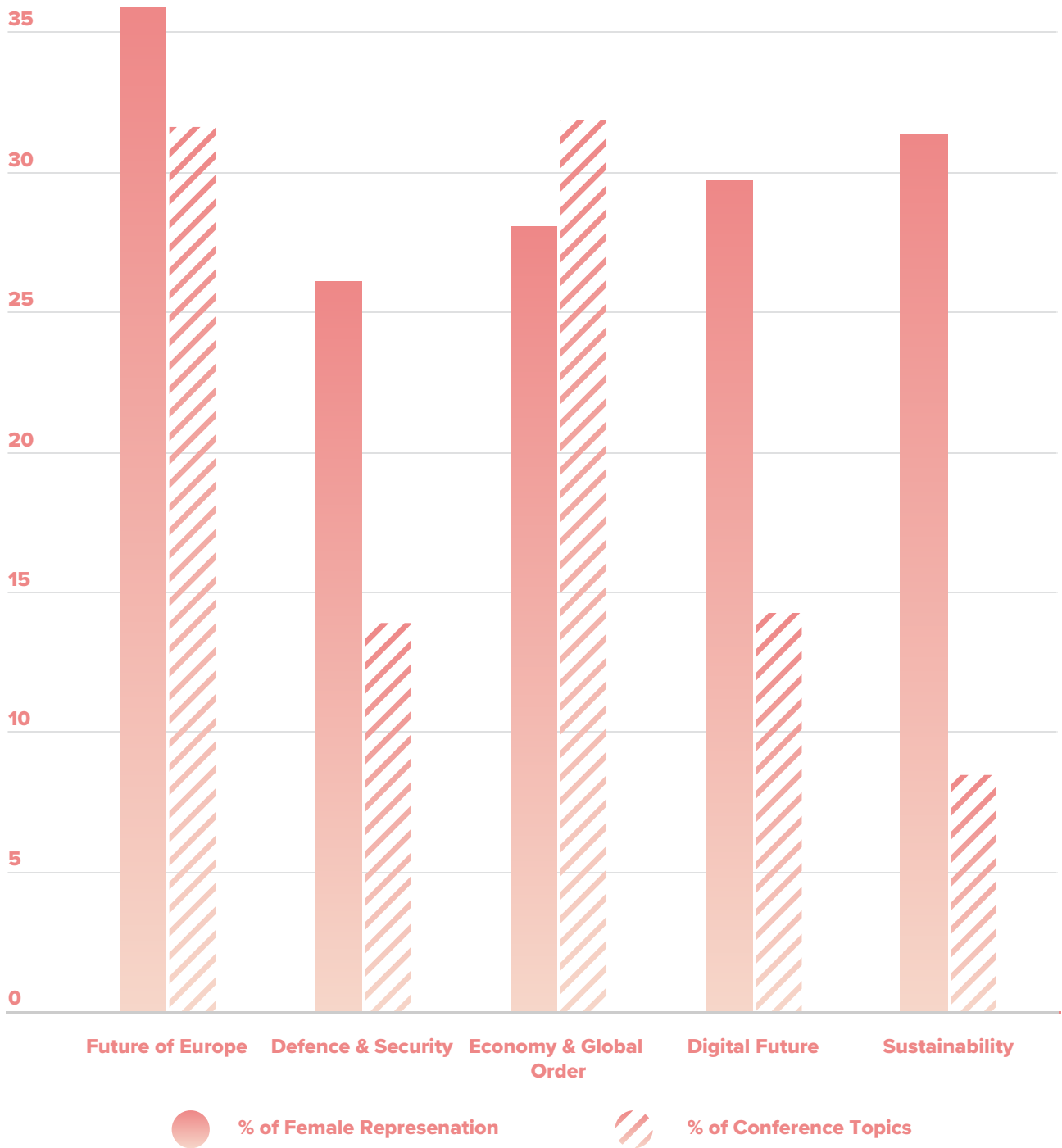
## GENDER COMPOSITION AT V4 CONFERENCES

Of the four analysed sectors, the data provided on conferences demonstrated the most significant proportion of female participation with the average speaker and participants representation of female voices at 26.72%. Conference settings are perhaps the most influential of our sectors as they provide a platform for legitimising and legitimised female voices. However, at 26.72%, gender equality remains far off. Furthermore, this average is based on the total female participation in speaking roles whether that contribution is as a keynote speaker or as a part of a panel discussion. Needless to say, the influence and empowerment of a position as a keynote speaker allocated in a session at a conference would be much greater.

The chart depicts that the average composition of female voices vis-à-vis male participation at conferences is that 27.06% of participants in moderated group discussions are female and 25.3% of the examined conferences' speakers are women. When divided on the basis of topic streams, the percentage of female representation compared to the relevance of the topic stream in our selection is as follows: Future of Europe: 35.88%/ 31.60% i.e., 35.88% of participants were women/ 31.60% of conference topics related to the Future of Europe; Defense & Security: 26.08%/ 13.87%; Economy & Global Order: 28.03%/ 31.85%; Digital Future: 29.67%/ 14.23%; and Sustainability: 31.34%/ 8.44%. This data shows that, for example, since the topic of Economy & Global Order was present on 31.85% of the conference agendas, women are likely to be underrepresented across the board due to the obvious disparity in this topic area. Conversely, while the female representation in Sustainability was 31.34%, this was significantly undermined by the topic stream of Sustainability being present only 8.44% of the conference platforms. Nevertheless, if we reverse the findings, the data shows that 73.28% of conference speakers and discussions' participants were men overall.

When distinguishing based on the type of participation, we observe that female speaker roles constitute a much smaller portion of the conference presence. This differentiation not only serves to discredit the value of female expertise but also limits participation in speaking time. This discrimination is only exacerbated by the data indication that in such speaking roles female participation is disproportionately weighted on topics of traditionally gendered topic streams such as Future of Europe and Sustainability, with little to no expert female voices being represented on topics of Defence & Security, Technology or Economy & Global Order.

**Figure 3. Proportion of Female Representation/Topic Stream Significance**



# Business Leadership

In 2020, the concept of gender equality is far from new. Yet, in the sector of business which has a potential to be amongst the most significant sectors in the V4 countries, female leadership remains sorely underrepresented. Over a decade ago, women made up a mere 4% of Fortune 500 CEOs and heads of boards in the European Union.<sup>23</sup> Disparagingly, by 2016, women accounted for only 4% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies globally despite serving as 25% of senior executives and managers.<sup>24</sup>

As of 2019 only 1 in 5 leaders across 279 international companies were female.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, while subjective designations of success and output may be fulfilled, these are masquerading as objective while clearly fail to be. Despite the societal progress in understanding the value of a female voice, many companies, though perhaps unintentionally, opt for gender balance not to be considered a priority. This is likely due to a missing comprehension of the value it promises. Research has shown that women possess a unique combination of skills and leadership traits which make them an asset in professional workplaces requiring such behavioural patterns. In addition to bringing a fresh perspective on development and innovation, female leaders are proven to be more trusted as more workers perceive female executives as being honest and ethical.<sup>26</sup>

It is appropriate to point out that millennial women are on average more educated than men with about 36% of women ages 25-34 having a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to their

male counterparts at only 28%.<sup>27</sup> An educated workforce is unequivocally a driver of innovation and progress in any sector and companies in the region ought to strive for such driver in a profit-desiring business environment. This rise in educated women in our society, paired with an expanded perspective, points toward a formation of a critical asset for the growth of a company. Therefore, reflecting on this opportunity for a business growth, there is a case to be made for the promotion of female leadership.

A 2016 survey of 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries concluded that “the presence of more female leaders in top positions of corporate management correlates with increased profitability of these companies”.<sup>28</sup> Considered in the context of the latest Women in the Workplace 2019 report by McKinsey & Company, advancing women's equality could result in up to \$12 trillion in global growth.<sup>29</sup> If these findings are put in the context of the Autumn 2020 Economic Forecast published by the European Commission, the impact of the world pandemic will likely spare very few countries across Europe from a drop in economic activity.<sup>30</sup> With public debt and deficits expected to rise before the numbers are to stabilise, the female representation in business leadership and participation in firms' ownership does no longer seem as an identity - and gender balance issue but more like one of the only ways to foster the much-needed economic recovery in the years to come.

23 <https://hbr.org/2007/09/women-and-the-labyrinth-of-leadership>

24 <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/>

25 <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>

26 [https://medium.com/@theBoardlist/5-reasons-why-having-women-in-leadership-benefits-your-entire-company-labor-day-2016-a3e46162a7a0#:~:text=2.%20Female%20leaders%20are%20trusted,%25%20say%20there's%20no%20difference\).](https://medium.com/@theBoardlist/5-reasons-why-having-women-in-leadership-benefits-your-entire-company-labor-day-2016-a3e46162a7a0#:~:text=2.%20Female%20leaders%20are%20trusted,%25%20say%20there's%20no%20difference).)

27 <https://statusofwomendata.org/coverage/millennial-women-are-more-educated-than-men-but-are-still-paid-less/#:~:text=About%2036%25%20of%20women%20ages,focused%20on%20women's%20economic%20issues.>

28 <https://www.pjic.com/newsroom/press-releases/new-peterson-institute-research-over-21000-companies-globally-finds-women>

29 <https://womenintheworkplace.com/>

30 [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2021](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2021)

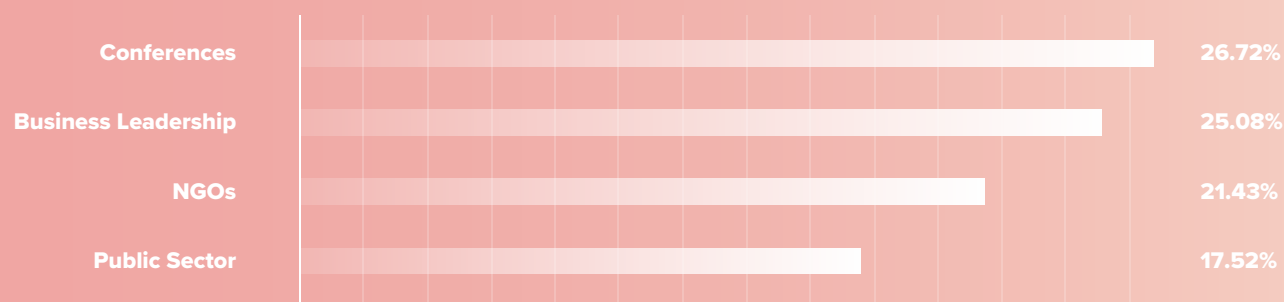


**Figure 4. 2019 Data on Economic Opportunity derived from World Bank Gender Data Portal<sup>31</sup>**

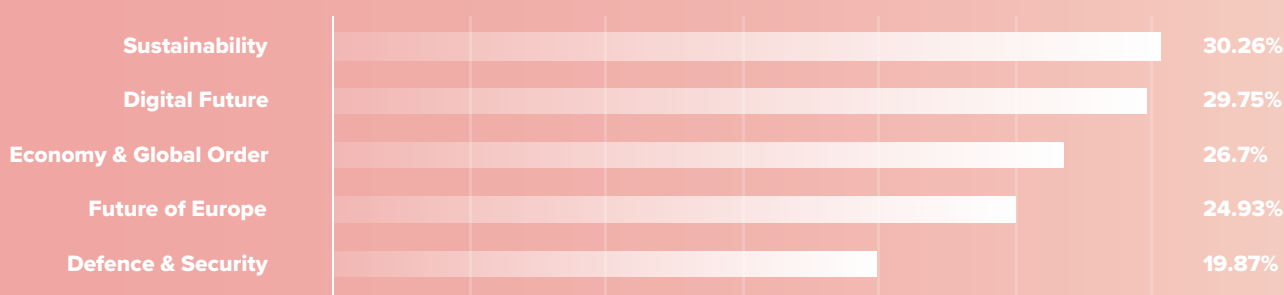
	Czech Republic	Poland	Slovakia	Hungary	V4 mean
% of firms with female participation in ownership	29.9%	37%	28.9%	51.9%	36.93%
% of firms with majority female ownership	16%	21.2%	11.8%	15.3%	16.08%
% of firms with a female top manager	16.1%	27.8%	22.9%	22.1%	22.23%
Average %	20.67%	28.67%	21.2%	29.77	25.08%

### GENERAL FIGURES:

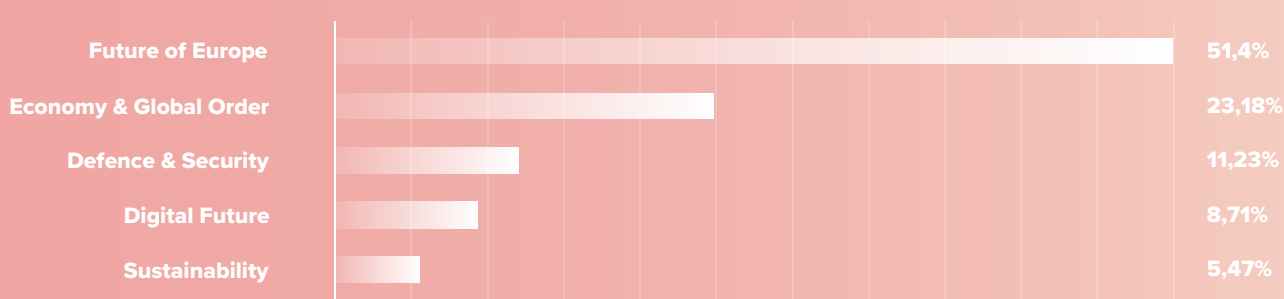
**Figure 5. Female Leadership and Representation by Sector**



**Figure 6. Female Leadership and Representation by Topic Stream (Public Sector, Conferences)**



**Figure 7. Topic Stream Significance (Most relevant topics)**



The streams of Sustainability (30.26%) and Digital Future (29.75%) in regard to mainly the Public Sector and Conferences do not reach overly pessimistic numbers of female leadership and representation. Note that by “pessimistic”, the word is used in relative terms compared to other fields where underrepresentation is more prevalent and so the wording does not suggest the female leadership is in its ideal form i.e., equality.

The figures on female leadership and participation in the streams across the board are not directly proportional to the most relevant topic streams of Future of Europe, Economy & Global Order and Defence & Security, respectively. Nonetheless, considering the average level of education attained by women compared to men (see Conferences and Business Leadership), the 19.87% of female leadership in Defence & Security signals a lack of opportunity as opposed to a structural personality and knowledge-related reasons for women not to be represented.

Considering the topic of Sustainability having scored the lowest percentage (5.47%) on the relevance scale, women are over-represented in the Public Sector and Conferences (30.26%). Although female representation in these sectors is not a zero-sum game, this indicates that women are largely appointed to positions which are not of high relevance or importance to the relevant stakeholders. If we are to support this observation and consider the actual impact of the individual sectors on policy agendas, women in CEE are more present in Conferences (26.72%) compared to the Public Sector (17.52%). Assuming a holistic perspective of the findings, the underlying pattern of gender disparity in CEE is that female voices are extensively marginalised on topics of great relevance and sectors which enjoy considerable influence.

**“The workplace is gender-specific and we see it in all the different types of economies.”**

**Scarlett Varga**

**Head of Development at Bruegel and Co-Founder of the Brussels Binder**  
Soft Launch of the CEE Her Database, 2021

**“It is crucial we tackle outdated cultural norms and traditions, visible and invisible glass ceilings that continue to perpetuate gender inequality in all contexts and environments, at personal, organizational and community level. We need to embrace and promote diversity, inclusion and gender equality as a part of who we are as societies in the 21st century.”**

**Alexandra Martin**

Head of GLOBSEC Brussels Office

# Data Analysis And Study Limitations

To analyse and interpret the results, this report used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis for the purpose of achieving methodological robustness. Accordingly, this data was utilised to allow for cross-country comparison, analysis of sectoral representation as to which sectors are heavily male-dominated and provided ground for a comprehensive evaluation of the V4 region. The topic of gendered leadership and positional superiority across sectors and topic streams was evaluated not only in its source but subsequently used in a comparative analysis between the cases. When summarized in percentage form, the data on female leadership demonstrate patterns and correlations which help reveal weak points in gender equity in the V4.

From great familiarity with the realm of international relations and comparative politics, the CEE HER Team understands that no research on the intersectional topic of female representation can be all-encompassing or fully representative. There is a possibility of certain confounding factors having influenced the pattern observed yet not being accounted for in the report. Regrettably, with at times limited resources and given the finite timeline of our research, it is difficult to survey all dynamics of female leadership in a horizontal format across the V4 region sectors and topics.

The analysis of Conferences proved to be far more complex than initially anticipated. The question remained as to whether conferences ought to be evaluated based on overall female participation, whether by females serving keynote or participant role, or by a topic sector. Similarly, the difficulty of determining how often is a topic stream present versus which topic streams enjoy the most of women representation was present throughout.

The analysis of our research does not fully explain nor resolve the conditions barring female representation. However, the hope is that this investigation on a narrowed scope of the V4 countries in the areas of government organisation, conference composition, top NGOs and company analysis will serve as a resource by which we may use our in-house expertise to create a platform fostering open discussion on gender equality. The CEE HER Team concludes that some of the most prevalent discussions are in areas where female voices are insufficiently present.

# Conclusion

While public perception of gender equality is seen as important for both men and women in Central Europe, female representation in key sectors remains highly unbalanced. There is a visible gender disparity across topic streams examined, as all four Visegrad countries remain far below the European standard. Although there are minor differences in the individual countries' results, the V4 region reflects a clear pattern of female underrepresentation in Security & Defence, and Economy & Global Order with the role of women in the public sector and business leadership being similarly disconcerting. The reasoning behind this underrepresentation is not supported by rational consideration since, as the report has shown, there are benefits associated with women's behavioural patterns such as intellectual and emotional capacity, and undeniable economic advantages. These should jointly prompt relevant stakeholders to assess gender equality gaps in respective public and private environments in order to craft policy measures that would address existing challenges and barriers for female professionals at all levels. Particular attention should be paid to the role identity plays in every society, as it constitutes the reference point for people to jointly address issues that concern their development and to influence public policies that help close inequalities and disparities. In this regard, the Report on Absent Voices could serve as a tool to highlight

key areas where female underrepresentation remains persistent and the underlying causes that require closer attention. Therefore, the next step is for public and corporate leaders, employers and conference organisers to incorporate policy recommendations that are fitting, and create a more inclusive environment for female voices to be heard.

# Policy And Organisational Recommendations

## SHORT-TERM

- Sign up to the the EU, the OECD and UN Standards on gender equality and follow the Brussels Binders, Open Society Foundations' recommendations, and other relevant global, regional and national organizations that provide relevant analysis and up to date statistics on broader gender equality topics, like these provided in the Report on Absent Voices: Missing Female Perspectives in CEE
- Look up other relevant conferences and conference organizers and draw inspiration from their agendas, their panels' representations, as well as list of participants to broaden the pool of possible female experts that could join your specific event or conversation
- Commit within your organization or institution to increase equal gender representation and ensure you work together with your team towards this goal
- Use data to inform Human Resources and Organisational Development Strategies to support women in their journey to leadership (via working with all managers (male and female) and teams on 'unconscious bias' to achieve a more balanced ratio across all departments and grades)
- Since most top positions in public and private sectors are male dominated, ensure that moderated group discussions, conferences and other event formats do not seek/entail only these top positions, as it will result in limited female participation
- If a conference aiming at providing "global", "widespread" or "future" vision, the composition of speakers and participants ought to reflect the global gender balance and the prescribed goals
- Work with moderators to ensure that female speakers are given equal speaking time within a panel, especially in areas like Defence & Security and Economy & Global Order
- Encourage male participants from your organization or institution to refuse to take part in discussions without female and diverse representation
- Speak up at events and conferences where female voices are visibly marginalized by engaging with conference organizers and other influencers
- Aim to diversify the thematic areas at the top CEE conferences to allow for gender diversity
- Increase the number of discussions on Sustainability and Future of Europe, which have a bigger pool of expertise and enjoy greater female engagement in conference agendas
- When sending out invites to possible speakers, make sure to send them in advance to increase the chances of female participation and account for possible virtual or other forms of flexible participation
- If a female expert declines an invitation ensure that the alternative option is also a female expert
- If a female expert declines an invitation ask them for recommendations of other female experts from their field

## LONG-TERM

- Utilise existing rosters and databases such as [www.ceeher.org](http://www.ceeher.org) to search for CEE female experts in the areas of international relations, foreign and security policy, business, economics, technology, sustainability to improve gender equal participation at your events on annual basis
- Conference organisers should track gender balance data breakdown at their conferences to ensure sustainable long-term progress from conference to conference
- Employers should regularly review and openly report on pay gaps and role parity between women and men across all grades within an organization, to track progress and increase data transparency and accessibility for all
- Employers and human resources departments should consider the benefits of female expertise within their own settings and strategies in a pro-active manner, since women's distinct set of qualities and skills may be an addition to the functioning of the public and private sectors
- Public and Private sector leaders should seek to develop organisation-wide policies and practices that equally enable men and women to thrive in their career ambitions, e.g., flexible working policies and efforts to close the pay gap in the specific industry to allow for equal opportunities
- Ensure that the starting point and requirements for public sector positions, especially in the area of Defence & Security, are identical for women and men without discrimination
- In order to create female talent pipelines and increase female representation in the political spheres, implement some forms of gender quotas for either candidate lists, political parties, or reserved seats, that originated with women's rights organisations' advocacy in their government. Otherwise, the existing gender disparity in the public space will continue to persist and affect how the society sees itself today
- For long-term societal change, address the common stereotypes and biases that continue to harm women's rights in the workforce and public life, in order to allow for female professionals to access senior levels within the organisations/public institutions
- Create an inclusive organisational and work environment that works towards dismantling access barriers and towards promoting diversity in the workplace.

