

The Gender Dimension in Slovakia

Theories of Democracy and the Gender Aspect

A wide variety of theories and models of democracy present preconditions and principles of a functioning democracy, but all tend to ignore the gender dimension of democracy and citizenship. For many years, this problem has either been ignored or even fully rejected. One example: J. Schumpeter, who has been a recognized theorist of democracy in this century, did not consider the fact that women were denied voting rights a reason to question the democratic nature of the society.

The criterion, which determines whether or not a society is evaluated in terms of democracy, appears to concentrate only on the area of "public life". This arises from the explicitly non-voiced assumption that the "public" and the "private" sectors can be separated from each other. This approach has been the principal criticism of liberal democracy by theorists of democracy who account for its feminist dimension. If we accept the definition of liberal democracy as an establishment based on the importance of free elections, general suffrage, granting of basic civil freedoms and rights, we arrive at the conclusion that almost everywhere in the world, except Scandinavian countries, democracy is deficient with respect to the proportionality of the gender participation. In a majority of countries, there is a marked discrepancy between the proportion of women in the general population and their participation in elected and politically nominated structures. If we performed a "mental experiment" and split all citizens of a country into two groups according to their gender, we would find out that for women, much more than for men, democracy is "electoral democracy". In other words, women find that democracy represents the right to participate in elections, and that their civil activities start and end by the right to participate in the electoral act. Although women formally have the same rights as men, they get elected much less frequently. Feminist authors cite this fact as evidence for the concept of democracy itself giving preference to men rather than as the manifestation of a free decision taken by women. The strict separation of the "public" and the "private" sphere begins to overlap when democracy gets consolidated. Then a free civil society starts forming and includes the private sphere.

The modern feminist concept of democracy emphasizes a democracy with a comprehensive nature and one that attaches importance to values such as equity and individual freedom in the private sphere. Emphasis is also put on

family relationships and inter-gender relationships in the workplace. The sensitivity of a society to these values and application of these values in daily life require a concentrated long-term

Box 6

The Gender Aspect

The gender-specific perspective understands human gender as a relevant category. The baseline is the distinction between *sex* as a biological specific and *gender* as a social construction.

Sex marks the biological differences between females and males that are innate and are general – both from the viewpoint of individuals as well as space and time. Thus, these differences concern all individuals, occur everywhere (in every country, region, etc.), and occur all the time, i.e., they do not change over time.

Gender refers to social differences between females and males. These differences are not innate, they are acquired and change in time and space – they vary both within and between societies. "...the different status of women and men within the network of social and power relationships is not the consequence of the biological, physiologic-anatomical differences between them, they cannot be derived from, or justified by them." (Szapuová, 1998) This is an acquired status created by existing stereotyped expectations with respect to the roles of women and men in the society. Discrimination against women hinders not only the development of girls and women but also the development of the entire society.

effort from the entire society, especially from the women themselves. Authors who are sensitive to the feminist dimension of democracy state that a democratic society requires a democratic family, a democratic economy, and ultimately democratic sexual and racial relationships. Both the family and the cultural dimensions of democratic sexual and racial relationships must undergo changes.

Reasons for the Poor Acceptance of the Gender Dimension in Slovakia

About two thirds of Slovakia's population are of Catholic faith. Even though a significant portion of them does not actively participate in the life of the church, they consider the *principal values and standards of Catholic faith* as part of their life beliefs and attitudes. The preferred family model is a *traditional model of the family and marriage* with the father being the key authority and the main breadwinner. Alternatives to the conventional form of the family coexistence occur quite frequently in western societies, but are not prevalent in Slovakia. Some statistics show an increase in the number of non-married couples living in partnerships in Slovakia, and that the age at which people marry has increased. It is also noted that the absolute numbers of marriages and divorces have remained almost unchanged in the last five years. Since most of Slovakia's population lives in medium-sized and smaller settlements, the pressure of the social control linked with the values of conservative Catholicism is an important factor that hinders the acceptance of alternative lifestyles.

The problem of violence against women still remains a taboo issue despite educational attempts by non-governmental organizations. People believe that society is not affected by hidden or open violence and inconsiderate attitudes to weaker groups of the population. But, half of the population studied acknowledged the existence of various forms of violence against women. Family education, prudery, and mistrust of public institutions all support the belief that it is a woman's responsibility to make decision for reporting and disclosing a violent crime.

Also, the official *communist ideology* of the previous establishment has affected the perception of a woman's status in the society. The pursuit of collectivist ideals caused women to accept their status as inconsequential and traditional. In many cases, they claimed that they were not interested in attracting attention to themselves, or motivated to step out of the protective framework of the anonymous collectivism.¹

On the other hand, the communist regime did change the status of women in society, particularly with respect to increasing both their educational opportunities and their participation in the work force. In a way, this has brought about the transition of the traditional model of the family. The ideology of equity and emancipation did not reach as far as the private sphere and there were no changes in the asymmetric performance of family chores. The man's income was insufficient to secure the family, and the income of the woman supplemented the family household. This resulted in the woman working "two shifts" – both at the workplace and at home, even if the latter was not considered work. That time period created the roots of the current prevalence of women employed in non-favored and less paid sectors of the economy. Even during communist times, a woman's income represented only two thirds of what a man would earn in former Czechoslovakia.

¹ Although there used to be official mass organizations of women under the communist regime, there was no women's association or a group at that time that would have been founded from the bottom up as a manifestation of common interests or needs; all were created through political pressure from the top.

A Short Trip to the History – Starting Point of the Transition

The human development indices from the period of socialism do speak in favor of gender equality. Men and women in Slovakia had equal access to basic health care and education. As a result, the education structure was relatively balanced, and as time went by, the education level of women even exceeded that of men at some levels (e.g., secondary school with high school diploma). There was no marked difference in infant and newborn mortality between boys and girls.

The Constitution laid down both the right and the liability to work and most women had paid employment. The gender difference in the extent of participation in the labor market at that time was comparable with North-European countries that had been in the forefront. The key reason for the high involvement of women in the labor market was the extensive industrialization in the 1950s and 1960s. This was a result of Slovakia's labor force shortage, particularly for monotonous and less well paid work in light industries. Later on, women's increased educational level and the inadequacy of a single income to sustain a household strengthened their working activities. Most women returned to their jobs a half year up to two years after the birth of a child because the income of both the husband and the wife were necessary to meet the family needs. On the average, the wages of women were less and it was the men who received tax allowances and family allowances. Men continued to be perceived as breadwinners, despite the mass involvement of women in the workforce.

As years went by, the working involvement of women continued to grow. Women made up 38.7 percent of total employment in 1960, which grew to 45.5 percent at the end of the 1980s. Although feminization of some sectors of the economy was based on industrialization, this trend intensified during the subsequent years.

After 1989, discussions of women returning to the "family hearth" started in the Slovak society. Official "circles" advocated a return to the traditional model of the family. The overall atmosphere of the early 1990s pressures women to leave their jobs and focus on the care of the family and the household. This pressure, however, did not receive an enthusiastic response from women because households still needed two incomes even during the time of transition. Also, educated women did not want to lose their qualifications after they had achieved better opportunities and more personal career options.

The transition of society in the 1990's was a complex development. Identifying the principal problems faced by women during this period requires examining an extensive and complex set of problems. These problems were linked to poverty, women's unemployment, stereotypes of job-related differentiation between genders, barriers in the process of starting up own business activities, inequity of remuneration for work, as well as the prevailing higher work and family-related burden.

Table 22

Major Problems Faced By Women in Slovakia by Relevance (%)

Type of Problem	Extent of Relevance for Women			
	Irrelevant at all	Moderately relevant	Highly relevant	Unable to tell
Low income	1.8	7.6	89.3	1.3
Insufficient opportunities for work, unemployment	2.8	15.5	78.9	2.8
Harassment at the workplace	26.2	25.1	19.3	29.4
Unfair division of labor between women and men	10.9	20.1	59.2	9.8
Lack of private time, overburdening	3.8	8.4	84.3	3.5
Violence in families	24.3	26.8	29.2	19.7
Loss of employment due to motherhood	18.6	18.4	53.8	9.2
Poor State support in motherhood	9.2	16.3	68.1	6.4
Disinterest in public work	10.7	22.0	50.4	16.9

Source: Guráň – Filadelfiová (1998)

Slovak women state that the greatest problems were lack of finances and lack of time. The groups most affected were divorced women and women with children that frequently lived at a minimum threshold of subsistence. The threat of poverty grows with increased age since wage differences between males and females grow with increased age. Little has changed for the majority of women with respect to the care of the family and household management. There is a prevailing discrepancy between the declared and the actual level of women's rights in the society. Even though women's rights are declared, the rules are frequently violated and breached in real life. Economic opportunities play a key role in bringing about change in this area of concern.

Gender Differences in the Labor Market (in Economy)

From the viewpoint of employment status, the most pronounced gender difference is manifested in the very *structure of the productive age and post-productive age portions of the population*. Women make up 48 percent and almost 66 percent of productive and post-productive age population, respectively. This gender gap is due to different definitions of productive age between the genders. For women, the interval 15-54 years is specified and for men 15-59 years is specified. During recent decades, the share of post-productive age women has kept increasing while the share for men has stagnated and remained the same due to their higher death rates. As of 31 December 1998, the numbers of post-productive age women reached 631,018. This is 5.9 percent more than in 1990. During the same period, the number of post-productive age men reached 328,463. This is only 0.8 percent higher than 1990. These increases are reflected in the aging index² that has grown from 69.3 in 1980 to 87.1 in 1998 (even 90.5 in 1999). The differences in gender-related trends have created marked differences in the aging index between women and men. There were 58.3 post-productive age men per 100 boys aged below 14 in 1998, whereas there were as many as 117.2 post-productive age women per 100 girls of the same age (and/or 92.3 women older than 59). The overall proportion of post-productive age people in Slovakia's population increased by 0.4 percent, however, the increment only concerned women.

² Aging index represents the ratio of post-productive population to pre-productive population.

The ongoing reduction in birth rates resulted in a reduction in the proportion of children, the pre-productive age portion of the population in the 90s, and an associated growth in the mainly productive age portion of the population (by 4.2 percent). This meant that the potential for economic activity and employment kept growing along with the pressure on job opportunities. In an economy whose pension system is mostly based on reciprocity, economically active individuals must generate income not only for themselves, but also for the pre- and post-productive age (children and pensioners) populations. In an economy with a shortage of jobs, increases in productive age population increases in unemployment rates.

The numbers of economically active individuals (i.e., the labor force of the society) kept growing in Slovakia throughout the 1990s. In 1999, it averaged 2,573,000 that was comprised of 45 percent women and 55 percent men. Since the mid-90s, *economic activity* rates of the population have stabilized at the 60 percent level.³ For all Slovak citizens aged 15 and above, 6 in 10 are economically active. As shown in Table 23, the portion of the male population in the labor force is approximately 19 percent higher than the portion of the female population in the labor force.

Table 23

Economic Activity Rate of Population (%)

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total	62.1	60.3	59.8	60.1	59.9	59.9	60.0
Males	70.4	69.1	68.9	68.7	68.6	68.9	68.7
Females	54.4	52.2	51.5	52.3	51.8	51.5	52.0

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

In 1999, the average of economically inactive persons was 1,718,500, i.e., *individuals outside of the labor market*. This was 0.6 percent higher than the preceding year's level. Pensioners were the largest group at 60.7 percent. The number of pensioners increased by 18.7 thousand over 1998 numbers. Women accounted for 15,800 of the increase (i.e., almost 85 percent of the year-to-year increase of pensioners). The second largest group of persons outside the labor market was students and apprentices, with a share of 24.3 percent. The next largest groups were housewives (6.6 percent in 1999), mothers on additional maternal leave (3.2%), persons unable to work (3.1%), the group of "discouraged" persons (who do not believe that they would find a job again – 0.6 percent), and persons who do not want or need to work.

The economically active population can be divided into two groups: those who work and those who are unemployed. An increase in the number of economically active individuals does not automatically mean an increased employment rate or an increase in the total numbers of individuals with jobs. Shortage of job opportunities may namely redirect the growth of economic activity towards a growth of unemployment. That is what occurred in Slovakia during the late 1990s. The growth of economic activity in mid-90s was reflected in a growth of persons with a job. In recent years, it has shifted into the growth of unemployment rates.

The average number of employed workers in Slovakia's economy dropped by 4.2 percent between 1996-1999. The most pronounced decrease was in 1999 (by 3 percent, i.e., 67,000). On average, there were more than 2,132,000 persons in Slovakia during 1999 with 45.4 percent being women. Gender differences were manifested in the developmental tendencies of working persons. Other differences in work activities can also be noted. Women are more involved in part-time or unstable jobs than men (temporary, occasional or seasonal work). According to the Labor Force Survey, there were 1.1 percent men and 3.1 percent women working part time

³ Economic activity rate represents the share of economically active population (employed including women on maternity leave, and registered unemployed) on total population in productive and post-productive age.

during the 4th quarter of 1999. Major reasons reported for part-time work were health condition, matching the overall arrangement of the life of the worker, and the wishes of the employer.⁴ In evaluating the willingness of employers to offer flexible working hours to mothers, it may be of interest that only 4 percent of women gave childcare responsibilities as the reason for working part-time (*Report on Social...*, 1999).

Another important factor after 1990 was the emergence of the private economic sector along with areas of the State and/or public economic sectors. The proportions of men and women in these sectors are different. 57.3% of women work in the public sector and make up almost half of its employees. In the private sector, only 43.6% of workers are women. The ratio of women in the self-employed sector is even less favorable at only 25%. For business people having no employees, women make up 26.8%, whereas the corresponding figure for business people with employees is 25.5%. The private sector in Slovakia is still a masculine domain.

Significant *employment segregation* based upon gender also exists in Slovakia as well as in other countries. Women dominate some sectors and positions while men dominate other sectors. However, it should be noted that Slovakia has undergone some marked changes in the overall economic structure and in employment. Since 1970, Slovakia has transformed from an economy with significant agricultural share into an industrial dominant economy. The services sector has also been developing since 1970.

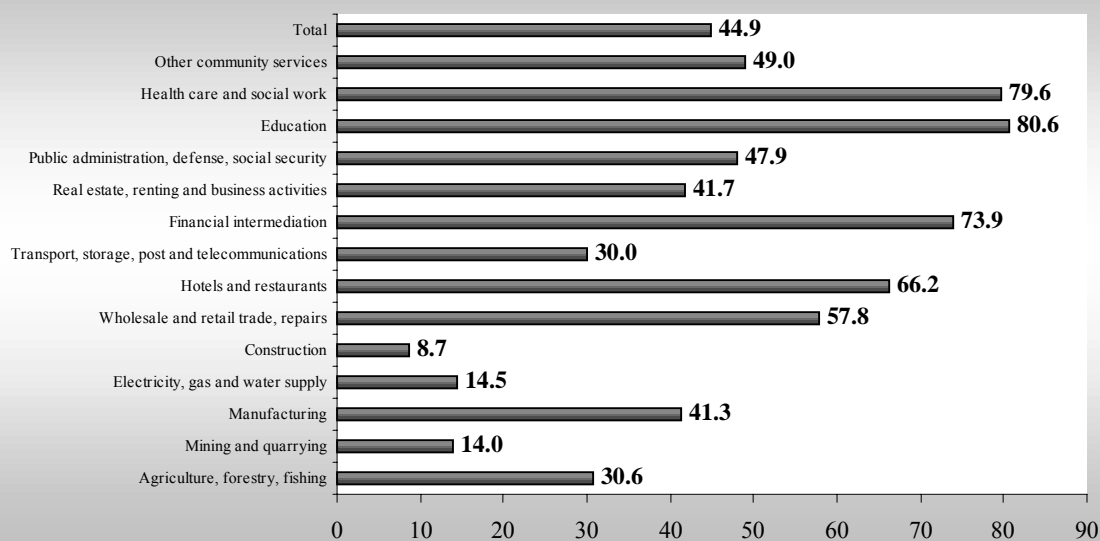
The proportions of persons working in the primary sector dropped to 8.3 percent by 1998, but those working in the secondary sector decreased slightly to 39.4 percent. The tertiary sector, with the total numbers of workers increasing to 52.3 percent, is the only sector that has kept growing. The individual sectors differ substantially in their respective participation of men and women. The tertiary sector is a predominantly a feminine arena, with almost 70 percent of working in it being women. Compared to men, the percentage of women in the primary sector is almost 50 percent smaller and one third smaller in the secondary sector.

When examining the individual branches of the national economy, one can note that the employment structure shows rather marked gender differences. In the sector structure, men pronouncedly dominate the construction industry, production of mineral raw materials, heavy industries, and agriculture. In addition to the conventional sectors mentioned, men also predominate in sectors such as transport, real estate, and development. Among the classical categories of economic activities, women could achieve predominance in light industries, trade and catering services. The most pronounced differences, with respect to gender, concerns education, health care, social care, as well as the financial and insurance businesses. In these sectors, women comprise more than three-quarters of the employed. These sectors may justifiably be called feminized. With the exception of the financial and insurance businesses, these are the sectors recording the lowest monthly wages. The working activities of women in these feminized sectors have strengthened in recent years. Progress has been made in the financial and insurance businesses and the education sector.

⁴ Women make up 44.8 percent of the labor force with full-time jobs, and their share on the part-time labor is 48.8 percent.

Figure 10

Share of Women on Total Number of Employed by Economic Activity (in %, 1998)



Source : Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Education in Slovakia is the most feminized employed sector. Women prevail in all types of schools, except universities and colleges (see also *Training and Education* in this report). Experts frequently mention the lack of male models in education and state that this has a negative impact mainly on the population of boys. Except for grammar schools and secondary schools, boys are more numerous than girls in school. Given the overall economic situation in the country, there is little chance in the future that low wages in the education sector may stop the male element to leave this sector. We are unable to estimate what impact this may have in the future.

Gender "gaps" are also evident in other occupations. The biggest difference, to the benefit of males, is in the group of craftsmen and qualified workers as well as jobs involving the operation of machines and equipment, i.e., laborer jobs where the share of women remains below the 20 percent level. Women in Slovakia typically prevail among the lower wage administrative and operating staffs of the services and trade sectors. The increased educational level of women in Slovakia has also resulted in women achieving majority participation in the second and the third classes of employees (scientific and professional intellectual jobs as well as technical and health professionals). Males and females have approximately equal shares within the category of ancillary, non-qualified, and agricultural laborers. A rather strong differentiation at the highest class of employment does not favor women, which is surprising when one considers the relatively balanced educational structure of men and women in Slovakia. Among the legislators, managers and senior officials, women do not even achieve a 30 percent share. This fact may be interpreted as additional evidence of marginalizing women in Slovakia's society. It also provides evidence for the existence of barriers to a broader participation of women on power and decision making outside of educational areas.

Table 24

Employed by Classification of Occupation (1998)

Occupation	Total (thous.)	Of which Women (%)
1 Legislators, senior officials and managers	128.2	29.8
2 Scientists and brain workers	210.2	60.3
3 Technical, medical, pedagogical professionals	365.3	60.2
4 Administrative workers (officials)	183.0	74.9
5 Workers in services and trade	266.2	67.8
6 Qualified workers in agriculture, forestry and relat. fields	42.2	43.8
7 Craftsmen and qualified producers, repairmen	465.1	18.6
8 Machine and equipment operators	304.2	19.6
9 Supporting and non-qualified staff	231.2	51.6
10 Not classified	3.0	56.7

Note: Data from labor force survey.

Source: *Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 1999*. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

A comparison of *average monthly wages* in various sectors of the national economy has shown that lower wages are typical for sectors that are dominated by women. Wages in these sectors do not exceed the level of average wages for the national economy of Slovakia. However, the average wages of men and women also differ in global terms. According to the survey *Information System on Average Wages* (Trexima Bratislava), the average hourly wage gap was SKK 18.87. In the 4th quarter of 1999, women received SKK 60.10 per hour while men received SKK 78.97 per hour. That means the average wages of women was only 76 percent of men's average wages. This gender disparity in remuneration is a long-term issue since a similar difference could be noticed over a longer period of time (actually, it is moderately increasing). So, the difference in average monthly wages between men and women represented SKK 2,609, and in 1998, SKK 200 more than in 1997. This disparity has been confirmed by a comparison of wages of men and women within matching categories of employment and education.

Table 25

Average Monthly Wage for Females and Males by Completed Education (1998)

Education	Males (M)	Females (F)	Ratio F/M
1. Primary	8,294	6,001	0.72
2. Apprenticeship	9,590	6,664	0.69
3. Secondary (without exam)	9,346	6,682	0.71
4. Apprenticeship with leaving exam	11,133	8,753	0.79
5. Full secondary general	11,714	8,984	0.77
6. Secondary vocational (vocational school)	12,328	9,119	0.74
7. Post-secondary	15,104	10,278	0.68
8. University	18,824	13,590	0.72
9. Scientific (Ph.D.)	19,865	13,147	0.66
Total	11,356	8,747	0.77

Source: *Sample Surveys on Structure of Wages of Employees in the Economy of the SR*. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Identical levels of education do not provide identical remuneration for work. Women had lower wages for each category of education, where the difference ranged between 21 and 32 percent of men's wages. The possibility of reducing this disparity with increased education could not be confirmed. The greatest difference concerned secondary education (without leaving exam). The reasons may be from differences due to extra work and night work. Evidence points to the fact that it stems from the significant difference in remuneration between light industries (mainly women) and heavy industries (mainly men). The difference between higher education groups

may be influenced by the different working positions of women and men. The greater willingness of women to work in lower qualification jobs may be reflected here.

Table 26

Average Monthly Wages for Females and Males by Classification of Occupation (1998)

Occupation	Males (M)	Females (F)	Ratio F/M
1 Legislators, senior officials and managers	27,497	17,773	0.65
2 Scientists and brain workers	14,617	11,886	0.81
3 Technical, medical, pedagogical professionals	13,251	10,162	0.77
4 Administrative workers (officials)	10,297	8,245	0.80
5 Workers in services and trade	9,668	6,423	0.66
6 Qualified workers in agriculture, forestry	8,070	7,096	0.88
7 Craftsmen and qualified producers, repairmen	9,954	6,974	0.70
8 Machine and equipment operators	9,985	7,418	0.74
9 Supporting and non-qualified staff	7,056	5,537	0.78
Total	11,356	8,747	0.77

Source: Sample Surveys on Structure of Wages of Employees in the Economy of the SR. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

A comparison of gender based employment differences within occupational groups showed that differences existed in all categories and those differences did not reduce with increased position. The most significant difference (35%) was in the wages paid for legislators and managers. The smallest wage gap was for qualified laborers in agriculture, lower white-collar workers, and scientific workers (less than 20 percent). These tendencies have continued over several years. One explanation may be the type of employment organization. Standard tables of remuneration are used by the public sector that employs most white collar and scientific workers. It is in these areas that a woman may more easily achieve a managerial position. In the private sector, where looser remuneration principles exist, men are dominant. Other explanations may be found in the educational differences of men and women, and in the practical experience differences (men achieve a higher educational level earlier, women have to "catch up" with them, breaks in the working career due to motherhood, care for, or attending family members, etc.).

Table 27

Average Monthly Wages for Females and Males by Age (1998)

Age category	Males (M)	Females (F)	Ratio F/M
up to 20 years	7,192	6,212	0.86
20 - 24 years	8,975	7,488	0.83
25 - 29 years	10,560	8,018	0.76
30 - 34 years	11,419	8,760	0.77
35 - 39 years	12,035	9,059	0.75
40 - 44 years	12,265	9,273	0.76
45 - 49 years	12,677	9,311	0.73
50 - 54 years	12,753	9,658	0.76
55 - 59 years	11,998	8,835	0.74
60 and more	9,622	6,406	0.67
Total	11,356	8,747	0.77

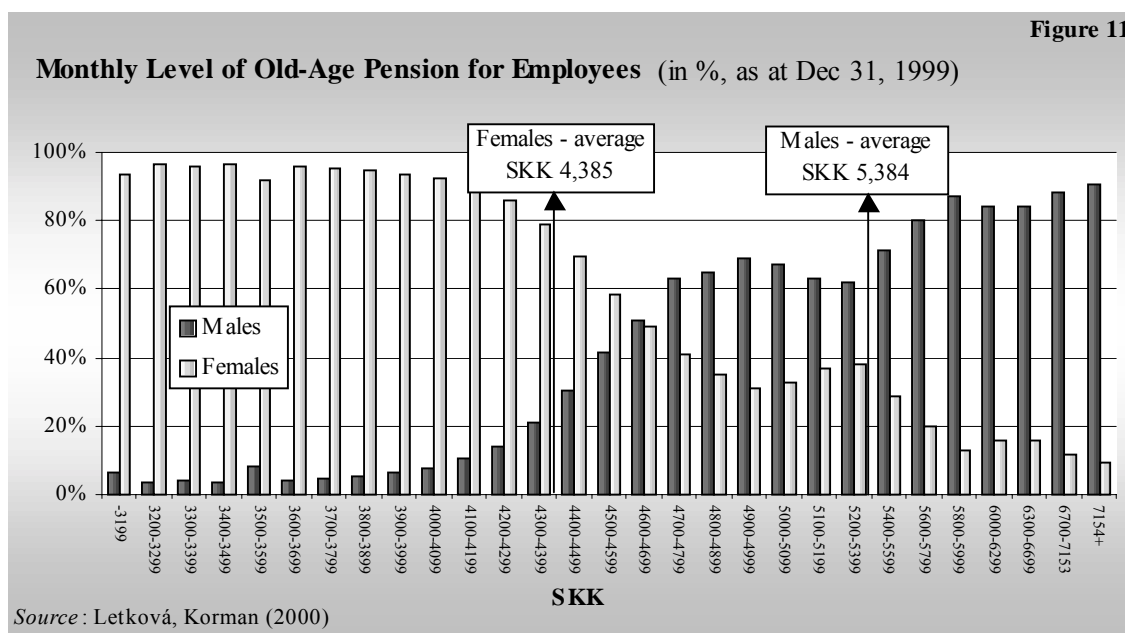
Source: Sample Surveys on Structure of Wages of Employees in the Economy of the SR. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

A comparison of comparable age categories partly confirms the suggested explanation. Namely, age is the only single distinguishing factor that shows a direct connection with wage differences between men and women. The greatest difference exists in the highest age categories (33%). The wage gap becomes smaller with decreases in age (down to 14 percent in the youngest

group). Men's careers are not restricted by maternal responsibilities and they can more readily accept higher and more time-consuming positions.

A comparison of comparable employment-related education and age categories of men and women suggests that there is a prevailing form of discrimination in the appreciation of women's work in our society. However, this comparison does not totally explain the discrimination. Gender based wage differences do not fully reflect gender discrimination at the workplace. As shown by measurements in other countries, the characteristic of the workplace per se and the preparation for employment explain less than a quarter of the difference in wages (*Women in Transition*, 1999). To verify other suggested explanations, a more detailed comparison would be needed (within more specific groups, multi-step analyses). It remains a fact that gender-related differences in wages occur in almost all developed European countries and in the US. No final answers to these issues have yet been found. But, experts need to continue to seek explanation. With Slovakia's conditions, priority solutions are needed for highly feminized sectors and professions. It remains unclear whether low wages are a result or the cause of feminization (see also *Measuring The Quality of Life* in this report).

Gender differences in wages results in women receiving smaller pensions. For 1997, the difference averaged around SKK 1,500. This can cause economic and social problems for a large group of female pensioners who, throughout their lives, worked for a lower salary. The law provides for partial adjustment of the difference by awarding widower's or some other type of pensions (*Report on Social Situation...*, 1999). This relates to the marked feminization and the seclusion of the elderly in Slovakia. There has been a marked growth in the proportions of poor women among the older-age population.

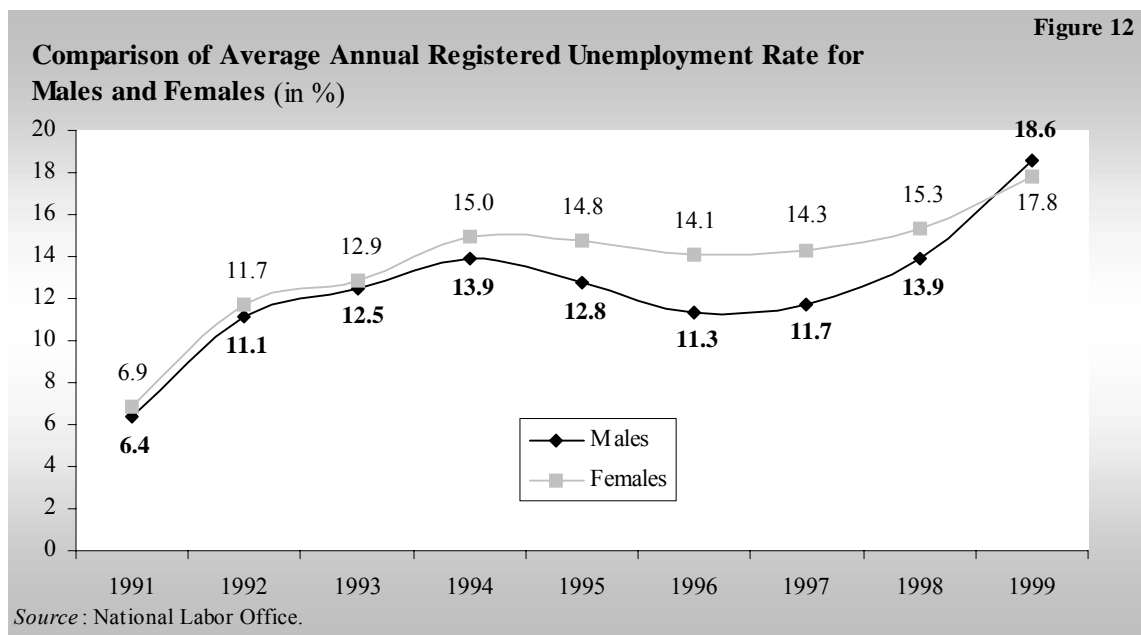


In addition to being employed, women generate significant value by working in their households. This is referred to as "*unpaid work*" (estimates suggesting as much as one-third of the gross domestic product reported for developed countries). There are huge differences among Slovakia's households concerning the participation of men and women on unpaid work. There have been several sociological surveys that show the prevalence of different participation (Bútorová, 1998; Filadelfiová – Guráš, 1997). In the 1990s, no representative survey of time utilization was conducted, which would provide more exact information on gender differences in domestic chores and childcare (see Figure 15 in *Poverty and Social Exclusion*).

As previously discussed, a portion of the economically active population in Slovakia has shifted into growing unemployment during the recent 3 years. **Unemployment** in Slovakia belongs to the most recent social phenomena. After 1990, unemployment emerged as part of the transition to market economy. It showed one of the most significant growth trends of all processes monitored. The monthly numbers of unemployed registered with the Labor Offices in 1999 averaged over 485,000 of which 219,415 were women. There are multiple reasons for this unprecedented unemployment situation. Among the causes were the liquidation of surplus jobs, bad economic results, bankruptcy of many enterprises, growing numbers of economically active persons, changed behaviors of the public, etc.

The share of unemployed women varied slightly during the 1990s. It grew to more than 50 percent and then dropped in 1993 and 1994. It also decreased in the last two years. In 1999, the lowest share of unemployed women was recorded; at that time, women accounted for 45.2 percent of all unemployed persons in Slovakia.

A comparison of yearly registered unemployment rates for women and men suggests that throughout the 1990s the rates for women in Slovakia were 1.0-2.8 percent higher than rates for men. During the last year studied, the unemployment rate for women, for the first time, was below the rate for men. The average registered unemployment rates for the given year were 18.6 percent for men and 17.8 percent for women (17.9% and 16.6%, respectively, when disposable numbers of registered unemployed are considered). The unemployment growth rate for men has grown to be twice that for women and has reached a difference of almost 5 percent.



Since 1994, long-term unemployment in Slovakia has been a continuing issue for both sexes. Long-term unemployment in 1999 was 41.5 percent for men and 45.4 percent for women. Unemployment benefits awarded to women average 14 percent to 18 percent less as a consequence of their lower average wages.

The greatest differences between unemployed men and unemployed women in Slovakia are attributable to age and marital status. The greatest number of unemployed in both men and women are those between 20 and 24 years old. At the same time, this age category shows the most pronounced difference in unemployment between men and women (20.4 percent of unemployed men and 16.1 percent of unemployed women). What is striking within the given frameworks is the huge difference between unemployed married men (approx. 43 percent) and

unemployed married women (approx. 57 percent). It is questionable whether this difference can be explained strictly by the age of the unemployed persons. For example, this might be a

Box 7

Retraining

Unemployed women get retrained more frequently than unemployed men. Although the numbers of those who get re-qualified in Slovakia are not overly high (less than 1 percent of all unemployed), the prevalence of women in this group can be characterized as pronounced. It ranges between two-thirds and three-quarters. The numbers of unemployed undergoing retraining draconically dropped in 1999, due to the shortage of funds to be spent on active employment policy.

strategy on the part of some married women with respect to obtaining unemployment benefits. Or, it might be a result of employment policies towards women with families.

The achieved level of education does not result in a more pronounced gender difference in the structure of the unemployed group. The level of education is stronger as a general rule, rather than as gender-related factor. A comparison of the educational level of the employed with that of the unemployed suggests that unqualified labor is eliminated from employment regardless of sex.

The disparity and similarities in the structure of unemployed men and women outlined above are manifesting themselves within a longer time-span and are thus becoming a part of Slovakia's unemployment pattern. There are some year-to-year deviations from this rule, but the principal proportions remain unchanged. From the gender aspect, the development of the unemployment rates in Slovakia does not show any serious deviations that could be characterized as inequality. Unemployment of both sexes started from the same baseline and the developments were parallel during the early 90s. The second half of the 1990s produced a slight worsening of the situation for women. It was towards the end of the decade that tendencies of a broader impact of male unemployment started to appear.

A marked gender difference in employment is a different story. The difference concerns specific aspects of working activities rather than the general development. The greatest employment differences in Slovakia concern, above all, employment-related segregation, feminization of some sectors and professions, male orientation of management positions, wage-related differences, or unfair gender-based division of unpaid work. In the future, more concentrated research, administrative, and legislative attention should be paid to these issues.

Gender Dimension in Politics

The fact that gender equality was a pretense during the communist regime became most evident in the *share of women on power and decision making*. At the communist parliament, women occupied about one third of the seats, a level that at that time was achieved only by Nordic countries. Quotas for women had been set, but the Communist Party determined the slates. The elections were primarily of a confirmatory nature. As early as the first free elections in 1990, the significant participation of women was lost. Only 18 women were elected to the parliament, i.e., 12 percent of all MPs. This social experiment showed the deep failure of the communist government with respect to the development of gender equality. Subsequent parliaments could not increase this share by more than 1.5-2 percent.

A similar situation could be observed during the most recent elections. The proportions of men and women on political party slates for the 1998 parliamentary (National Council of the Slovak Republic) elections was not close to their respective proportions in the population. There were 274 women out of 1,618 candidates, representing 16.9 percent. The proportions of women running for the individual political entities ranged between 7.3 percent (Hungarian Coalition Party) to 44.4 percent (Independent Initiative of the Slovak Republic). The situation was even less favorable in the *ranking on the lists of candidates*. There were a total of 14.1 percent

women in the first half of the list and only 12.3 percent women in the first quarter of the candidates. The slates of a majority of political parties were set so that there was a direct relationship between the ranking on the list and the numbers of women. A higher ranking on the list increased the probability of being elected. The smaller percent of women on top of the list did not help gender equality. Women were assigned the worst positions on the list of the Slovak Democratic Coalition SDK; there were but 5.3 percent women within the first fourth of the slates, and the highest-ranking woman had position 32.

The tendency of reducing the proportions of women to highly rated positions has been also manifested in the structure of the internal party bodies. It showed that the relatively strong participation of women as ordinary members was substantially reduced towards the higher offices. Women are therefore less represented among the party leaders, at the top positions in the national councils, etc. This "upward reduction" is then reflected on the slates for parliamentary elections and the subsequent filling of the parliamentary seats.

The actual numbers of female MPs at the National Council of the Slovak Republic is 21. This is only 7.7 percent of all the female candidates and 14.0 percent of all the *seats at the parliament*. Besides the first post-revolutionary parliament (1990-1992), the present National Council has the smallest participation of women. We may therefore state that participation of women in the legislative power has been relatively constant at a rather low level during the post-revolutionary period. This ratio ranks Slovakia about 20th in Europe. Only four EU Member States have a smaller participation of women in their parliaments than Slovakia. Greece has 6.3 percent, France has 10.9 percent, Italy has 11.4 percent, and Ireland has 12.5 percent. The highest participation of women is 42.7 percent, found in the Swedish parliament.

Table 28

Representation of Women in National Parliaments (as of January 15, 2000)

Country	Lower Chamber or Single-Chamber Parliament			Upper Chamber or Senate		
	Elections	Mandates	Women (%)	Elections	Mandates	Women (%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina	09 1998	42	28.6	09 1998	15	0.0
Croatia	01 1999	127	20.5	01 1999	68	?
Estonia	03 1999	101	17.8	-	-	-
Latvia	10 1996	137	17.5	-	-	-
Lithuania	10 1998	100	17.0	-	-	-
Czech Republic	06 1998	200	15.0	11 1998	81	11.1
Poland	09 1997	460	13.0	09 1997	100	11.0
Slovakia	09 1998	150	12.7	-	-	-
Bulgaria	04 1997	240	10.8	-	-	-
Hungary	05 1998	386	8.3	-	-	-
Slovenia	11 1996	90	7.8	-	-	-

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments as at January 15, 2000.

The situation is not much different when it comes to the *participation of women in the government*. The composition of the current cabinet of the Prime-Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda does not deviate from the "post-revolution" traditions. In post-revolution governments, there were 0 to 4 women-members of the government and only two women serving in the current government. They represent 10 percent of the total number of the cabinet members. This level of women's participation in the top executive power makes Slovakia tie in rank with Poland at 24 and 25. However, seven European countries do not have a single female representative in their national governments, including the Czech Republic. Of the EU Member States, only Portugal, Greece and San Marino have smaller representations than Slovakia. Again, the

highest share of women can be found in Sweden with 10 women among 20 members of the government (50 percent).

The *communal policy* parallels the pattern of the big politics: female mayors have only been elected in 6 of all Slovak towns (4.4 percent of all mayors). There were no women elected (or running for) the office of mayor in any regional town. There were only 2 women elected in District towns (2.5 percent of all mayors of District towns). Compared to the preceding term, the share of female mayors increased, though by only 2.2 percent. A better situation can be observed with respect to mayors of villages. During the preceding term, women made up 15.2 percent of all mayors in Slovakia, their share having increased in the current term to reach 17.5 percent. Overall, there were 484 women successful in the communal elections for the office of mayors (among about 2,000 municipalities).

A similar tendency of women's decreasing participation with the increasing importance of the office can also be observed among the staff of the *ministries* in Slovakia and managerial posts at *District and Regional Offices*. Women make up 58 percent of the Slovak ministries staff. There are 35.1 percent women holding the office of department directors, and only 27.6 percent holding the office of sectional director. The highest proportions of women in managerial positions can be found at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (almost 70 percent) followed by the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Health (about 50 percent). Three additional ministries (Finance, Privatization, and Justice) have populations of women that varies from 40 percent to 50 percent. At the opposite extreme are the Ministries of Construction and Regional Development, Foreign Affairs, and Agriculture. No woman is holding the office of Regional Office Manager; and, there are only 9 women holding the office of District Office Manager. The situation is quite different with respect to the Departments of Social Affairs where there are 65.8 percent female department heads at the district level.

The quantitative situation shown suggests that besides desks and departments of social affairs and so-called weak ministries in Slovakia, women have a share on managerial positions that is far below 30 percent. That is a substantial difference compared to the overall proportions of women in the population. All the data mentioned suggest a ***marked gender difference in the participation on power and decision-making***. Also, participation of women in legislative as well as executive power has been low throughout the 1990s. This low participation is generally considered a reflection of the public life situation in which women are disfavored and marginalized.

The ***reasons*** for the huge differences in the participation of men and women in power and decision-making in Slovakia do not reside in any legislative restrictions. Rather, they stem from the political practice and the prevailing gender stereotypes. After 1989, it has appeared that women have shown less interest in politics than men. This is evidenced by their smaller participation in the elections. This fact, however, does not represent a significant difference in Slovakia's conditions. Looking at the analyses of political preferences, electoral outcomes⁵, at various polling reports⁶, or at various biographic records and memories of male/female players of the November 1989 breakthrough, it remains a fact that the gender dimension has been either totally (perhaps not deliberately) ignored. We come across the phraseology "Men of November" that reflects the gender nature of the structures of Slovak post-November political elites. Prior to the 1989 elections, even those parties who verbally proclaimed their standard democratic orientation failed to list an optically balanced number of women and men in their

⁵ See, e.g.: *Slovak Elections '98. Who? Why? How?* Institute for Public Affairs, Bratislava, 1999.

⁶ E.g., the periodically appearing information bulletin of the Institute for Public Opinion Research at the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic *Názory* (Opinions) has mentioned no gender dimension of any problem during the recent two years.

ranks. Female authors fail to challenge the male dominant role. Their social science texts rarely consider the gender dimension of politics. The *political factors* of this fact include:

- Dominance of the masculine model of political life – character features, standards, and the working style including the working time.
- Minimal support to female candidates in political parties. A negative role is also played by internal party mechanisms of selection that do not operate based on clear-cut rules. The lower posts are filled by elections, whereas political decisions frequently interfere with the selection of women to fill higher positions and the formation of candidate slates. For the time being, the classical and natural promotion in the political career from the membership base towards the top is an exception rather than the rule with respect to Slovak women. The biggest chances open up in front of those women who happen to be at the cradle of a political party or a movement.
- Insufficient "visibility" of professionally competent women. The media pay less attention to the creation of politically competent women than it is the case with men. Traditionally, women are considered more for the role of a spokesperson, secretary, protocol staff, or assistant.
- The absence of critical numbers of women in managing and leading positions. According to the comparative survey conducted by the European Commission, women can win real influence on political decision-making provided that their participation in the legislative body and central institution reaches the critical value of 30 percent. However, there also is an alternative interpretation of women's influence on political decision-making that stresses solidarity of women's groupings within the official structures, the standing interest of such groupings to attract attention toward the gender dimension in all areas of the society, and to not simply focus on percentages of representation.

The *socio-economic factors* of the low participation of women in political life include:

- The overall economic transition with the restructuring and macro stabilization processes is based on the assumption that above all, women are responsible for the replacement of labor.
- Problems of poverty and unpaid labor.⁷ Due to the cuts in State expenditures on social security and services during the transition of the society, women in the families take over more responsibilities and perform activities that used to be provided for by the State to a significant extent (e.g., the liquidation of the wide network of pre-school facilities, after-school centers, free-of-charge special-interests groups, etc.). This results in much more unpaid work for women and also means that the women have less time to devote to other activities, including political activities.

The *ideological factors* of women's weak political involvement may be summarized as follows:

- The prevailing nature of official debates on the "status of women" in the society. Traditionally, the institutions that have implicitly supported the dominance of males in the society include the *church, State and the school*. We may also add today the *mass media* (they now prevalingly offer a picture of the woman as either a victim, a beauty, or a model).
- The aforementioned institutions make a contribution towards the stereotyping of the social roles, thus exerting pressure on the conformity of the behaviors: women are the sensitive and the weaker gender that needs to be approached in a different way. Since personalities suitable to hold political offices are considered to be strong individuals, women "naturally" are not included in this group.
- Scarcity or even rarity of the role model of a successful female politician in post-communist countries. The few role models encountered are exceptions to this rule, e.g., Hanna Suchocka in Poland or Brigita Schmögnerová in Slovakia.

⁷ The factors of poverty feminization are dealt with in the section *Poverty and Social Exclusion*.

- The poor image of politics under Slovakia's conditions. For many women, the belief that politics "is a dirty matter" creates a barrier to developing an interest in entering politics. International surveys suggest that there is a direct relation between a high degree of corruption in a country and the low participation of women in politics. Countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Bangladesh rank among the most corrupted countries in the world. Women in those countries have a 3 percent to 9 percent representation in the parliaments. On the other hand, countries showing the lowest levels of corruption, including Norway, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, have a relatively high representation of women in "official" politics.
- Prejudice and stereotypes concerning male and female roles that exist in the minds of Slovakia's population have the most pronounced effect. The prevailing attitudes are against women with young children entering politics. Any woman deciding to take up a political career in Slovakia must necessarily get her family's consent. As a rule, she can only obtain a conditional consent – provided that the family will not suffer by such a decision. For such a woman, this means that she will have – besides political responsibilities – to take care of the functioning of the household, moreover in an environment with unsatisfactory and expensive services. The generally restricted potential of mobility in Slovakia determines that the participation of women in high politics effectively equals long-term separation from the family during the week. (*Conclusions of the survey Women in Politics*, 2000)

Box 8

Political Activism Outside of the "Official" Politics

The low representation of women among the "full-time" politicians does not mean that women show no interest in politics at all. They rather prefer indirect participation in politics that would not jeopardize their "female" approach towards treating conflicts, the ability to negotiate, to seek compromises. This is a trend that is not only typical of women in our region but can also be observed in the West, in particular because women getting to the politics are sometimes considered as too "masculine" (e.g. Margaret Thatcher), and this discourages them to choose political career.

However, throughout the Central and Eastern Europe, women are markedly represented on NGOs, on the non-for-profit sector: some statistics suggest as high a share as 70 percent on the activities of these organizations.

When considering the political dimension of women's work in households to raise children and to provide for the family and replacement of the next generation of labor, we arrive at the conclusion that both genders have "activities" that make different forms of contribution to the development of the society. A male's contribution is more visible and financially valued higher. The contribution of a female is less visible and financially valued lower.

When considering the "private" dimension of democracy, i.e., the formation of equal mutual partnership relationships between the genders, it cannot be controlled by adopting new legislation or by taking administrative measures. There are some positive consequences of "forced" emancipation from the period of the communist establishment. However, this ideology has never started to reassess the traditional status of women in terms of sufficient support to actual economic independence of women.

Experience related to the introduction of mandatory quotas as a way to increase the share of women on top politics have been variable. It certainly would not be appropriate to introduce quotas for the parliament as a whole. However, it did prove effective in Scandinavian countries when quotas in statutes of political parties were introduced. Such quotas might be expected to also gradually establish themselves spontaneously in the competition for female voters.

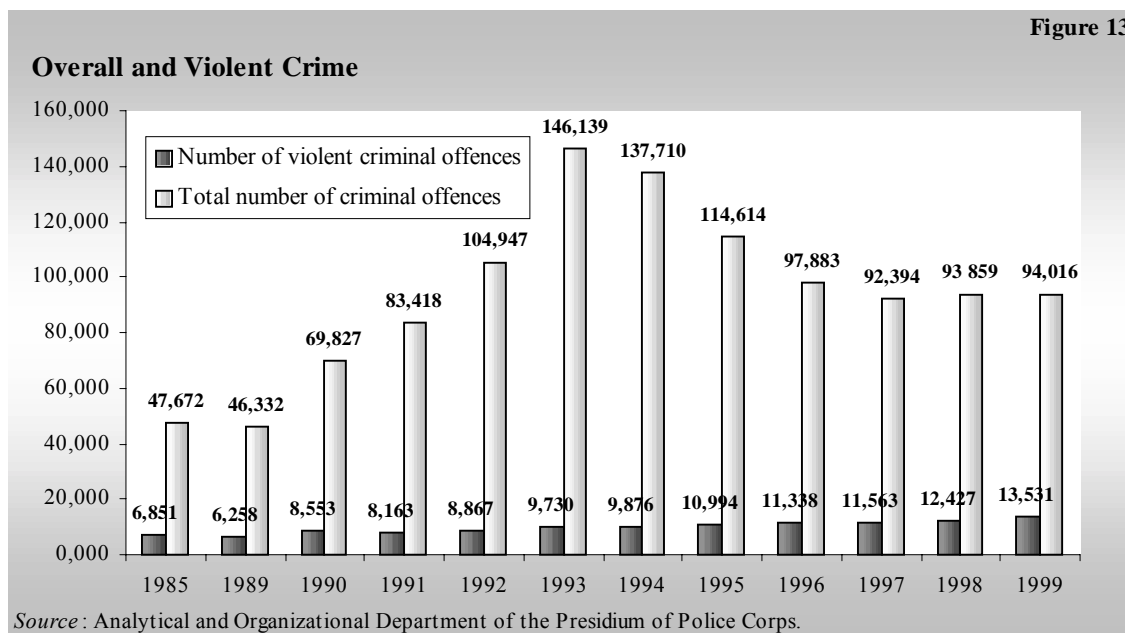
Interestingly enough, it only is HZDS after its "transformation" convention that has a similar provision in its statutes.⁸

A first step might be to make this problem at least "visible" within the society, and to start a broader discussion. A subsequent step might be discussions with political parties. Also, a significant role may be possible improving the efficiency of activities by the Coordination Board for Women Issues and of the Department for Equality of Opportunities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family. During the past period, a concept of equality of opportunities for women and men was prepared, containing measures and recommendations oriented toward both public and political life.

Development of Crime and Violence

Crime in Slovakia had relatively stable levels and high-resolution rates until 1989. There were around 46,000 to 47,000 registered crimes a year and almost 90 percent were solved. After 1990, the change in the social conditions instigated a rapid growth in crime accompanied by a parallel reduction of the resolution rates. This growth continued into 1993 when 146,125 crimes were recorded. The reduction of crime rates after this record year was above all due to the amendment of the penal law that re-qualified crime and offence. A majority of former crimes would be now considered an offence. In this context, there was a reduction mainly of crimes against property. The numbers of criminal acts kept decreasing during 1994-1997. In 1997, the numbers of crimes had dropped down to 92,395.

There were 94,017 crimes detected in 1999, an increase of 0.6 percent over the preceding year. The resolution rates oscillate around 50.1 percent, depending on the various types of crime. For vice crimes, 95 percent of the acts could be solved, whereas the corresponding number for thefts was only 30.5 percent.



The growth of crime rates has also been projected in the growth of criminal acts containing an element of violence. The development of violent crime, however, did not parallel the general development of crime rates. The number of violent criminal acts has continuously increased since 1991, reaching approximately 8,000 during the early 1990s, and exceeding 11,000 in

⁸ Only HZDS, after its "transformation" convention, has a similar provision in its statutes.

1996. There were 11,912 criminal acts in 1999 that had a violent element, representing an increase of 50 percent over the 1991 level.

In parallel with the growth of crime rates, there has also been an increase in the number of female crime victims. The numbers keep growing in Slovakia with respect to both general and violent crimes. The number of female violent crime victims grew in 1997 to be more than twice as high as reported earlier in the decade. The total number of female crime victims was over 8,000 in 1999, representing 51.71 percent of all victims. Women had a share of 47.6 percent among the victims of violent crime, and as high as 90.4 percent for vice crimes. The corresponding figure for crime against property was 62.8 percent. The aforementioned ratios have been level for several years, with only a slight increase in the proportion of female victims.

The incidence of violent crimes suggests that women are most frequently victims of violence against an individual. This type of crime has also shown the most dynamic growth. The numbers of female victims of this type of crime grew more than six fold. The criminal acts ranking second in frequency, with respect to female victims, are assaults, with an incidence of more than 1,000. A dynamic growth was recorded with respect to female victims concerning sexual abuse, extortion and robbery. The number of murders with a female as a victim has been at the same level of about 40 cases a year throughout the 1990s. The only criminal act showing a reduction in criminal statistics concerns rapes. They were most numerous after 1990 but have been declining since that time.

In 1999, women were victims of 5,500 violent crimes, most frequently violence against an individual (3,491 cases) and assaults (1,100 cases). A total of 258 women were extorted, representing almost twice the numbers registered in 1997. Also, robbery of women showed a similar tendency, increasing by a third as compared to 1997 (381 cases). Last year, 43 women were murder victims and there were 3 cases involving girls where an act of maltreatment of entrusted person was detected. With respect to other types of violent crime, females were victims in 149 cases.

Table 29

Recorded Criminal Offences Committed Against Women (1985-1999)

Type of Crime	1985	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1999
Homicides	41	30	38	49	44	39	33	41	36	39	43
Robberies	79	79	253	250	262	265	235	248	282	287	381
Injury to health	1,027	958	1,077	1,071	1,245	1,126	1,189	1,207	1,143	1,113	1,100
Violence against individual	361	465	384	438	701	808	1,203	1,430	1,908	2,374	3,491
Extortion	45	59	58	73	86	83	86	118	141	126	258
Maltreatment of ward	10	10	6	15	6	5	6	10	10	4	3
Other violent crimes	122	126	161	147	122	111	115	126	125	129	149
Assault	255	257	318	258	234	210	211	207	207	173	171
Sexual abuse in dependence	71	38	36	40	47	47	42	71	41	42	59
Other sexual abuse	441	345	265	212	248	244	340	339	444	426	363
Soliciting	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trade in women	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	9	4	5	11

Source: Analytical and Organizational Department of the Presidium of Police Corps, Bratislava.

Concerning vice crime and the numbers of criminal acts registered in 1999; there were 59 cases of sexual abuse in dependent girls (17 more than in 1997). There were 363 cases of women – victims of sexual abuse, and 171 cases of rape. Also new types of vice crime, such as soliciting and trade in women have appeared in recent years, but only a few detected cases appear in crime statistics (11 cases of trading in women in 1999).

A comparison of men versus women suggests that females are mostly victims of violent crime against individuals. In other violent criminal acts, it is males who are more frequently the victims. In murders and maltreatment of entrusted person, males are twice as frequently victims as females. The number of assaults, robbery, and extortion against men are threefold the number against women. On the contrary, vice crime almost exclusively concerns women. With respect to sexual abuse, the most threatened group is girls and young women below the age of 18. A similar situation concerns trading in women. Rape concerns all age groups of women.

Table 30

Victims of Violent Crime by Gender and Age (1999)

Type of crime	Gender of victim	-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+	Total
Homicides	male	6	5	11	11	24	18	11	12	98
	female	0	5	0	0	13	9	5	11	43
Robberies	male	264	126	99	59	100	124	70	65	907
	female	45	28	38	23	53	51	39	104	381
Injury to health	male	156	415	469	312	528	571	235	152	2,838
	female	29	72	102	141	326	238	101	91	1,100
Violence against individual	male	27	134	143	119	214	342	184	239	1,402
	female	24	164	245	334	992	864	407	461	3,491
Extortion	male	249	121	91	59	85	106	28	27	766
	female	51	37	30	19	38	40	13	30	258
Maltreatment of ward	male	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
	female	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Other violent crimes	male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	female	25	38	25	17	35	19	6	6	171
Assault	male	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
	female	45	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	59
Sexual abuse in dependence	male	60	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	63
	female	363	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	367
Other sexual abuse	male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Soliciting	male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	female	0	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	11
Trade in women	male	33	9	11	8	14	10	3	6	94
	female	26	33	18	16	25	10	8	13	149

Source: Analytical and Organizational Department of the Presidium of Police Corps, Bratislava.

However, crime statistics only record a portion of the total crime committed in real life. They only provide an overview of criminal acts that could be detected. The incidence of latent crime will be much higher. Since there have been no surveys of latent crime in Slovakia as yet, these rates cannot be estimated. Moreover, the number of criminal acts contained in crime statistics usually do not include victims of *domestic violence*. The most recent official data concerning domestic violence to women is for 1997, when such violence accounted for 72.1 percent of all violent cases against women.

Again, this is but a small portion of the violence actually committed at home. Women who are victims of domestic violence, frequently do not bother to involve the authorities, and do not file petitions to start criminal proceedings. Women are frequently discouraged by offenders or relatives and forced to drop prosecution after having filed a petition with the Police. They typically withdraw their petitions. To open criminal proceedings in Slovakia, the victim must give his/her consent, and may – at any time – withdraw such consent. This frequently happens because of fears and threats of further violence, since the offender and the victim usually remain in the same household during the investigation of a reported criminal act. The consent of the victim in criminal proceedings is necessary when the offender is directly related to the victim, if he/she is a sibling, foster father, foster child, actual or de facto husband, or another person with a personal or family relationship. The institute shown is presented as assistance to

the victim who might perceive the prosecution of the offender as his/her own loss, and this enables the victim to settle his/her relationship with the offender. Representatives of many NGOs and many experts reject this interpretation and require offenders to be prosecuted regardless of whether the female victim has given her consent or not. The law only allows criminal proceedings in such cases that result in death.

Another problem in violence against women is the qualification of the act committed. In criminal proceedings of domestic violence, such an act is handled as an offence rather than as a criminal act. In 1999, there were 713,035 offences committed, an increase of 17,401 cases over the preceding year. Statistics do not show how many women have been victims of cases resolved in the framework of administrative proceedings. Alcohol consumption has a marked contribution to offences. It may only be assumed that the data on offences include many cases of domestic violence when only a slight injury was caused. Offences are sanctioned by penalties that are rarely recoverable. Frequently it is the victim who pays the penalty instead of the offender.

Box 9

Women as Offenders

As compared to women's share on crime in the role of victims (which is high), the share of female offenders is much smaller. In 1999, a total of 3,537 female offenders were registered, making up 7.6 percent of the total number of offenders (0.6 percent more than in 1998). Their participation in violent crime was 6.1 percent, that in crime against property 6.4 percent, and that in vice crime 3.9 percent. The type of crime committed by women is different from that committed by men. Most frequently, the criminal acts are intended to gain profit, such as fraud, embezzlement or robbery, etc. What follows is crime against children (neglecting of nutrition, rarely - maltreatment and exceptionally murder and/or murder of the newborn). A special group of offenders are women who committed murder or assault. These acts were mostly committed under strong agitation after maltreatment over long years by the partner, or under the influence of alcohol. Women made up around 4 percent among those sentenced; their share grew to almost 7 percent in 1999

Fighting violence is a difficult and complicated job for State authorities in Slovakia. The principal reason is that the legislation and laws are imperfect. Legal standards that regulate domestic violence and/or violence in families are introduced in several countries, including legal regulations that protect women from violence. It was the most recent amendment to the Slovak Penal Code that introduced protection for maltreated women. Prior to this, the Code had only contained factors that constitute the offence of cruelty to animals, maltreatment of children, and had only provided protection to persons dependent on the care of another person. The law did not protect women, even though they were persons with legal capacity. By including "close persons" into the text of the law, legal conditions were created for this group as well. The definition of maltreatment has also been extended. Nevertheless, no special legal regulation has yet been adopted to address domestic violence. Cases of domestic violence, in the presence of factors that constitute the crime, are assessed according to the general penal law (Chapters five to eight of the Penal Code). The qualifications for some criminal acts are also vague and overly benevolent. For example, assault is defined as injury to health that requires at least 7 days of treatment.

In addition to weak spots in the legislative definition, complications in fighting violence by State authorities resides in the lack of willingness or ability of many victims to seek protection. Many victims are prone to tolerate violence because of their economic dependence on the offenders and because of fears that the family may disintegrate. This is complemented by a relatively benevolent public opinion concerning violent behavior and a low level of public support. It is frequently the victim rather than the offender who is blamed. The Police therefore address family problems only after there are severe consequences.

Under the past government, violence against women could not even be openly mentioned. In many cases, this silence still exists. Violence against women is not a point in Slovakia that can be treated without emotions and taboos. Available data about violence against women suggests that this phenomenon remains in society. However, professionals from justice, medical establishment, social work, and education sectors are not trained to be alert for violence against women and to handle the problem. This is a heritage of the communist regime. At that time, violence could not be mentioned publicly and experts for assisting victims of violence were not given any training.

The growth of violent crime has been huge, and a weak legal awareness prevails in the society. Rape and domestic violence are frequently underestimated, causing insufficient attention to these crimes. The crimes require an expedient introduction of specially trained professionals, social workers, police agents, and lawyers to adequately remedy the situation and to introduce preventive measures.

In Slovakia, NGOs have started activities designed to assist victims of crime and to take preventive measures in matters of violence against women. In recent years, several crisis centers and SOS lines have been established to assist women victims. The crisis centers operate primarily as voluntary organizations with an NGO status. According to the *Beijing Action Platform, measures to eliminate violence* have been formulated into the *National Action Plan for Women*. International pressure has resulted in the establishment of the *Expert Group for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and in Families* at the Government's Council for Crime Prevention. Its task is to develop a *National Strategy of Fighting Violence Against Women and in Families*.

International and National Support Mechanisms

The international community's interest toward equal status of women and men in the society can be traced back to 1948, the year when the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was proclaimed. Numerous summits have been organized at the international forum since then, and numerous documents have been signed that specified and supplemented the general definition of human rights. The most significant forums have been the *International Pact on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), *Declaration of the Right for Development* (1986), *Convention on Children's Rights* (1989), *World Conference on Human Rights* (Vienna, 1993), *International UN Conference on Population and Development* (Cairo, 1994), and a number of others. The most important international meetings, from a gender viewpoint, included the *4th World Conference on Women* (Beijing, 1995) and the 21st Special Meeting of the UN General Assembly (New York, 2000). The most significant documents are the *Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1979) and the *Beijing Action Platform* (1995).

The concept of men and women's equality has been recognized in Europe and elsewhere in the international community. But, the concept has not been fully developed in Slovakia and other Eastern bloc countries. During the era of socialism, women's emancipation was discussed instead of the equality of women and men. Efforts during that era only focused on the field of labor (status of women in employment, protection of motherhood, etc.).

As early as 1980, the former Czechoslovakia signed the *Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* and it came into force in 1982.⁹ Since it was published in the Collection of Laws, the *Convention* takes precedence over the national legislation providing that it secures a broader scope of basic rights and freedoms. The Slovak

⁹ Following the separation, Slovakia became party to the *Convention* on 1 January, 1993, through succession notified to the UN Secretary General.

Republic ratified in 2000 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In 1996, Slovakia established the *Coordination Committee for Women's Issues*. The committee was comprised of representatives of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, sectors, and NGOs. In 1997, the Coordination Committee developed the *Action Plan for Women*, in accordance with the action platform adopted at the Beijing World Conference on the Rights of Women. This set forth priorities for a period of 10 years as an attempt to secure equality of genders and to improve the status of women in society (Slovak Government's Resolution No. 650/1997). In 1999, the national machinery to eliminate discrimination against women was supplemented by the establishment of the *Department of Equal Opportunities at the Slovak Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family*. In 1999, the Parliamentary Commission of Women was also established. It operated in the framework of the National Council of the Slovak Republic's Commission for Human Rights and Minorities. In addition to official and public institutions, numerous non-governmental organizations and associations have also promoted related activities in Slovakia.

Since 1989, Slovakia has been going through an intricate process of social transformation. This social transformation has somewhat impacted the full implementation of the *Convention*. There is less space and willingness to take measures that would enable women to fully utilize and exercise their human rights. In preparing measures, the society attaches a stronger importance to the protection of motherhood and the role of women in families than to the woman as a personality. This comment, along with worries expressed with respect to the strengthening of the traditional perception of women as predominantly mothers, was also stated by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in its final comments on the Status Quo Report of Slovakia. (*Evaluation...*,1998)

Conclusions

The collapse of communism and the subsequent democratization of Slovakia's society have brought a number of changes to the social status of women and men. The free market economy meant the disappearance of many former services provided by the State. During the initial period after the communism era, women had to take on additional tasks within their families. However, women have refused to be tied to the household, which has contributed to the tedious process of change in male-female relationships.

Since the mid-90s, women have gradually been more accepted in public positions, although they are more accepted in economic than in political structures. The marginalization trend has prevailed both on the part of the women themselves and on the part of the "official" politics, despite the ratified international conventions on equal treatment of women and men, and despite the existence of the National Action Plan for Women in Slovakia. Society very weakly supports the idea of women organizing themselves in the interest of voicing and defending their own interests. Society is not yet ready to consider discrimination against women within the same context as discrimination based on ethnic principle. The opportunities to lobby for women's requirements are still subject to traditional anti-feminist arguments.

The greatest difference in gender is in the participation of women in power and decision-making, as well as some contexts of employment (segregation, lower wages for women). Men's occupations are generally better paid than those occupations that are traditionally filled by women. The participation of women in active politics is lower than their proportions in the population, their educational level, and their professional knowledge. Political and economical reforms have not resulted in the promotion of women into decision-making positions. This will require an environment in which women and men will have a fair access to resources and

opportunities, and in which governments, companies and civil institutions will exercise proactive policies and practice.

In the Central and East European region, there are deep-rooted political and sociological reasons for rejecting western forms of feminism. Changes in gender relationships occur slowly and gradually, both in the private sector and in the public sector.

A democracy modeled on the family relationship is the cornerstone for building equal opportunities in a society. A crucial requirement is to abandon gender stereotypes concerning the roles of men and women. A substantial and key role in this respect can be played by the media and addressed education of the younger generation.

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