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Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees
Agency for Gender Equality of
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Policies, Incentives and Affirmative Measures for Improving the Position of Women in the Labour Market in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Foreword

This joint publication focuses on the status of women in the labour market, which is the main theme of the issue-based coalition for Decent Work of the Women Forum for Development, supported by UNDP and the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Political dialogues, advocacy for changes in the law must be supported by facts and the latest statistical data. In this regard, the intention is to collect, consolidate and analyze the latest data with the aim of stopping and reducing the trend of the growing gender gap in the labour market, which, according to the latest data, has reached an infamous and alarming record of 26%.

The publication notes that creating an environment for reducing gender differences and ensuring gender equality in the workplace is an obligation under the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, we put a focus on the importance of introducing gender equality standards in the public and private sectors and the necessity to incorporate social issues into all economic analyses and dialogues. Building an unbreakable link between social and economic policies and measures alongside the principles of gender equality as an integrator that unites them and puts them at the service of improving the quality of lives of women and men in BiH is the only way to achieve significant results in this area.

The data, analysis and recommendations from this publication provide us with arguments to continue dialogue with all relevant government levels and public sector actors, international and non-governmental organizations, the academic community and the private sector for the purpose of introducing specific policies, reform measures and innovative solutions to improve the status of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Working towards removing structural obstacles in parallel and through joint efforts, we continue to work on raising awareness and removing gender stereotypes, transforming patriarchal social norms and preventing retrograde trends that slow down work on achieving de facto gender equality in Bosnia-Herzegovina's society.

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Summary

According to some indicators, the status of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unequal to that of men. The situational analysis of the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides a detailed insight into the state of women's participation in the labour market and their educational structure. The analysis includes several key factors that impact the activity of women in the labour market, including their levels of education, the work-life balance, gender differences in employment and other specificities. Based on the results of the analysis, recommendations were formulated to encourage greater activity of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the key findings of the analysis is that there are almost equal numbers of men and women in the working age population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, there are significant differences in their activity in the labour market. The share of men in the workforce is higher than the share of women, while men's employment is higher than women's. This data indicates the need for measures that will encourage a greater activity of women in the labour market.

Education plays a key role in employment and participation in the labour market. The analysis reveals that a greater number of women have only primary education or lower education, compared to men. This creates challenges because women with lower levels of education have limited employment opportunities. Therefore, measures are recommended to provide educational programmes and re-skilling to improve the employment of women with lower levels of education.

The gender gaps in employment and unemployment are also reflected in employment sectors. Women are significantly more represented in the service sector, while men are more often employed in non-agricultural activities. Creating incentive measures to increase the participation of women in different sectors can create more diversity in the labour market.

Long-term unemployment is also a problem, and women's share in long-term unemployment is often significant. Improving access to training and re-skilling programmes for these women could help them re-enter the labour market.

Encouraging gender equality in the workplace is key to improving women's position at the labour market. This includes the introduction of flexible working arrangements, pay transparency and measures leading to more women in management roles.

In conclusion, the analysis of the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina provided an important insight into the challenges faced by women in the labour market. The introduction of recommended measures, including improving education, encouraging workplace gender equality and women's entrepreneurship and facilitating the work-family life balance can significantly contribute to increasing the activity of women in the labour market and reducing the existing disparities.

Introduction

The status of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina is unequal to that of men and there is a growing gender gap in the labour market participation rate. It is stated in various knowledge-products, such as the “Roadmap for Decent Work” of UNDP’s Women Forum for Development, that *“although women represent more than half of the BiH population, in the sphere of the formal economy and entrepreneurship they are a minority for the most part due to their being socially, economically and politically disadvantaged, compared to men”*. The same report further states that *“the key obstacles to the development of women’s entrepreneurship and the concept of decent work in BiH can be divided into three categories: 1) structural, 2) economic and 3) the so-called ‘soft’ obstacles”*.¹

It is also stated in the report that the care economy in Bosnia and Herzegovina potentially includes around 120,000 jobs, which is around 15% of total employment. Care economy can be defined as the sector, or a combination of sectors of the economy, that is responsible for the provision of care and services that contribute to the care for current and future populations. It involves childcare, elder care, care for people with disabilities, ill and chronically ill, education, healthcare and personal social and domestic services that are provided in both paid and unpaid forms and within formal and informal sectors.

Despite the fact that the care economy potentially includes a significant number of jobs, we must not ignore its current underdeveloped state in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This sector, although promising in terms of its potential, is facing a number of challenges that limit its contribution and impact in society. First, existing care services are often insufficient, inaccessible or unaffordable to a large number of citizens, especially those from vulnerable social groups. The lack of adequate care services can mean that many individuals, particularly women, face obstacles in achieving their professional goals due to family care responsibilities. Second, the care economy often remains invisible and under-recognized in the economy. This lack of understanding contributes to the reduced recognition of workers in this sector, which can result in lower salaries and less social protection, thus placing an additional burden on care workers, often women, whose economic and professional opportunities remain limited. Also, it is important to point out that increasing investment in the care economy can have many positive impacts on society. Increased availability and quality of care services would allow women greater freedom in choosing and pursuing their careers and at the same time would make it easier for many families to reconcile family and work responsibilities.

On the other hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, women bore a heavier economic and social burden of the crisis. According to the UNDP’s knowledge product “The Economy of Care and Social Innovations”, the pre- and post-COVID-19 pandemic recession affected women more severely. According to the “Social Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Bosnia and Herzegovina” household survey, conducted by UNDP and UNICEF, 75% of women in BiH stated that they spent more time on household chores and care work due to the crisis.² The same survey confirms *“in the labour market, the sectors with the highest rates of women’s employment experienced the heaviest job losses. Increased childcare needs during preschool and school closures placed an even greater burden on working mothers”*. UNDP’s Intersectional Analysis³ confirms that *“the crisis took a disproportionately greater toll on women, whereas women from vulnerable groups or those*

experiencing multiple vulnerabilities are in a more difficult situation. 55.5% of all women respondents reported a worsened financial situation (compared to 44.9% of men). 13.5% of women reported reduced remittances, compared to 8% of men. Women from rural areas are particularly affected, 79% of them reported a worse or much worse financial situation. A quarter of all women with an income below BAM 900 had to borrow money to cover basic needs, while 39% of poor women and 35% of single mothers also experienced this issue. 24% of all women resorted to reduced food intake compared to 15% of men, while the percentage radically increases for poor women (55%) and women with disabilities (40%), single mothers (38%) and internally displaced women (38%)."

In addition to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly affected women, the document "National Human Development Report: Social Inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina"⁴ lists the factors that contribute to the different rates of labour market participation for men and women.

These factors are:

- ▶ Lack of adequate childcare systems, and assistance and care for the elderly and people with disabilities,
- ▶ The structure of family leave policies and the lack of flexible or part-time employment,
- ▶ Internal migration or emigration among male workers.

For the purpose of the above, in order to formulate the measures that will lead to greater activity and employment of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is necessary to conduct a situational analysis that will provide answers to the following questions:

- ▶ What is the level of activity, employment and unemployment of women in the labour market?
- ▶ What is the share of women in the workforce?
- ▶ What is the level of education of women within the working age population and in the labour market?
- ▶ What is the level of employment of women by activity and length of unemployment?
- ▶ What is the ratio of women in the categories of self-employed and women employees?

Methodological framework

In the data collection and preparation of the analysis related to the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the official data of the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina was used, where the basic concepts that will be the subject of this analysis are defined. According to the BiH Agency for Statistics, the following categories are defined:

The working age population includes all persons aged 15 to 89 and is divided into two categories: active population or labour force (employed and unemployed persons) and persons outside the labour force.

The labour force or active population consists of all employed persons aged 15 to 89 and unemployed persons aged 15 to 74.

Persons outside the labour force are persons aged 15 to 89 who are not classified as employed or unemployed, i.e. all persons who did not perform any paid work in the reference week, did not actively seek work or were not able to start working within two weeks after the end of the reference week.

Employed persons are defined as persons aged between 15 and 89 (in completed years at the end of the reference week) who, during the reference week, were in one of the following categories:

- a) persons who during the reference week worked for at least one hour for pay or profit, including contributing family workers;
- b) persons with a job or business who were temporarily not at work during the reference week, but had an attachment to their job.

Self-employed persons are persons who work independently in their own company, institution, private shop or on an agricultural farm, as well as persons who perform independent professional activity or some other job for their own account. Self-employed persons determine the conditions of their work (as well as the work of their employees) and bear the risk for their work.

Employees are persons who work for an employer in any form of ownership (public or private), regardless of whether they have a formal employment contract or work on the basis of an oral agreement. Household members who help with family work and who are paid for their work are considered employees.

Unemployed persons are defined as persons aged 15 to 74:

- ▶ who were not employed during the reference week, i.e. did not perform any paid work;
- ▶ who are currently available for paid employment or self-employment or were available for paid work before the end of a two-week period following the reference week; and

- ▶ who are actively seeking work, i.e. they either carried out job seeking activities during the period of four weeks preceding the reference week or found a job where they will start working no later than three months following the reference week.

Different rates are defined as follows: the activity rate is the share of the active population (labour force) in the total working age population. The inactivity rate is the share of persons outside the labour force (inactive population) in the total working age population. The employment rate is the share of employed persons in the total working age population. The unemployment rate is the share of unemployed persons in the total active population. The long-term unemployment rate is the share of unemployed persons in the active population for a year or longer.

The data presented in the analysis is based on the 2022 Labour Force Survey.

Bosnia and Herzegovina labour market analysis

The first step in defining measures and proposals that may lead to greater activity of women in the labour market, as well as to their increased employment, is to conduct a situational analysis which will show the state of the labour market, as well as the level of activity of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Labour Force Survey in Bosnia and Herzegovina serves as a basis for the presentation of the state of the labour market and the population activities. The main objective of the Labour Force Survey is to obtain data on three basic, mutually exclusive contingents of the population: the employed, the unemployed and persons outside the labour force.⁵

Figure 1 shows a summary of indicators related to the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These indicators are grouped according to the categories of working age population, labour force, the employed and the unemployed, and persons outside the labour force.⁶ These indicators are further distributed according to the gender structure in order to determine the differences in the labour market between men and women. This data shows that the category of working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina comprises almost equal numbers of women (1.48 million) and men (1.4 million). According to the data of the BiH Agency for Statistics, there are a total of 2.88 million of working age people in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When it comes to the labour force data, the situation is somewhat different in favour of men. **Out of the total number of 2.88 million working age people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.37 million make up the labour force. In the structure of the labour force, there are 840,000 men, accounting for 61% of the labour force and making up a majority, and 530,000 or 39% of women.** Of the total number of employees in Bosnia and Herzegovina - 1.16 million - 733,000 or 63% are men, while 427,000 or 37% are women. In accordance with the above, 105,000 unemployed persons are women and 106,000 are men. **According to this data, a total number of unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina is 211,000, hence the unemployment rate stood at 15.3% at the end of 2022.**

It is important to emphasize here that the data on unemployment trends largely differs from the registered unemployment rate. The assumption is that part of these workers are employed in the informal sector, where the latest estimates show that around 80,000 workers⁷ continue to earn a living and provide for their families in this way without having access to social services, such as employer-sponsored health insurance or the right to disability insurance and pension. In this case, it is very difficult to assess the gender representation of men and women workers in the informal sector. In any case, work in the informal sector puts men and women workers in a vulnerable situation in case of disability, they are more exposed to unsafe working conditions, low wages and the risk of falling into poverty, especially in old age⁸.

It is interesting to note that **the number of persons outside the labour force is significantly higher than the number of working age persons. According to these indicators, the number of persons outside the labour force, who can work, is 1.51 million, which is 10.3% more than the level of the labour force.** In addition to this data, persons outside the labour force make up 52% of the working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This data raises some concern because the majority of the working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is inactive. On the other hand, this data can be seen as potential, because with properly defined measures, there can be greater activation in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Details according to the structure are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1.

Key indicators of the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► Summary of indicators of employment and activity

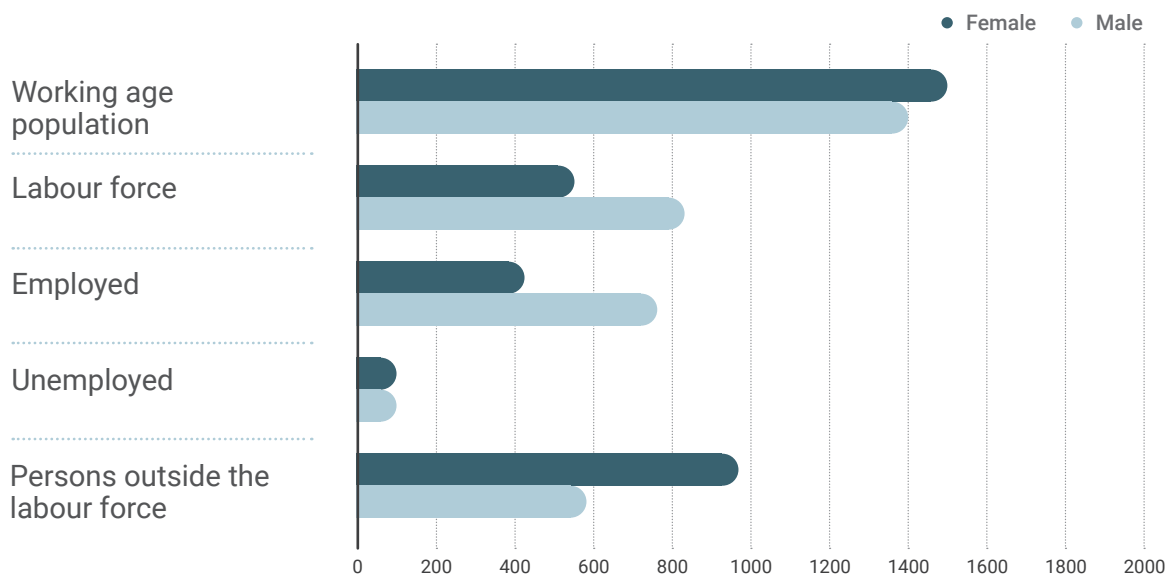
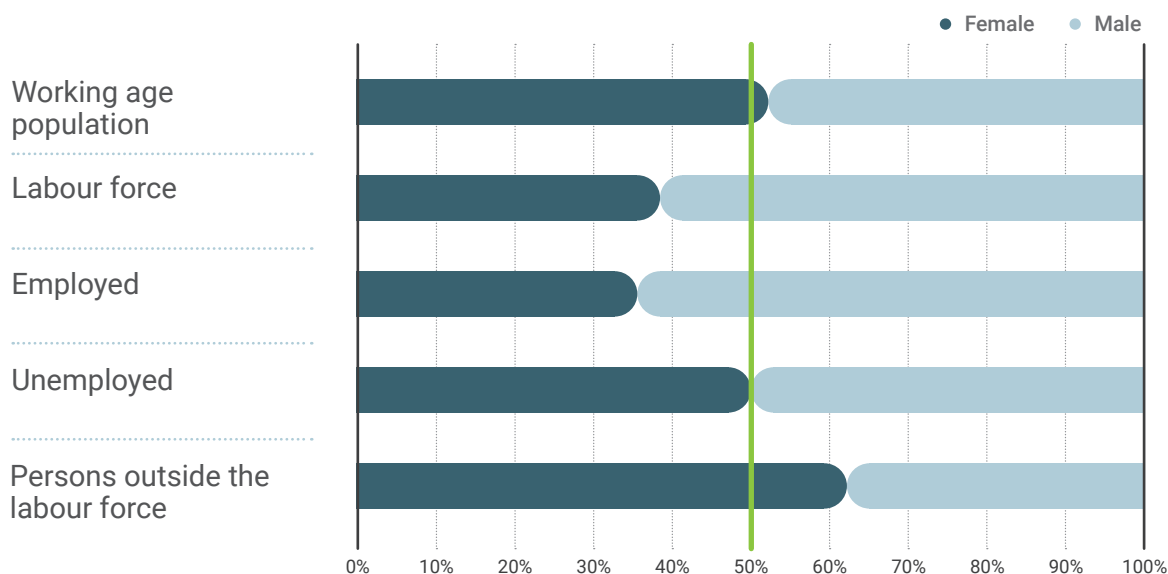


Figure 2.

Key indicators of the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► Summary of indicators of employment and activity



The next group of indicators⁹ refers to the representation of the working age population by educational attainment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is shown in Figure 3. The working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into persons who have only primary or lower education, persons with completed secondary school and specialization, and finally, persons who have college, university, master's or doctorate degree. **In the structure of the distribution of the population by educational attainment, 853,000 people or 30% of the working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina have only primary or lower education, 1,657,000 people or 57% of the working age population completed secondary school and specialization, while 377,000 people or 13% of the working age population have college, university, master's or doctorate degree.** The structure is less favourable in terms of gender distribution, where unlike the average for the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are in a less favourable situation. Namely, unlike the average, where 30% of the working age population has only primary education or lower education, 38% of all working age women have only primary education, and 48% of women completed secondary education. **In other words, two in every five working age women in Bosnia and Herzegovina finished only the primary school or lower education.**

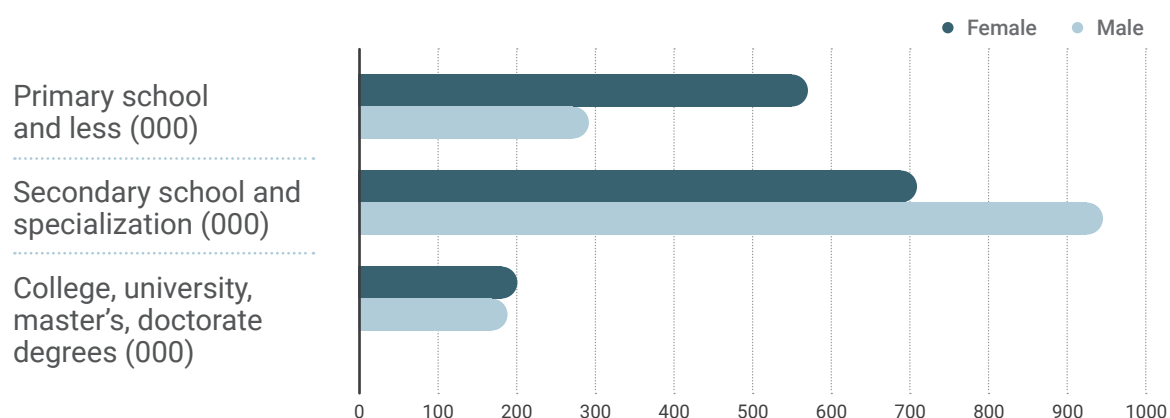
It is particularly interesting to observe the lower level of indicators within the gender structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding the structure in the category of primary and lower education, **out of the total number of working age population, 66% or 561,000 are women, and 292,000 or 34% are men, which shows that women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have lower levels of education, compared to men.** Regarding secondary education, out of the total number of working age persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 43% or 716,000 are women, while 57% or 941,000 are men. Finally, the last indicator related to the level of higher education shows that the situation is in favour of women and that slightly more women gained tertiary education than men. According to these data, 54% or 202,000 women, compared to 46% or 175,000 men, have college, university, master's and doctorate degrees. Details are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

Working age population by educational attainment in BiH

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► **Working age population by educational attainment (LFS BiH 2022)**



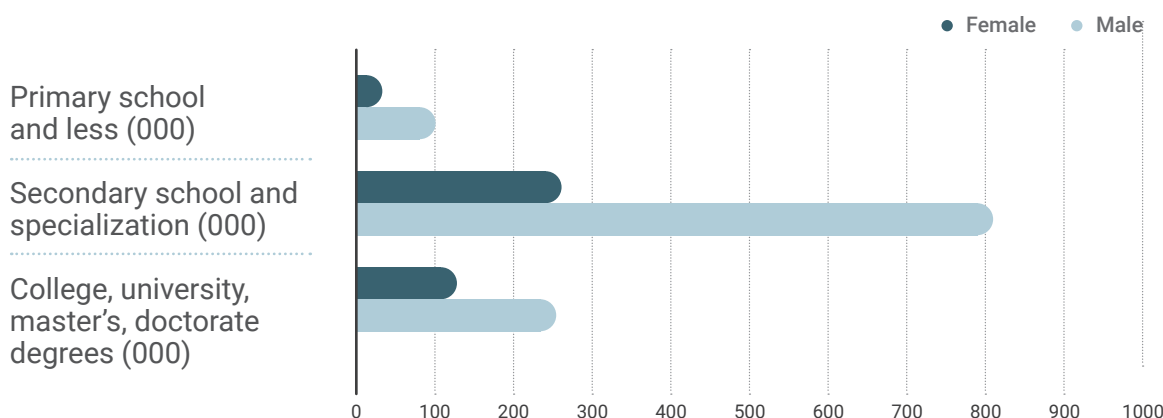
The next analysis of the group of indicators is related to the level of employment¹⁰ and unemployment¹¹ of people according to their education levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as according to the gender structure, which is shown in Figure 4. As part of this, the structure of employment according to educational attainment and gender was analyzed. According to the data of the BiH Agency for Statistics, **a total of 1,162 million inhabitants are employed, of whom 428,000 or 37% are women and 734,000 or 63% are men. In other words, every third employed worker in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a woman.** Observed according to the structure of educational attainment, on average 8% or 97,000 are employees with only primary education, followed by 70% or 811,000 employees with secondary education, and, in the end, by 22% or 254,000 people with higher education. Regarding the proportion among women, in the structure of employed women, there is a higher proportion of employed women with higher education than men, and their percentage - 31% - is above the average.

Figure 4.

Employment by educational attainment in BiH

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► **employment by educational attainment (LFS BiH 2022)**



Unlike employment, data for unemployment by educational attainment shows slightly different trends for both men and women. Similar to the employment structure, the largest number of unemployed persons completed secondary school, so they make up 70% of the total number of unemployed persons, or 148,000. The number of unemployed persons who have primary school and higher education is equal or percentage-wise, 15% each. The structure of unemployment according to educational attainment is similar between men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but there is a certain difference in terms of higher education. According to this data, twice as many unemployed persons with higher education are women, which can also be seen in Figure 5. According to the data of the BiH Agency for Statistics, there are 21,000 unemployed women with higher education, relative to 10,000 unemployed men, which makes up a 20% share of the total number of unemployed women. **This data shows that every fifth unemployed woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina has higher education.**

Figure 5.

Unemployment by educational attainment in BiH

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► **Unemployed persons aged 16-74 by educational attainment (LFS BiH 2022)**

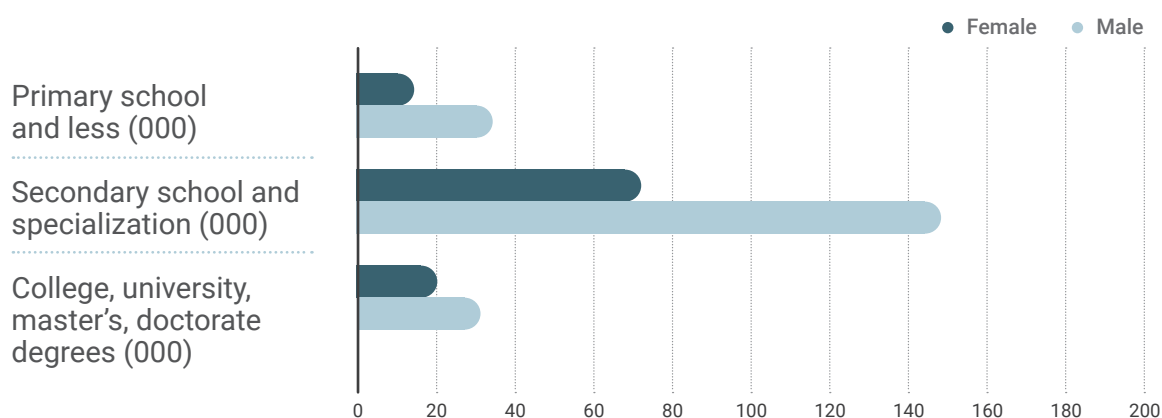
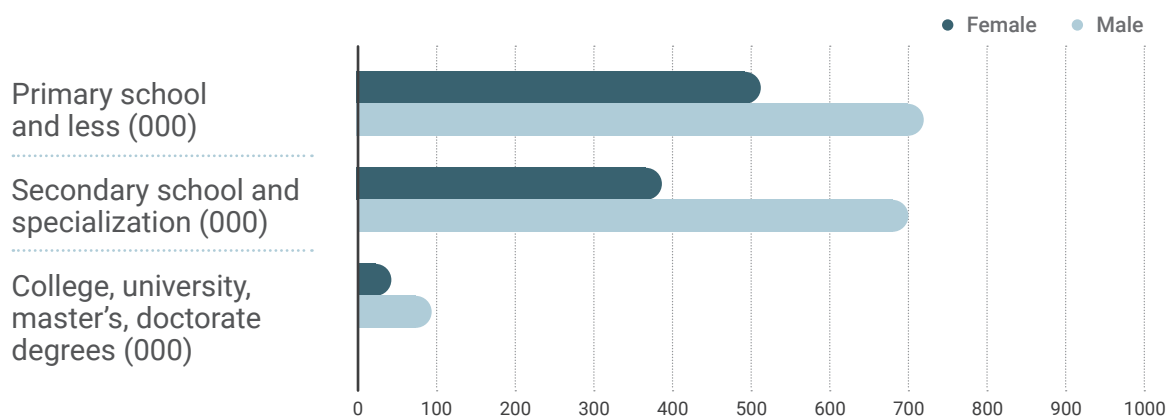


Figure 6.

Inactive persons by educational attainment in BiH

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► **Persons outside the labour force (LSF BiH 2022)**



Data on the educational structure of persons outside the labour force¹² by gender is very interesting. As mentioned above, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a larger number of inactive persons (1,514,000), i.e. persons outside the labour force, compared to persons who make up the total labour force. Nevertheless, when looking at the structure of inactive persons by educational attainment and gender, it can be seen that **the largest number of inactive persons have primary education - 724,000 or 48% - followed by those with secondary education - 46% - while the smallest number of inactive persons have higher education - 6%.**

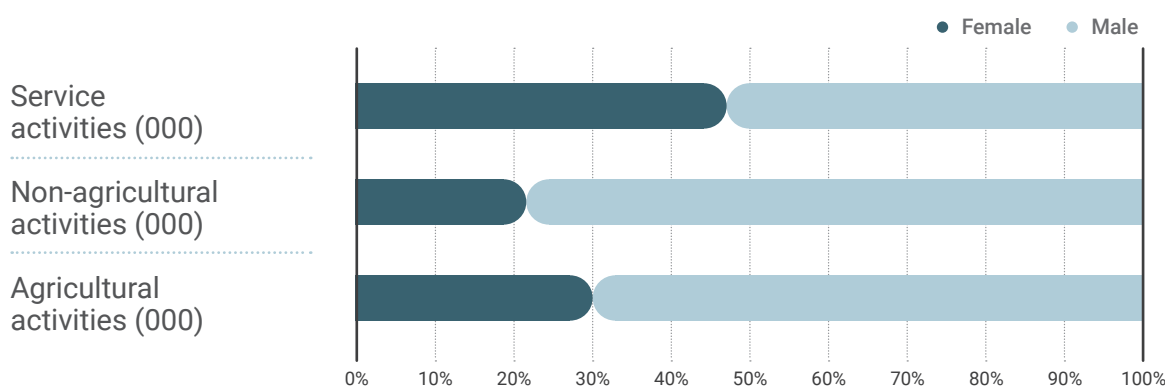
There is still a difference between men and women according to educational attainment. Of the total number of inactive persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina with primary education, 71% or 514,000 are women, while 29% or 210,000 are men. When it comes to secondary education, women are less active also in this category, so that the number of inactive women is 383,000 or 55%, and the number of inactive men is 315,000 or 45%. Finally, the ratio of inactive persons with higher education is similar and it stands at 49,000 or 53% for women and 43,000 or 47% for men. This data is very significant because it shows that today in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are four times more inactive men with higher education than unemployed men, and 2.5 more inactive women with higher education than unemployed women. This data indicates that it is possible to increase the level of the labour force of persons with higher education through measures of greater activity.

In particular, it is necessary to highlight the data on the large number of inactive women with primary education. Of the total number of inactive persons with primary education, 71% or 514,000 are women. This is a very serious challenge for Bosnia and Herzegovina because it shows that there is a large number of inactive women with a lower level of education, which means that these persons cannot be employed through the activation process in jobs requiring a higher level of education. Nevertheless, through re-skilling and other stimulating measures to combat informality, this category could be more actively involved in the labour market and the pension and disability insurance system in order to prevent their poverty. It is important to note that every second inactive woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina has completed elementary school. Details are shown in Figure 6.

Figure 7. Employment by type of activity

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► **Employment by activity (LSF BiH 2022)**



Employment by type of activity in Bosnia and Herzegovina¹³, according to the Labour Force Survey, is divided into service activities, non-agricultural activities and agricultural activities. At the end of 2022, according to this division, men were significantly more dominant in the employment structure of non-agricultural activities than women. According to this data, every fifth woman is employed in non-agricultural activities. The details are shown in Figure 7. Looking at the vertical analysis of employment trends within the

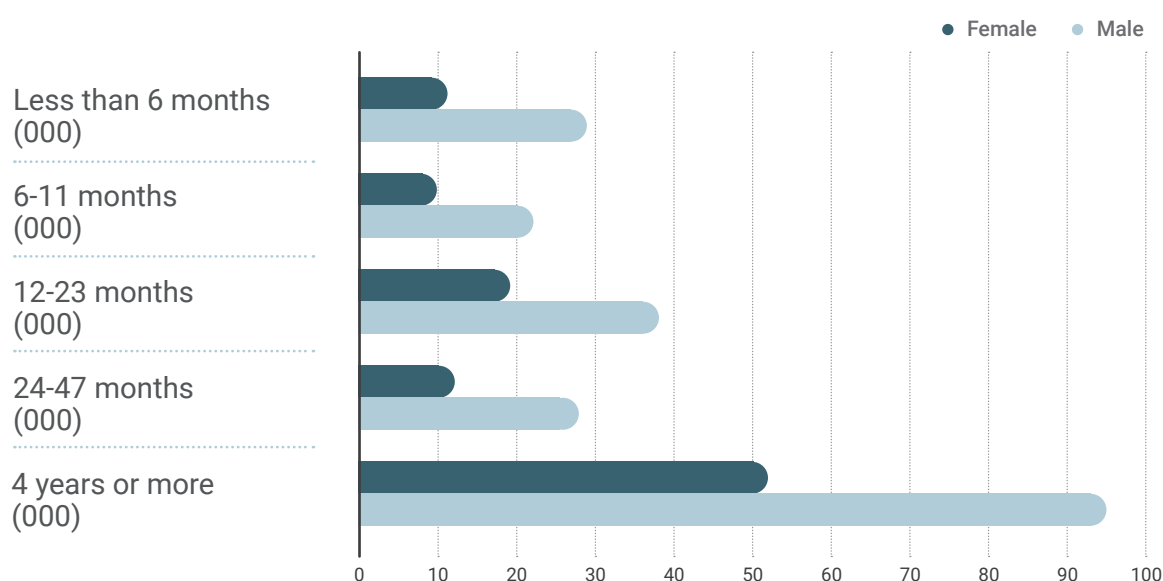
gender structure, it can be seen that 6% of employed women and 8% of employed men are employed in agricultural activities, 20% of women and 43% of men are employed in non-agricultural activities and, in the end, 74% of women and 49% of men are employed in service activities. This data precisely indicates that nearly four out of five women are employed in the service sector. Details are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Unemployment by duration

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► Unemployed persons aged 15-74 (LSF BiH 2022)



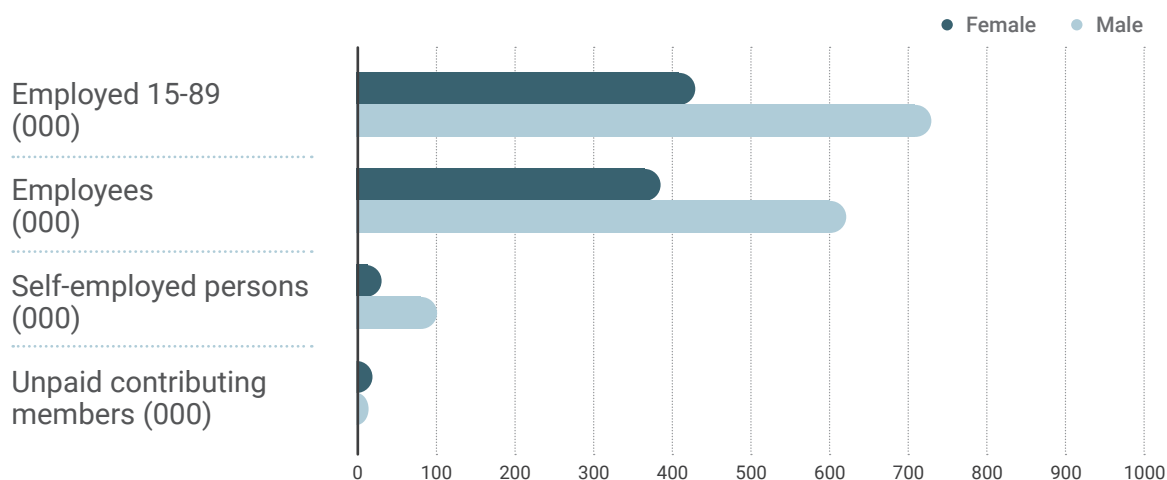
The next factor taken into consideration, which is shown in Figure 8, refers to duration of unemployment by gender.¹⁴ As previously shown, there is almost an equal number of unemployed women and men in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and there is no gender difference. However, when the structure of unemployment is analyzed by duration, it can be noticed that the majority of unemployed persons are the long-term unemployed, that is, persons who have been formally registered with the Employment Services as unemployed for more than four years. **Of the total number of 213,000 unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to the Labour Force Survey, 45% or 95,000 are persons who have been unemployed for four or more years**, while the number of those who have been seeking work between 6 and 11 months is the smallest: 23,000 or 11%. **The analysis of the vertical structure within the women unemployed population reveals that the share of unemployed women who have been seeking work for four years or more is 49% or 52,000 of the total number of unemployed women.** Further, if this number of unemployed women is put into the ratio of the total number of unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we can see that this ratio is 24%, **which means that every fourth unemployed person in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a woman who has been seeking work for four years or more.** This conclusion is very important for decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina as it can help to target and formulate measures related to reducing unemployment of specific categories of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 9.

Employees by type of employment

Source: The BiH Agency for Statistics

► Employment by type (LSF BIH 2022)



The last factor that we take into account in the presentation of the state of the labour market related to employment according to type of employment, namely those who are employees and those who are self-employed.¹⁵ The data graphically presented in Figure 9 indicates that there is a more significant number of employed men in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared to women, which is ultimately reflected in the total number of employees. According to this data, there are 71% more employed men than women, so that the ratio is ultimately 734,000 to 428,000 women. **According to the employment structure, 87% are employees, and 13% are self-employed.** Similar to the level of employees, the state of the self-employment market shows that men are significantly more represented in this category than women, so today, there are 101,000 self-employed men and 35,000 self-employed women. This data indicates that the adoption of measures that will stimulate greater activity in the labour market and greater participation of self-employed women can lead to a greater level of activity in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is shown below.

Proposed measures to improve the status of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The situational analysis showed that women are in a significantly more unequal position compared to men in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With regard to the above data, several measures and proposals have been prepared that can lead to greater activity and employment of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Data from the analysis indicates that there are more men in the labour market today, which is particularly reflected in the level of employment, and that women are more inactive and make up a larger share of persons outside the labour force, that they are more represented in the categories of the population that have primary education and secondary vocational education and that they are long-term job seekers.

This information leads us to define the following goals:

1. To increase the level of activity of women in the labour market,
2. To increase the level of education of women in the labour market and of women who are outside the labour force, but make up the working-age population,
3. Measures aimed at formalizing informal work,
4. To shorten time spent on seeking work.

Decision-makers in Bosnia and Herzegovina at different levels of government have different mechanisms and opportunities available for the implementation of the set goals in order to quantify these goals through specially designed measures for the purpose of their fulfilment.

Measures can be indirect and direct. Indirect measures are the measures from the domain of tax policy, where it is possible to provide through tax laws a temporary exemption from paying taxes in order to employ a certain category of the population. Indirect tax benefits, as an incentive, are allowed under the Law on the State Aid System of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁶, but this type of measures has not been used enough so far and represents an untapped potential for the next period. This type of incentive can be a significant tool for fulfilling goal number 4. ***“To shorten time spent on seeking work”***. Since that every fourth unemployed person in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a woman who has been seeking work for four years or more, the inclusion of an indirect tax incentive mechanism would allow the employing company to use a tax credit once and be exempt from paying labour taxes for the new woman employee for one year, provided that it invests during a specified period of time in the training of that employee and retains her after the end of the tax credit period. In order to reduce the level of abuses, the woman employee could have a salary at the level of the average salary during the first year, and after that she would negotiate new conditions. Companies may be interested in this type of employment considering that by using an indirect tax incentive they could get cheaper labour, but not in a way that harms the woman employee – by paying lower wages. The economic logic is that the employee, assuming that she is not part of the informal market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot have the same level of productivity as current employees, which is why it is necessary to use the first year of her work for training and

increasing her level of productivity. The state also has an interest in introducing these measures because in this way it will reduce the share of unemployed persons, especially among women who are long-term job seekers, thereby increasing the level of economic activity. Part of the generated income will still end up in the budgets of different levels of government through consumption taxation. In the end, the employee herself also benefits as she gets the opportunity to become employed and work and to empower herself economically and financially.

Another indirect measure refers to the introduction of the concept of self-employed person in the labour legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It was determined through the analysis that today there is a significantly higher number of self-employed men than women in the market in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but a particular problem is that this category is not recognized by the Labour Laws. This measure would provide access to the labour market and integration of certain categories that are unable to be part of the system due to high tax burdens into the system.

The introduction of the concept of self-employed person in the labour legislation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has key implications for improving the status of women in the labour market. The current lack of registration of self-employed women has created inequality and limited access to the labour market for many women who want to develop their own business ideas. This legal amendment would provide adequate protection of and rights to self-employed women, which would encourage their increased participation in economic activities.

Statistical data indicates a significant disparity between the number of self-employed men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This trend precisely indicates the need for concrete measures aimed at including and empowering women's entrepreneurship. The inclusion of self-employed women into the legislative framework would provide women with equal conditions for developing their own business initiatives and accessing the labour market, which would result in an increased number of women entrepreneurs and their stronger economic independence.

In addition to this amendment and intervention in the Labour Laws, it is necessary to provide more flexible working hours for women, especially for those women who would be willing to become active in the labour market, although this would be difficult because of their childcare duties. By introducing flexible working hours, many women would be encouraged to enter the labour market and thereby reduce their level of inactivity.

In the end, it is important to emphasize that not only women but society as a whole would benefit from changes in the legislation that will encourage the inclusion of self-employed women and more flexible working hours. Workforce diversification through the strengthening of women entrepreneurship and more equal representation of women in the labour market contributes to greater economic stability, encourages innovation and creativity and confirms Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to building an inclusive society.

Direct incentive measures can be different and they have been most widely used in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Direct incentive measures mainly refer to direct financial incentives to enterprises. This mechanism works in such a way that the budget revenue collected through labour and consumption taxation is directed directly to enterprises on the basis of previously announced public calls so that such enterprises are motivated to employ unemployed persons according to their own needs. Incentive funds are used differently, depending on the type of incentive. They can be used to finance a part of the earned salary, a part of the social contributions paid to the state, or a combination of both measures. The problem with this mechanism is that calls oftentimes remain open for a very short time, and cases have been recorded in which the fastest companies manage to apply during the first few minutes, withdraw all the funds and thus prevent access to other

companies. Another problem is that companies often respond to this type of public call not because they really need a worker, but because they will get money for hiring. In the end, there is an increase in inefficient use of those funds due to an unclear monitoring and evaluation system.

This state incentive system can continue to be used in a similar way for the purpose of increasing efficiency. However, it would be more effective if incentive funds could be directed through the pilot project to unemployed persons instead of companies, targeting those categories for which a clear and measurable goal is set. The issuance of vouchers for different purposes could be used as a measure to increase efficiency. Vouchers would be issued directly to unemployed and inactive persons, especially women. This measure can be used to attain especially goal 1: ***“To increase the level of activity of women in the labour market”*** and goal 2: ***“To increase the level of education of women in the labour market and of women who are outside the labour force, but make up the working-age population”***. An example can be given of a woman who is not active in the labour market, i.e. who is outside the labour force, is long-term unemployed and spends time caring for a young child at home. A single voucher may not be enough for this person, rather, she will need a combination of vouchers, depending on her situation. The combination of vouchers can include an annual salary voucher in the amount of BAM 10,000 and a one-year kindergarten voucher in the amount of BAM 1,800. In this case, the woman will be encouraged to move from the category of persons who are inactive in the labour market directly to the category of employed persons, because in addition to her salary, she will also get the opportunity to take her child to kindergarten that will take care of her child while she is at work. One of the positive additional initiatives that could empower women in this sense would be for companies to organize kindergartens for their employees. Another combination of vouchers may refer to the training and up-skilling system and an annual salary level, where a long-term unemployed person would first go through a training process, and then would get an opportunity for employment.

The voucher system would work in such a way that the person who has received a voucher directly finds an opportunity to use it in the companies, instead of the other way around, where the companies that receive a voucher would eventually redeem it at the government institution that issued it. In this way, the problem of the availability of incentive funds and possible abuses by companies is solved, because all power and decision-making would be given directly to unemployed and inactive people, especially women.

The introduction of new incentive measures to activate women in the labour market should be recognized as a complex process that requires a comprehensive approach. The experiences of the Women Forum for Development and those from the field clearly show that there is often a need for additional support, counselling and a psychological approach in order to overcome some of the key challenges that women face when entering the labour market.

The first and often insurmountable barrier that women face is the weakened self-confidence that results from a long period of unemployment or being out of the labour force. Several consecutive unsuccessful attempts to find a job can lead to a loss of self-confidence and the feeling of worthlessness. Therefore, it is important to provide a support system which will encourage women, foster their self-confidence and provide them with “soft” skills, knowledge and skills for the 21st century, business communications and present their talents and experiences in a positive way.

Also, we often face difficult social situations, especially when it comes to women who have been exposed to domestic violence, single mothers who are forced to take care of the family alone, women who are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities, women who chronically suffer from time poverty, etc. These life circumstances and the lack of adequate

support from the system can significantly affect their ability to find time and/or to orient themselves towards the labour market. In this context, along with structural support such as kindergartens, centres and activities for people with disabilities and older people, it is important to provide tailored counselling and psychosocial support.

Social stigma, stereotypes and discrimination can also be present in some work environments, making it even more difficult for women to successfully integrate into the labour market. It is precisely for this reason that psychological support can be helpful in facing these challenges, while in parallel, it would be necessary to encourage changes in work environments through various initiatives, such as the UNDP and Agency for Gender Equality of BiH Seal for Gender Equality for the Public and Private sectors, in order to create a more inclusive environment within companies, free from stigma and stereotypes, which has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, abuse of authority and which provides women with equal opportunities in terms of equal pay for equal work, advancement in their careers and promotion to decision-making positions, as well as *de facto* exercise of the full scope of the rights guaranteed under the Labour Laws.

As part of the new incentive measures, it is therefore important to provide resources for the provision of psychological and counselling support adapted to the specific needs of women. This may include mentoring programmes, training for the development of coping skills and techniques for stress, and the engagement of experts who will provide individual support.

Through a holistic approach that combines financial incentives, educational programmes and psychological support, and the creation of an inclusive environment through the implementation of the Gender Equality Seal, society can create an enabling and inclusive environment that will help women to overcome challenges and achieve their full potential in the labour market. Such measures will not only contribute to strengthening the economy but will also promote gender equality and social justice.

Considering that a large number of inactive women with primary education may be working in the informal economy or doing unpaid jobs in agriculture, it is important to find solutions that will encourage the formalization of such work activities. The formalization of informal work can bring many benefits, including ensuring labour rights, social protection and economic stability for women workers who were previously outside the labour system and are exposed to poverty due to work-related injury and/or old age. This measure would refer to proposal number 3. ***“Formalization of informal work”***.

As part of this new measure, it is also proposed to use a voucher approach. This new measure would be applied to various sectors, where there is a significant number of inactive women in the informal economy, such as, for example, cleaners, nannies or caregivers of the elderly, chronically ill and disabled people. For these people, formalization of their work could be ensured through vouchers, so that they could become beneficiaries of the pension and disability insurance fund system. Also, in parallel with this process, adequate training and certification could be provided that would qualify such women for formal employment, and employers would receive incentives or benefits for hiring women workers from the informal sector.

Adapted curricula and training programmes should be developed in cooperation with relevant institutions and organizations in order to train women workers for formal employment. Such programmes would focus on acquiring skills, knowledge and certifications that match the demands of the formal labour market.

It is important to emphasize that this measure should be followed by careful monitoring and evaluation in order to determine its effectiveness and remove any weaknesses. In accordance with the recommendations from the National Human Development Report:

Social Inclusion in BiH (UNDP, 2021), collaboration with the International Labour Organization, relevant ministries, employment offices, experts, trade unions, employers' associations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant actors is key to ensuring the implementation and adjustments of the measure in accordance with the needs of women workers.

The formalization of informal work can create safe working conditions, provide women workers with access to social protection, ensure equality and reduce gender inequality in the labour market, permanently contributing to the reduction of inequality and poverty in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the achievements in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. This measure will not only empower women who were previously outside the labour market system, but will also contribute to strengthening the level of economic activity through an increase in active working population and economic productivity. Through a holistic approach that combines formalization of work, up-skilling, implementation of gender equality standards in the private sector/Gender Equality Seal and other incentive measures, Bosnia and Herzegovina can achieve progress towards a more equal and sustainable labour market.

Conclusions

In a broader economic context, it can be said that the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina is complex, considering the structure of the working age population. Out of the total 2.88 million working age people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.37 million make up the labour force, while the men make up the majority of the labour force structure which consists of 840,000 61% of men and 530,000 or 39% of women.

The level of employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina is similar to the structure of the labour force, so that of the total number of employees in Bosnia and Herzegovina - 1.16 million - 733,000 or 63% are employed men and 427,000 or 37% are employed women. The total number of unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina is equal according to the gender structure, totaling 211,000, hence an unemployment rate of 15.3% at the end of 2022.

The number of people outside the labour force is significantly higher than the number of working age people. According to these indicators, the number of persons outside the labour force who can work is 1.51 million, which is 10.3% more than the level of the labour force.

In the structure of the distribution of the population by educational attainment, 853,000 people or 30% of the working age population in Bosnia and Herzegovina have only primary school or lower education, 1.657 million people or 57% of the working age population have secondary education and specialization, while 377,000 people or 13% of the working age population have college and university, master's and doctorate degrees. Regarding women, two in every five working age women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have only primary education or lower.

Of the total number of working age people, 561,000 or 66% are women, which shows that women have a lower level of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina compared to men of whom 292,000 account for 34% of the working age population.

Women account for a significantly smaller share of the employment structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of the total employed population of 1.162 million inhabitants, 428,000 or 37% are women and 734,000 or 63% are men. In other words, every third employed worker in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a woman.

The structure of unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina shows an equal number of unemployed women (105,000) and men (106,000). Nevertheless, the structure of unemployment by educational attainment shows that every fifth unemployed woman in Bosnia and Herzegovina has higher education.

According to the structure of the inactive population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the largest number of inactive persons have primary education, 724,000 or 48%, followed by those who have secondary education - 46% - while the smallest number of inactive persons have higher education - 6%. Nevertheless, the difference exists between men and women according to educational attainment. Of the total number of inactive persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina with primary education, 71% or 514,000 are women.

A special problem for Bosnia and Herzegovina is the duration of unemployment. Of the total number of unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to the Labour Force Survey (213,000), 45% or 95,000 persons have been unemployed for four or more years. The analysis of the vertical structure within the women unemployed population reveals that the share of unemployed women who have been seeking work for four years or more is 49% or 52,000 of the total number of unemployed women. In other words, every fourth unemployed person in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a woman who has been seeking work for four years or more

The share of self-employed women is much less favourable than that of men. Of the total number of self-employed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 101,000 are men and 35,000 are women, which indicates that it is necessary to stimulate the level of self-employment of women through special government programmes.

Recommendations

The situational analysis represents a key step in understanding the current state of women in the labour market in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This analysis provided insight into inequality, discrimination and other challenges that women face, thereby providing the opportunity to identify various factors that affect their inactivity in the labour market, including socio-economic, cultural and educational factors. Also, the situational analysis identified areas where it is necessary to intervene in order to create better conditions for women in the labour market.

Linking the importance of the situational analysis with the proposed measures, a series of recommendations are proposed that can lead to the improvement of the situation of women in the labour market and eventually increase the level of equality and reduce the existing discrimination.

Recommendation 1:

Implementation of a programme for self-confidence building and psychological support for women in the labour market

The situational analysis identified a low level of self-confidence as one of the key problems that limits women in their business activation. Precisely because of this finding, the first recommendation refers to the implementation of a programme to increase self-confidence and provide psychological support to unemployed women. Provision of adequate resources for counselling and training in coping with stress is necessary for improving women's psychological well-being and boosting their self-confidence. In this way, also unemployed or inactive women psychologists could be employed, which would further increase activity and employment in the labour market from the gender equality perspective.

In order to overcome the challenges that women face when entering and actively participating in the labour market, it is necessary to take steps to empower and support women. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of implementing the programme that will provide support to women in the form of increasing their self-confidence and providing psychological support.

The first step in understanding the importance of this recommendation is to recognize the challenges that many women face in the labour market. When women decide to actively participate in the labour force, they face a number of obstacles and uncertainties. Low self-confidence, stress and psychological pressure are often present. The reasons for this can be different, including gender stereotypes, lack of support, fear of failure, but also harm to mental health caused by the objectively poor socioeconomic situation in which persons find themselves and the chronic lack of systemic support.

The support program for self-confidence building and psychological support for women in the labour market must provide adequate resources to address these challenges, including:

- 1. Counselling and mentoring programmes:** Implementation of these programmes would allow women to receive mentoring guidance, life coaching and counselling from professionals. Mentors could share their experiences, provide decision-making support and help build self-confidence in women entering the labour market. In addition, mentoring relationships could provide structure and guidance for career advancement.

2. **Training to develop coping skills for stress:** Work can be stressful and women should have access to training to help them develop skills to cope with stress and pressure. This training may include stress management techniques, communication skills and strategies for maintaining work-life balance.
3. **Support in difficult social situations:** Some women face special challenges, such as single mothers or women who are forced to take care of the family on their own, without adequate support from the system. Support programmes should be adapted to those specific situations to ensure that women are not prevented or limited in their participation in the labour market. This includes access to flexible working arrangements, adjustments to working conditions and family support.

The implementation of programmes to support the increase of self-confidence and psychological support for women in the labour market is essential for creating an enabling and inclusive environment. These programmes will help women overcome challenges, develop their skills and realize their professional potential. Through mentoring, counselling, training and support in difficult social situations, women will be motivated to actively participate in the labour market and achieve success in their careers. By encouraging self-confidence and supporting the balance between family responsibilities and professional goals, these measures will contribute to gender equality and economic empowerment of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Recommendation 2:

Formalize informal work through voucher schemes

The recommendation to formalize informal work through voucher schemes directly addresses this problem. This measure provides certification and training for women workers who wish to move into the formal sector. In addition, the role of employers is crucial and they should be motivated or stimulated to employ women from the informal sector, which will improve their economic security and provide them with equal working conditions.

In order to increase inclusiveness and gender equality in the labour market, it is crucial to direct efforts towards formalizing the informal work, especially in sectors where a significant number of women are inactive. This recommendation suggests that this formalization can be achieved by applying a voucher scheme as an approach that allows women to acquire the necessary training and certificates to move from the informal to the formal sector, while employers will benefit from incentives or reliefs to hire women workers from the informal sector.

Informal work is often prone to uncertainty, exploitation, low income, poor working conditions and results in a lack of access to the social protection system. Women often make up the majority of the informal workforce, and they face numerous challenges due to their presence in this sector. The formalization of informal work means the transition from the grey economy to a legally recognized sector with rights and duties for both women workers and employers.

The key component of this recommendation is the use of voucher schemes to encourage the formalization of informal work. A voucher scheme is the process in which workers in the informal sector are provided with vouchers or certificates attesting to their skills and qualifications. These vouchers allow women to prove their competences and facilitate the transition to the formal sector.

In order to encourage the employment of women workers from the informal sector, em-

employers should be given incentives or benefits. This may include financial incentives, tax reductions or subsidies for the employment of women workers who have formalized their work. Such incentives would make it easier for employers to make the decision to hire women workers from the informal sector and would encourage the growth of formal jobs.

The formalization of informal work has a number of advantages. First, it creates safe working conditions for women workers, including higher wages, access to health and social protection, and greater opportunities for advancement. Also, formalization ensures equality in the labour market, giving women the same opportunities and rights as their male colleagues. In addition, strengthening the formal sector helps reduce the grey economy and increases the government revenue and tax revenues.

This recommendation aims at formalizing informal work through voucher schemes, which is a key measure for increasing inclusiveness and equality in the labour market. Through the application of the voucher scheme, women are enabled to make an easier transition from the informal to the formal sector, while employers are provided with incentives to hire these workers.

Recommendation 3:

Introduce more flexible working arrangements for women

The situational analysis highlighted the problem of imbalance between family responsibilities and professional life as a key challenge for women who want to be active in the labour market. The recommendation to introduce more flexible working hours is directly related to this need. Flexibility in working hours allows women to better balance their professional and family roles, encouraging them to be more active in the labour market. In order to encourage women to actively participate in the labour market, especially those who face challenges related to childcare, it is important to consider the introduction of more flexible working hours. This key measure has the potential to provide women with more adjustable working schedules, which will allow them to reconcile work and family responsibilities more easily. The implementation of flexible working hours brings many advantages, encourages women to become active in the labour market and contributes to reducing the unemployment rate among them. This recommendation aims to create a balance between family and professional life and encourage gender equality in the labour market.

Women often face challenges when it comes to employment, especially if they have childcare responsibilities or provide unpaid care to family members in a society that chronically suffers from non-existent, low-quality or expensive social services. Also, traditional working models with fixed working schedules are often unsuitable for women who want to balance their professional and family responsibilities. This can result in inactivity in the labour market and limited opportunities for career advancement.

Introducing more flexible working hours provides a solution to these challenges and problems. This means that women workers have the possibility to adjust their working hours. Flexibility in working hours may include working from home, part-time or changing start and finish times.

By introducing such flexible work models, many women will be encouraged to become active in the labour market. This may encourage women who were previously inactive or left the labour force for the above reasons to re-enter the workforce. Flexible working hours also make it easier for pregnant women and young mothers to keep their jobs, which is key to preventing gender discrimination and ensuring women's continued economic independence.

In addition to encouraging women to join the labour market, the introduction of flexible working hours allows women to balance their professional and family life. This balance, in addition to the above-mentioned structural reasons that contribute to gender equality, is also crucial for women's long-term well-being and happiness and helps prevent exhaustion and stress associated with constantly balancing work and family. This recommendation has a significant impact on achieving gender equality in the labour market. Allowing women to adjust their working hours helps eliminate barriers that often prevent women from advancing in their careers. Introducing more flexible working hours for women is a key initiative that will improve their participation in the labour market, encourage a balance between family and professional responsibilities and increase gender equality.

Recommendation 4:

Monitoring and evaluation of effectiveness of incentive measures

The situational analysis also highlighted the need for constant monitoring and evaluation of the measures being implemented in order to ensure their effectiveness. The recommendation for regular monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of incentive measures for activating women in the labour market is directly based on this need. Multi-sector collaboration with all of the above-mentioned actors in the evaluation process ensures that the measures are adjusted to the real needs of the women workers.

In order to ensure success and remove possible weaknesses of new incentive measures for activating women in the labour market, it is crucial to carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness. This recommendation lays the foundation for successfully implemented measures and maintaining their relevance in light of changing needs and circumstances.

Monitoring and evaluation are the key steps in ensuring that incentive measures to activate women in the labour market yield the desired results. Without adequate monitoring and evaluation, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of these measures or identify necessary adjustments or improvements. In addition, incentive measures should not be static, but should evolve to reflect the changing needs of women in the labour market.

A key component of this process is cooperation with experts, trade unions, governmental and non-governmental organizations. Experts can provide valuable insights and analyses on the effectiveness of measures, while trade unions and non-governmental organizations can serve as the voice of women workers. This partnership approach ensures that all relevant aspects are considered during the evaluation and that the measures are adapted to the actual needs of the women workers.

The evaluation process should include an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the incentive measures. Based on the obtained data, it is possible to recognize what worked well and what needs to be improved. For example, if a training programme for women is found to be successful in increasing their employment, consideration may be given to expanding that programme or similar initiatives. On the other hand, if weaknesses are discovered, adjustments or replacement of measures that did not meet expectations can be considered.

Through monitoring and evaluation, it is also possible to identify potential gender inequalities or injustices in the implementation of the measures. This enables rapid intervention to ensure inclusiveness and equality in the labour market. For example, if certain groups of women or regions are found to be neglected, specific steps can be taken to address these issues.

Recommendation 5:

Social investment in the care economy

Investing in the care economy has the potential to significantly contribute to the economic development of Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially with regard to the improvement of women's equality. Through investments in the health, education and social protection sectors, the country can achieve a number of positive effects. First, it will improve human capital, thereby promoting women's equality in the labour market. Second, investments in these sectors will reduce social inequalities, contributing to a better integration of women in economic activity and society in general.

In particular, it is recommended to focus additional efforts on encouraging women entrepreneurship by creating an environment that supports women in all stages of their careers. This includes access to education and mentoring for women entrepreneurs, as well as ensuring equal rights and opportunities in the workplace.

In order to achieve this goal, joint cooperation of the government, the private sector and international organizations is needed to work together on the implementation of these recommendations in order to support investments in the care economy, especially in the context of achieving women's equality.

Recommendation 6:

Political dialogues and the introduction of innovative models of social services to address the care economy issue for the purpose of strengthening the status of women in the labour market in BiH

UNDP's 2021 Human Development Report on Social Inclusion in BiH provides data to support the fact that a huge challenge is the poor quality and accessibility of social services or lack thereof, combined with the heavy reliance on women in the field of care due to traditional social norms that treat this work as an unpaid, gender-based responsibility typically assigned to women. The survey conducted in 2020 by the Agency for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows that in 93% of the couples covered by the survey, women perform all or most of the routine household chores. According to the UNDP and UNICEF survey "Social Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Bosnia and Herzegovina",¹⁷ 75% of women in BiH spend more time on household chores and care work and that the crisis took a disproportionately heavier toll on women.

Considering the situation, it is necessary to:

- ▶ Continue with political dialogues that include the Agency for Gender Equality of the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, decision-makers and public sector actors, international and non-governmental organizations and the private sector for the purpose of introducing specific reform measures and raising awareness that the care economy is an integral part of the economy, and continue to place a firm focus on gendering and mainstreaming of the gender equality principles into the system of social protection, social services and the labour market system. At the same time, it is necessary to build an unbreakable link between social and economic issues alongside the principles of gender equality as an integrator that unites them and puts them at the service of improving the quality of lives of women and men in BiH. Social issues must be included in all economic dialogues.
- ▶ Create new innovative models and partnerships between relevant government institutions and bodies, non-governmental and private sectors and international

organizations for the implementation of an innovative system of social services that include childcare, a network of day care centres, facilities for people with disabilities and elderly people in need of assistance and care and respite care facilities providing relief for the usual carers.

Recommendation 7:

Strengthen the status of women who are already active in the labour market by introducing standards for enhancing gender equality within public and private sector institutions

Creating an environment for reducing gender differences and ensuring gender equality in the workplace is an obligation under the Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Gender Action Plan of BiH (areas of work and employment and access to all resources, and Article 22 - the responsibility to maintain gender-disaggregated statistics), and other domestic and international standards. In order to counter the challenges faced by women who are already active in the labour market and prevent further deepening of economic inequalities, it is necessary to undertake activities aimed at creating a better environment and strengthening the status of women in the labour market. In 2022, UNDP and the Agency for Gender Equality BiH of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina started implementing the Gender Equality Seal for public and private companies. The Gender Equality Seal for Private Enterprises sets standards in the field of equal opportunities and includes a comprehensive method developed and implemented by UNDP in 12 countries, including over 1,800 companies worldwide, to effect change in organizational culture by introducing policies and practices to ensure gender equality, and thereby dignified working conditions for women. The Seal offers private companies a framework to strengthen organizational mechanisms for introducing gender equality in order to reduce gender differences and create fair working conditions for both women and men. In addition, the gender equality standard provides companies with the information and tools to become agents of change by offering working conditions that promote gender equality, while increasing their productivity and economic profits. Past experiences show that the combined effects of raising awareness about gender equality, capacity building and participatory processes that are established during the implementation of gender equality standards, in addition to improving the status of women in the workplace, often result in improved productivity for the company, reducing absenteeism and ensuring a more inclusive working environment for all. Also, reaching the goals of the standards included in the Seal has a positive impact on the overall competitiveness and business operations of a private company, both in domestic and foreign markets. It is recommended to deepen and expand the work on the implementation of the Gender Equality Seal for public and private institutions in BiH under the leadership of the Agency for Gender Equality of the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with UNDP.

Recommendation 8:

Work on eliminating gender stereotypes

Initiatives like the Women Forum for Development confirm that tireless work is needed to raise awareness and remove gender stereotypes, transform patriarchal social norms and prevent retrograde trends when it comes to the status of women and girls in society and in the labour market. Parallel work on these issues will speed up work on removing structural obstacles that slow down work on achieving *de facto* gender equality despite long-term work on mainstreaming, gender-sensitive legislation, application of quotas and tireless work of competent institutions and the non-governmental sector.

Endnotes

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