

Gender equality in the EU candidate countries

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Abstract: *The article is focused on the analysis of selected indicators to reveal the gender equality aspects in the EU candidate countries in comparison with the EU member states average in the past ten years. Since gender balance is among the priorities of the majority of government all over the world and it is an important instrument to ensure sustainable development and growth, identifying the gaps and enhancing the potential of women will contribute to significant progress and economic development around the world. Besides analyzing the structure of employment considering the structure of population, via indirect indicators such as mortality rate the quality of life for women in EU candidate countries will be compared. Also, will be considered the evolution of active women in total labour force and in comparison, with female population as well as women's vulnerability in EU candidate countries and potential candidate Georgia. The effort estimated in number of procedures and cost of start-up procedures as share of GNI per capita will be compared, and women's representation in top and middle management will be compared as well.*

Kew words: gender equality, EU candidate countries, women enhancement, gender gap, female employment

Gender equality is a major concern of policy makers around the world. Numbered five under Sustainable Development Goals, it aims to Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. In the light of the recent evolution at the global level, including the COVID-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine, energy crises etc., it is now obvious that countries will not be able to achieve gender equality by 2030. On the contrary in many areas the gender gap has even widened. In the pandemic in many countries, women faced major problems with access to health services, especially in countries with low income, moreover in many countries was registered an increase of violence against women during the pandemic.

Thus, in order to achieve gender equality, it is needed a stronger commitment from governments to promote policies, allocate appropriate budgets and enhance capacity of the corresponding institutions in order to achieve better results in achieving progress in ensuring gender equality.

As per findings of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022, it was revealed that at the international level 26% of women aged 15 and older have faced physical and/or sexual violence at least once, in a 2021 survey conducted in thirteen countries, 45% of women reported that either they or someone they know were subject to violence starting with the pandemic period; almost 20% of women were married earlier than at the age of 18 in the year 2021, there was registered some progress related to women representation in national parliaments, so as of 1 January 2022 the share of women in national parliaments till 26,2% from 22,4% in the year 2015. The share is slightly bigger with about 33% when it comes to women representation in local governments. The share of women in managerial positions, although registered a slight increase till 28,3% in 2020, the same level as in 2019, from 27,2% in 2015, still is a low share. Another important finding of the report is that only 26% of the countries in the period 2018 and 2021 implemented comprehensive systems to track public allocations for gender equality, while 59% reported to have some components of such a system, and 15% reported not to have the minimum elements of such a system.¹

An important role on the global arena in promoting gender equality is played by UN Women that is a leader in promoting and coordinating UN work on gender equality in all agreements related to 2030 Agenda.

Among key players in promoting gender equality is also European Union that is currently implementing the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, following the implementation of previous Strategy on Gender Equality from 2016-2019.²

Among UN-EU joint initiatives is the Spotlight Initiative that is a global, multi-year initiative aiming at eliminating all forms of violence against women in girls, in this regards an initial investment of 500 million euros is made, with EU contributing the majority of funds, other donors will also be invited to the Initiative in order to extend its scope and applicability.³

Although, EU registered considerable progress in ensuring gender equality, and is above the world average for many indicators, still there are gender gaps when it comes to labour market, as women still register a higher share in lower paid sectors and a much lower share in the decision-making positions. Among the key objectives of the EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 are: eliminating gender-based violence, challenging gender stereotypes, eliminating gender gaps in the labour market, ensuring equal pay, equal participation in different sectors of the economy, eliminating gender inequality and ensuring gender equality in politics and managerial positions.⁴

¹ United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022. ISBN: 978-92-1-101448-8

² EU Gender Equality Strategy available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en (accessed on 24 November 2022)

³ UN Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. <https://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/> (accessed on 26 November 2022)

⁴ EU Gender Equality Strategy available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en (accessed on 24 November 2022)

Further will be analysed several main indicators in order to highlight the evolution and current status related to gender equality in EU candidate countries in comparison with the EU average as per data availability in the period 2012-2021.

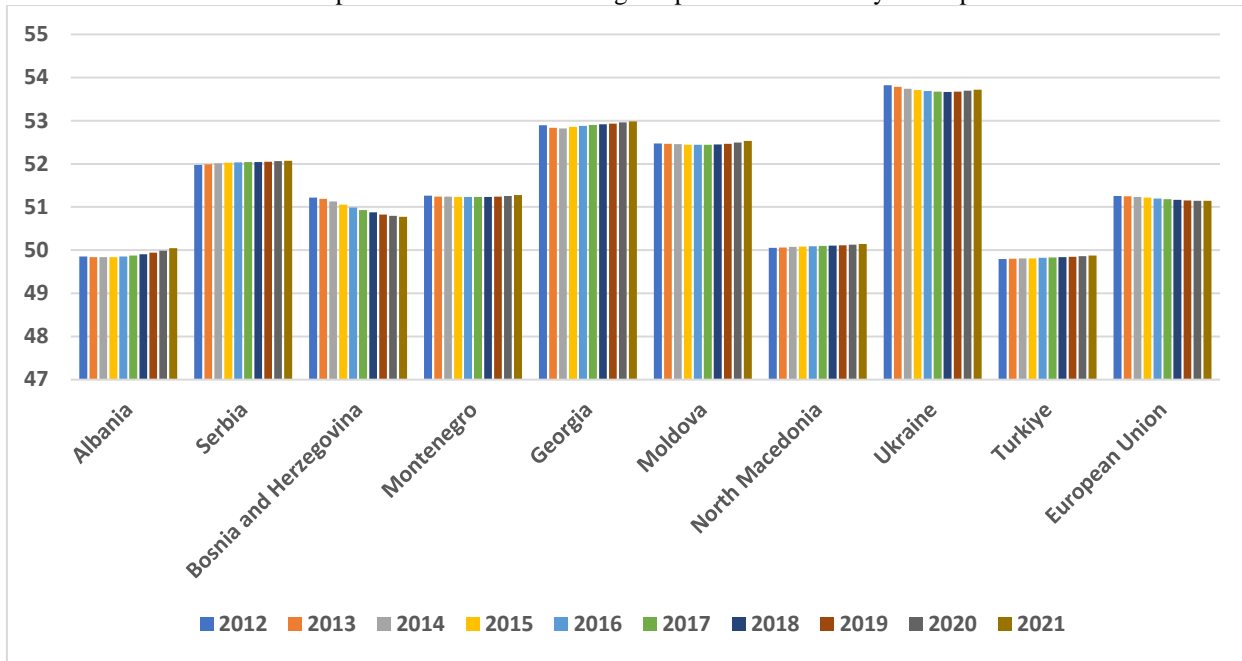


Figure nr. 1 The evolution of share of female population in EU, EU candidate countries and potential candidate country Georgia, (% of total population), 2012-2021

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

Among EU member states, EU candidate countries and potential candidate country Georgia, Ukraine is situated on the first place registering the highest share of female population in total population registering a share of 53,8% in 2012 and a share of 53,7% in 2021; followed by Georgia registering a slight increase from 52,9% in 2012 till 52,98% in 2021. On the third place is situated Moldova with a slight increase from 52,47% in 2012 till 52,53% in 2021, on the fourth place is Serbia with similar levels in the analysed period: 51,97% in 2012 and 52% in 2021. EU and Montenegro register similar shares of women in total population, while Montenegro registered a slight increase from 51,27% in 2012 till 51,28% in 2021, EU recorded a slight decrease from 51,27% in 2012 till 51,14% in 2021. The country with the lowest share of women in total population is Turkiye with 49,8% in 2012 and 49,88% in 2021, followed by Albania (50,05% in 2021), North Macedonia (50,14% in 2021) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (50,77% in 2021), the last one also registering the highest decrease of the share of female population from 2012 (51,22%).

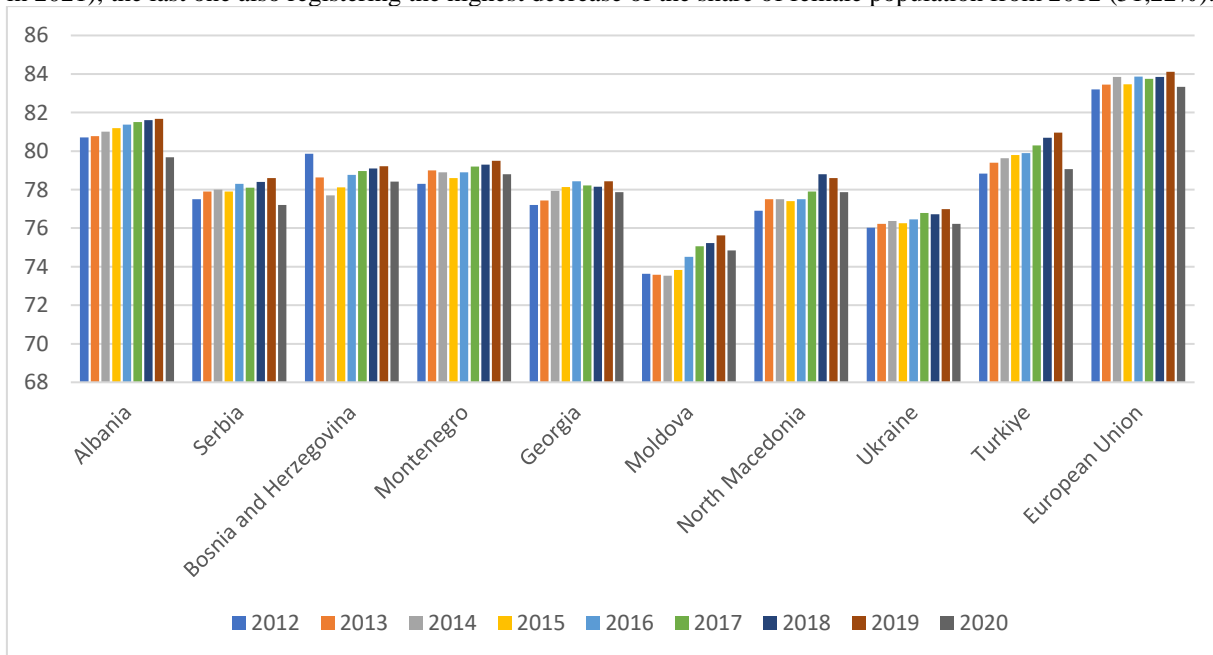


Figure nr. 2. Life expectancy at birth of women in the EU member states and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2021 (years)

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

Considering the data on life expectancy at birth for women in the analysed countries, that takes into account a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life, EU would be on the first place with a positive trend in terms of life expectancy with the exception of the pandemic 2020 year when it decreased till 83,32 years from 84,1 years in 2019. On the second place is situated Albania with life expectancy at birth for women increasing from 80,7 years in 2012 till 81,7 years in 2019, and declining till 79,7 years in 2020. On the third place is situated Turkiye with 79 years in 2020, following a decline from 80,9 years in 2019, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina with 78,4 years in 2020, declining from 79,2 years in 2019. The country with the lowest life expectancy at birth of women is Moldova registering an increase from 73,6 years in 2012 till 75,6 years in 2019, and a decline till 74,9 years in 2020 with a life expectancy at birth of women with 1,3 years less than in Ukraine with is the next one in order, and with 8,45 years less than EU average in 2020. Among considered countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the one that registered a significant decline in comparison with the level registered in 2012 – 79,9 years and in 2020 – 78,4 years.

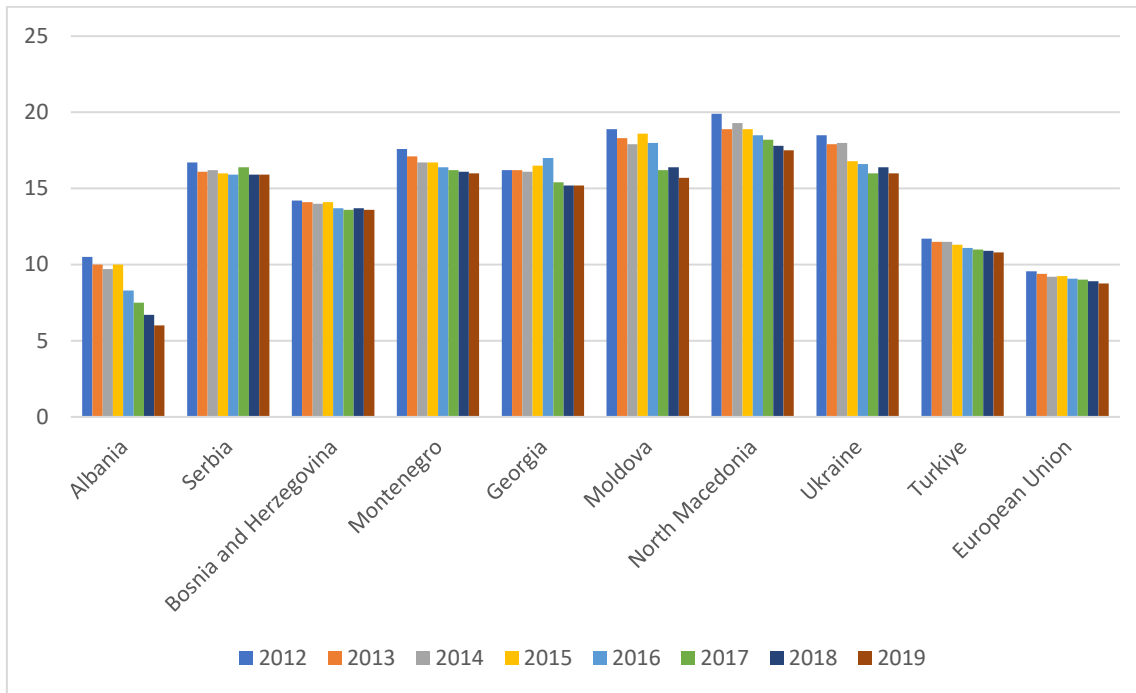


Figure nr. 3 Mortality from CVD, cancer, diabetes or CRD between exact ages 30 and 70, female (%), in EU member states and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2019

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

Among analysed countries, the lowest mortality rate of women aged 30 who would die before 70th birthday from any cardiovascular disease (CRD), cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease (CRD) assuming that she would experience current mortality rates at every age and would not die from any other cause of death, as per World Health Organization Data, is registered by Albania with 6% in 2019 registering a decline since 2012, when it registered 10,5%. On the second place with lowest mortality rate in this category is EU with 8,8% in 2019 similarly registering a decrease from 2012 when a rate of 9,55% was registered, followed by Turkiye with a mortality from CVD, cancer, diabetes or CRD of 10,8% in 2019 declining from 11,7% in 2012. On the opposite side is North Macedonia that registered the highest mortality between ages 30 and 70, of 19,9% in 2012 and declining till 17,5% in 2019, followed by Montenegro and Ukraine with equal rates in 2019 of 16%, both registering decline from 2012 17,6% - Montenegro and from 18,5% - Ukraine. Except for Albania, all the other candidate countries and Georgia, potential candidate register mortality from CVD, cancer, diabetes or CRD among women between ages 30 and 70 higher than the EU average. It is to be noted that all countries registered a decline of the indicator in the period 2012-2019.

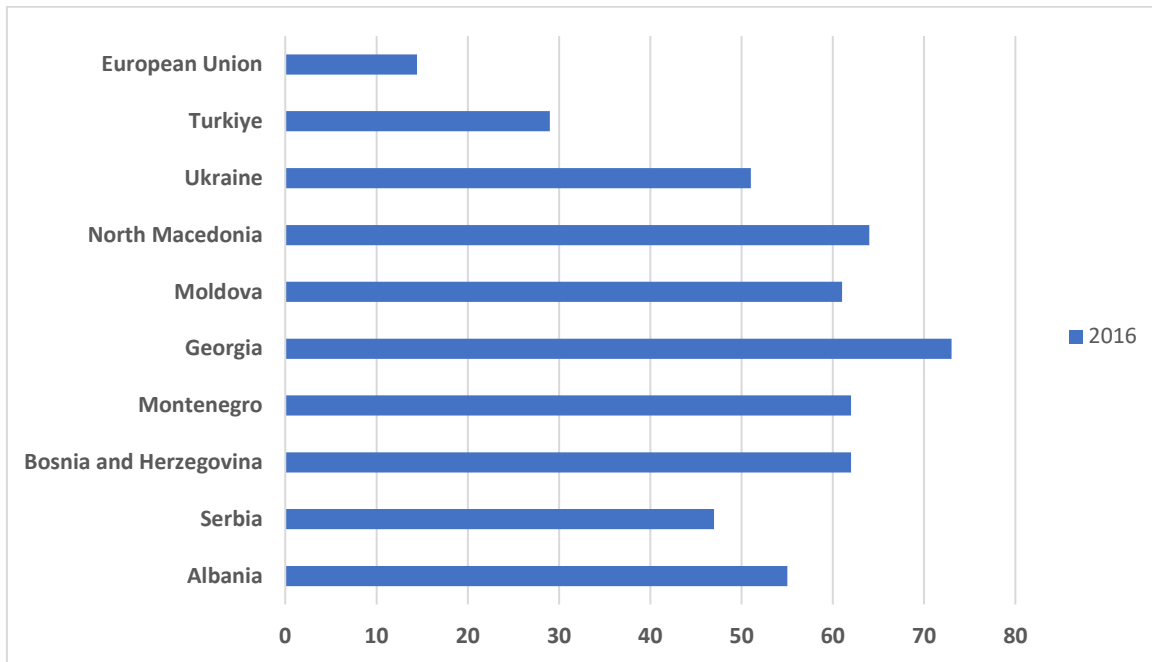


Figure nr. 4 Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution, age-standardized, female (per 100,000 female population), EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2019

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

From the point of view of mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution among women per 100 000 female population, EU is on the first place registering the lowest mortality rate of 14,5 in 2016, the latest available data for this indicator, followed by Turkiye on the second place with 29, and Serbia - 47. The countries registering the highest mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution are: Georgia – 73, followed by North Macedonia with 64 women per 100 000 female population.

Further will be analysed the structure of labour market in EU and EU candidate countries.

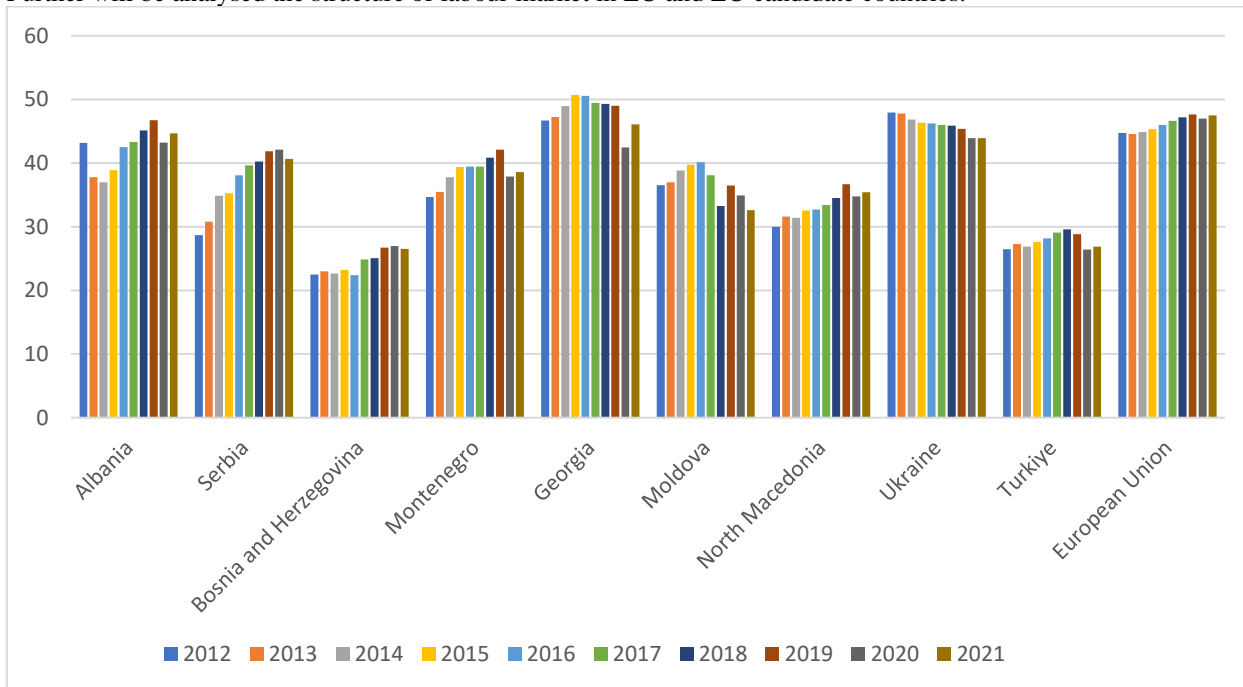


Figure nr. 5 Employment to population ratio, 15+, female (%), EU and EU candidate countries, 2012-2021

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

There was registered a heterogeneous evolution in terms of employment to population ratio for women aged 15 and up in 2012-2021. EU, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia registered an increase of this indicator for the majority of the period, with the exception of pandemic 2020 year, while Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia registered a decline, in particular from 2016 till 2021. In 2021 EU registered the highest rate of employment to population among women – of 47,5%, thus EU has the highest share

of economically active women registering an increase from 44,7% registered in 2012, followed by Georgia – 46% in 2021, declining from 46,7% in 2012, registering the peak of 50,7% in 2015. On the third place is situated Albania with 44,7% in 2021 increasing from 43% in 2012, with the peak of 46,8% in 2019. Ukraine reached 43,9% in 2021 declining from 47,9% in 2012. The countries that register the lowest share of economically active women are: Bosnia and Herzegovina – 26,5% in 2021 increasing from 22,5% in 2012; followed by Turkiye with 26,9% in 2021, registering a decline from 2017 when it registered 29%, and Moldova – 32,6% in 2021, declining from 36,5% in 2012 with a peak being registered in 2016 of 40,1%. The difference between the share of economically active women between EU members and Bosnia and Herzegovina that is the candidate country with the lowest indicator in 2021 is 21%.

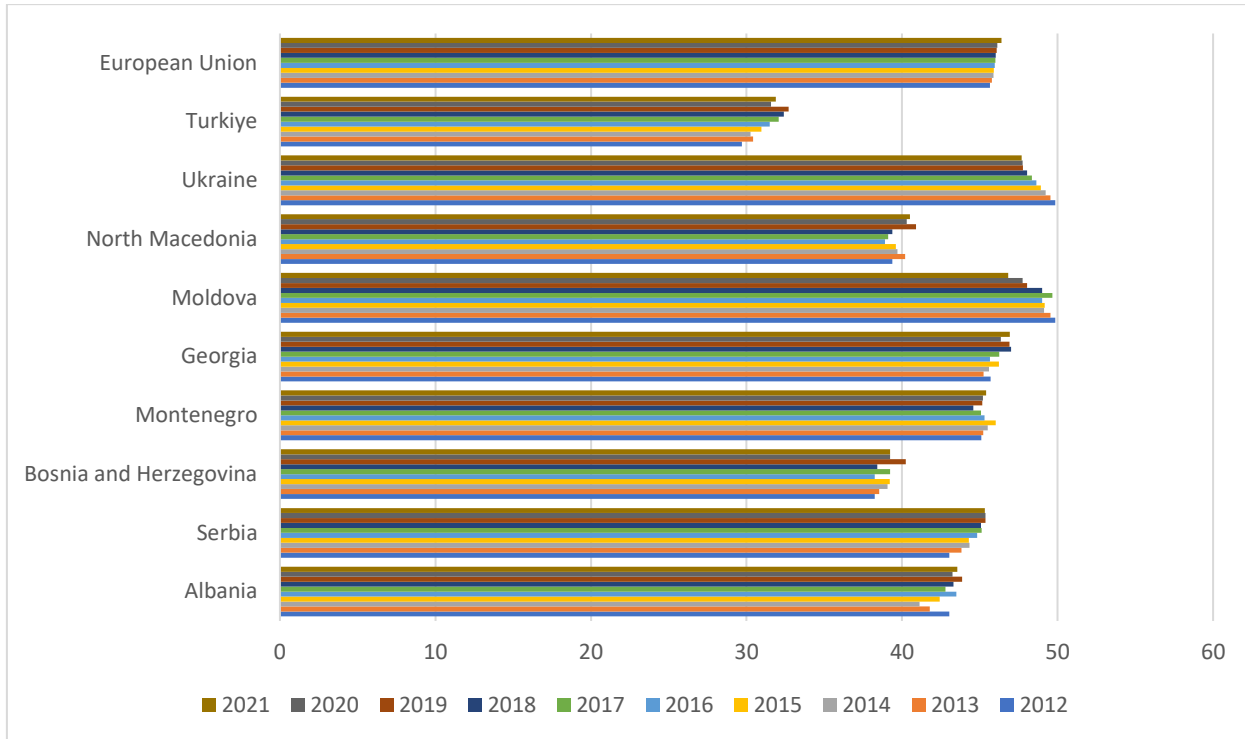


Figure nr. 6. Share of female labour force, (% of total labor force) in EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012 -2021
Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

Considering the evolution of female labour force as a share of the total labour force, there is a different ranking of these countries. So, on the first place is situated Ukraine with a share of active women in the total labour force of 47,7% in 2021, declining from 49,9% in 2012, followed by Georgia with 46,9% in 2021, increasing from 45,7% in 2012. On the third place is situated Moldova with 46,8% in 2021, declining from 49,85% in 2012, similar to Ukraine. EU is ranked fourth in 2021 – with 46,4% registering an increase from 45,6% in 2012. Montenegro and Serbia registered similar values in 2021, slightly above 45%, with Serbia registering higher increase in comparison with the year 2012. The countries that registered the lowest share of female labour force in 2021 are: Turkiye – 31,9%, following a decline in 2020 after a peak registered in 2019 of 32,7%, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 39,2% in 2021 with similar evolution, a peak registered in 2019 of 40,2% followed by decline in pandemic 2020. From the analysed countries the only exceptions that registered a slight increase of the share of female labour force in 2020 were EU countries, Serbia and Montenegro, in comparison with the other candidate countries that registered a decline in the year 2020.

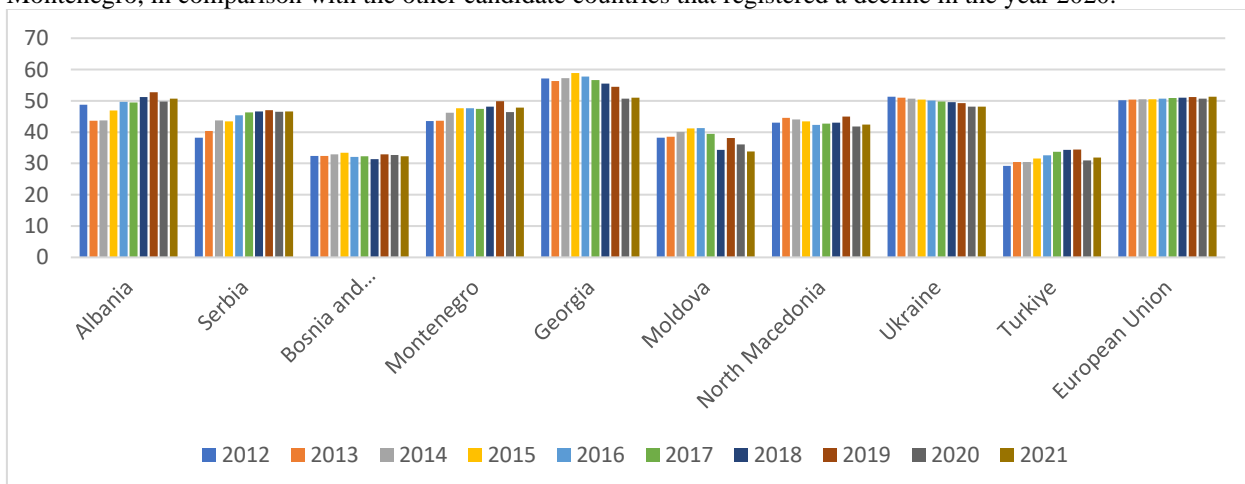


Figure nr.7 Labour force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+), EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2021

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

In the figure above is presented the evolution in the period 2012-2021 of the share of economically active women above age of 15. In 2021 on the first place are situated EU countries with 51,33% following an increase from 50,2% in 2012. On the second place is situated Georgia that registered a rate of 50,99% in 2021 following a decline from the peak registered in 2015 of 58,9% . Albania with 50,7% in 2021 ranked third, following a decline in 2020 from the peak registered in 2019 of 52,7% . The countries that registered the lowest share of economically active women in women aged 15 and older are: Turkiye with 31,8% in 2021 that suffered a significant decline in 2020 of more than 3% from 34,4% registered in 2019, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina with 32,3% in 2021, registering a steady evolution with minor fluctuations in the period 2012-2021. The difference in the women labour force participation rate between EU ranked first from the analysed countries and Turkiye ranked last is 19,5% in 2021.

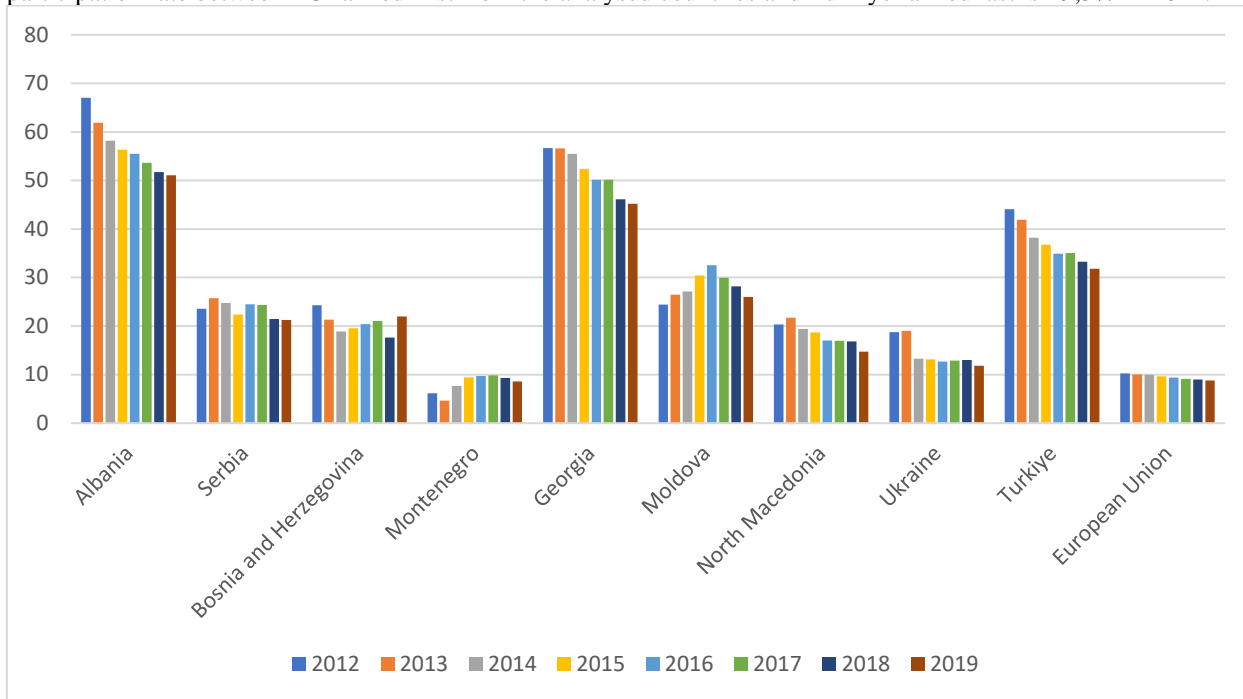


Figure nr. 8. Vulnerable employment, female (% of female employment) in EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2019

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

There is a much higher variation when it comes to vulnerable employment as a share of total female employment, it varying from as low as 8,57% for Montenegro till 51% for Albania in 2019. On the first place registering the lowest vulnerability rate, that is determined as the share of female contributing family workers and own-account workers in total employment is situated Montenegro with 8,57% in 2019 declining from 9,86% peak registered in 2017, but registering an increase in comparison with 2012 level of 6,16%, while the lowest level was registered in 2013 – of only 4,67%. On the second place is situated EU with a share of vulnerable women employment in 2019 of 8,82% declining from 10.23% in 2012. The next country with lowest vulnerability rate is Ukraine – 11,8% in 2019, declining significantly from 18,7% in 2012. On the opposite side, the countries that register the highest vulnerability rate among employed women are: Albania with 51,05% in 2019, declining from 67,04% in 2012, Georgia – with 45,2% in 2019 declining from 56,7% in 2012, Turkiye – 31,8% in 2019, declining from 44,1% in 2012, followed by Moldova with 26% in 2019 declining from the peak of 32,5% registered in 2016. From EU candidate countries only Montenegro registered an employment vulnerability among women lower than the EU average, while the rest have much higher shares. For example, the share of vulnerable female employment in Albania is almost six times higher than the one of Montenegro or EU, and the share of vulnerable female employment in Georgia is 5,2 times bigger than the one of Montenegro or EU in 2019.

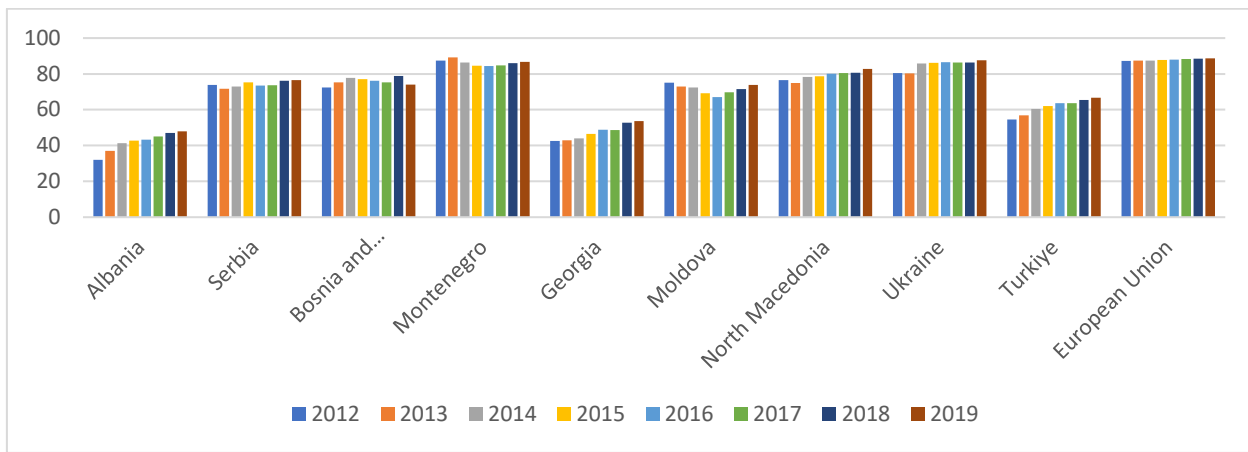


Figure nr. 9. Wage and salaried workers, female (% of female employment), EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2019

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

A similar ranking is observed when it comes to the share of wage and salaried workers among women, with the highest share being registered by EU countries – 88,7% in 2019 registering a slight increase in comparison with 2012 (87,2%), followed by Ukraine – 87,6% in 2019, increasing from 80,5% in 2012, and Montenegro – 86,8% in 2019, increasing from 87,4% in 2012. North Macedonia ranks fourth with 82,7% of the share of waged and salaried women in total female employment, registering an increase from 76,5% in 2012. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova registered in 2019 correspondingly 76,5%, 74,02% and 73,82%. The countries that registered the lowest shares in wage and salaried workers in total women employment are: Albania – 47,8% in 2019, Georgia – 53,7% in 2019 and Turkiye – 66,71%, all of them registering an increase from 2012, thus registering progress in terms of increase of the share of employment with less vulnerability. From the analysed countries the ones that registered in 2019 a share lower than in 2012 were Montenegro and Moldova.

Further will be considered the complexity of starting a business for women in these countries. In the figure below is presented the number of required start-up procedures to register a business, including interactions to obtain necessary permits, licenses etc. and to complete all inscriptions, verifications and notifications to start operations.

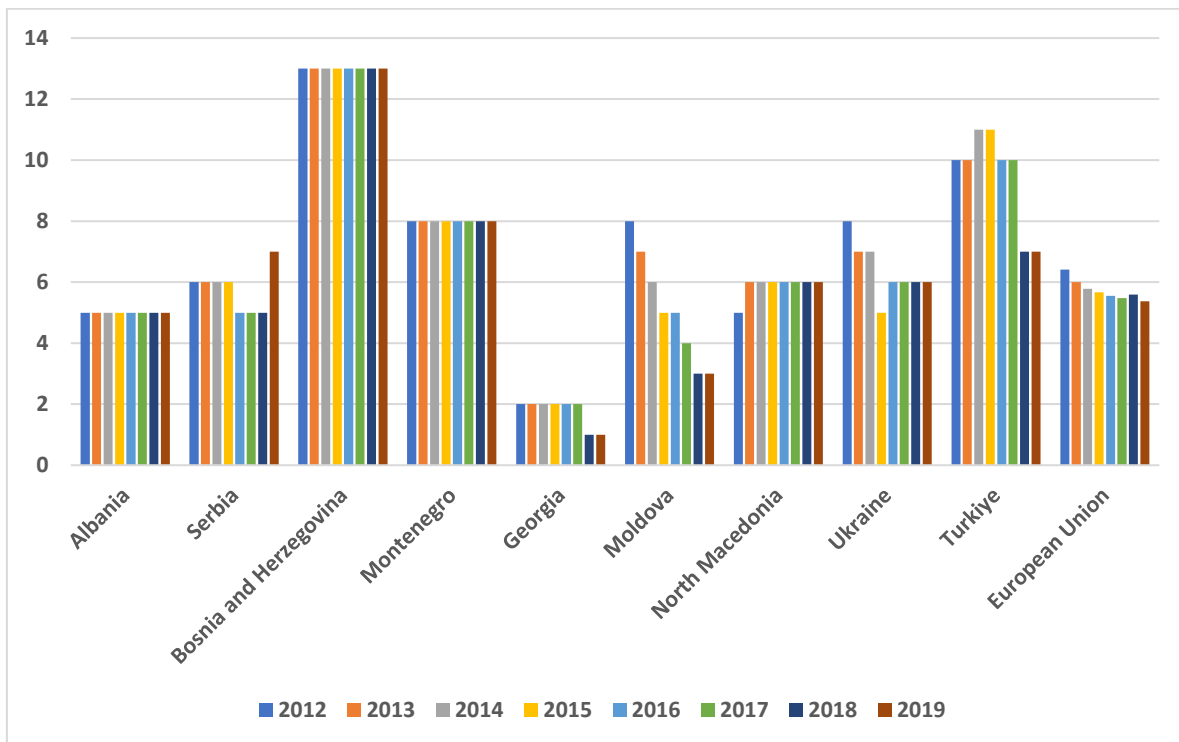


Figure nr. 10. Start-up procedures to register a business, female (number), EU and EU candidate countries and Georgia, 2012-2019

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

Out of EU and EU candidate countries and potential candidate Georgia, in 2019 the lowest number of required start-up procedures to register a business by women were recorded in Georgia – only 1 since 2018, being reduced from 2 required in the period 2012-2017, the next country performing best after Georgia with reduced number of required procedures is Moldova with 3 procedures required in 2019 in comparison with 8 required in 2012. On the third place is situated Albania with 5 procedures required to register a business in 2019, equal with the number required since 2012. Next comes EU average – with a number of 5,37 procedures in 2019, decreasing from 6,4 in 2012. North Macedonia and Ukraine require the same number of procedures – 6 in 2019 in comparison with 5 required in 2012 and 8 required in 2012 correspondingly. Serbia and Turkiye required 7 procedures to register a business in 2019 in comparison with 5 in 2012 and 10 in 2012 correspondingly. The country that requires the highest number of procedures to register a business in Bosnia and Herzegovina – 13 in 2019, keeping the same number since 2012. Three countries, Georgia, Moldova and Albania have a lower number of required procedures to register a business for women in comparison with EU average, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is the country with the highest number of required procedures, being 13 times bigger than Georgia and 2,4 times higher than the EU average number of procedures.

In the below chart is presented the cost of start-up procedures for female as a share of GNI per capita that will help us to assess the complexity of registering a business from the point of view of required procedures, but also the financial effort and cost burden for registering a business.

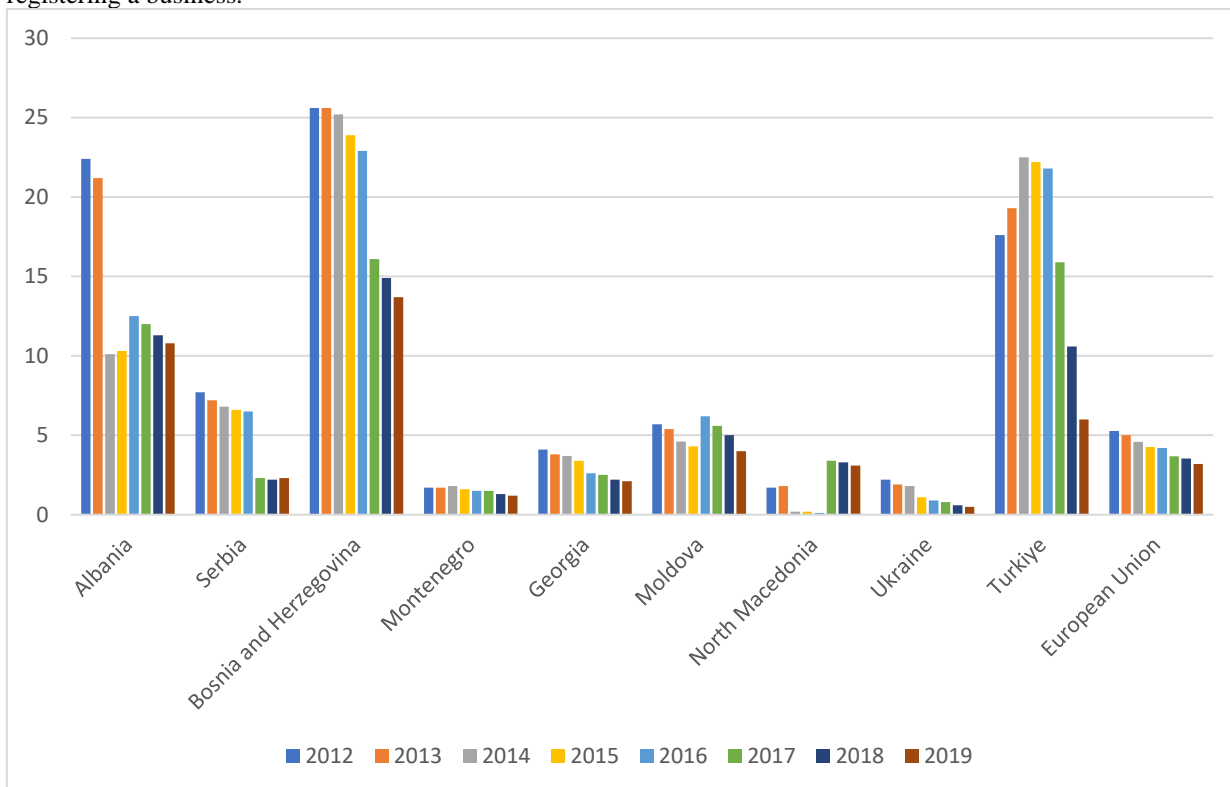


Figure nr. 11. Cost of business start-up procedures, female (% of GNI per capita)

Source: elaborated by the author based on the data from

<https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SE.ENR.PRSC.FM.ZS&country=#>

The highest cost of business start-up procedures for women is registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2019 – of 13,7%, registering a considerable decline from the level of 25,6% registered in 2012 (nearly 2 times less), followed by Albania – with 10,8% in 2019, similarly registering a considerable reduction in comparison with the cost registered in 2012 – 22,4% (more than twice), followed by Turkiye – with a cost of 6% in 2019 declining from 17,6% in 2012 (nearly 3 times reduction), and Moldova with 4% in 2019 in comparison with 5,7% in 2012. EU countries register an average of 3,2% in 2019 declining from 5,3% in 2012. The leader in terms of the lowest cost of business start-up by women is Ukraine with 0,5% in 2019 (6,4 times less in comparison with EU average), declining from 2,2% in 2012, followed by Montenegro with 1,2% in 2019, declining from 1,7% in 2012. Next is situated Georgia with 2,1% of GNI per capita cost of business start-up in 2019 decreasing from 4,1% in 2012, followed by Serbia with 2,3% in 2019 in comparison with 7,7% in 2012, and North Macedonia – 3,1% in 2019 in comparison with 1,7% in 2012. Thus 4 candidate countries register higher costs than the EU average, and 5 countries register lower costs of business start-up in comparison with EU. In 2019 Ukraine that registered lowest costs of business start-up for women, had a cost 27 times lower in comparison with Bosnia and Herzegovina that registered costs out of all analysed countries. It is to be highlighted that all countries registered a decrease of the costs in the period 2012-2019, except for North Macedonia that registered an increase of costs. Also, North Macedonia is the country that registered the lowest cost of business start-up in the analysed period, in particular in 2016 – 0,1%. While the country that registered the highest decline of costs in 2012-2019 was Ukraine with 4,4 times decline in costs.

Considering the share of women in senior and middle management in total employment, as per data available in the World Bank databank, the country with the highest share of women in senior and middle management is Albania – 41,3% in 2019 – increasing

from 14,7% in 2012, followed by Serbia for which data is available for 2021 as well, when was registered a share of 34,2% increasing from 29,1% in 2012.

Table nr. 1 Female share of employment in senior and middle management (%)

Countries	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Albania	14.7	29.3	20.6	19.3	24	22.6	31.6	41.3
Serbia	29.1	32.7	31.5	30.9	30.9	30.3	29.8	33.6	32.6	34.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	23	21.4	24.2	24.2	18.8	18.8	26.1	25.4	24.9	20.2
Montenegro	23.3	22.7	24.6	17.6	24.9	25.4	23.8	28.2	25.3	..
Georgia	31	32.8	33.8	38.8	44.2	32	35.7	36.7	33.8	..
North Macedonia	23.3	24.7	26	23	27.3	22.5	28.2	28.2	24.2	25
Turkiye	14.3	16.6	15.6	14.4	16.7	17.3	16.3	17.5	19.3	20.7

Source: retrieved from <https://databank.worldbank.org/>

On the third place is situated Georgia that registered a share of 33,8% in 2020 declining from 36,7% in 2019, but being higher in comparison with the share of 31% registered in 2012. In case of Georgia the peak was registered in 2016 – 44,2%. On the fourth place is situated Montenegro – 25,3% in 2020 declining from 28,2% in 2019, but registering an increase in comparison with 2012 (23,3%). North Macedonia registered a share of women in senior and middle management of 25% in 2021, declining in 2020 till 24,2% from the peak of 28,2% in 2019, but increasing in comparison with 23,3% in 2012. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Turkiye registered shares slightly above 20% in 2021, while Bosnia and Herzegovina registered a decline in comparison with the period 2012-2020, except for 2016-2017, Turkiye registered the highest share in 2021 in comparison with the 2012-2020. Thus, it is visible that in the majority of EU candidate countries women are underrepresented in senior and middle management.

As per data available in the WB databank, the share of firms with women top managers is even lower, and data available for the year 2013 and 2019 show that North Macedonia is the candidate country with the highest share of firms with women top managers in 2019 – 21,3% increasing from 16,8% in 2013, followed by Moldova with 18,6% in 2019 decreasing from 22,4% in 2013. On the third place is situated Serbia with 18,2% in 2019 increasing from 15,3% in 2013, followed by Albania with similar level – 18,1% in 2019 up from 12,2% in 2013. Ukraine registered a share of 17,7% in 2019, declining from 20,9% in 2013, Bosnia and Herzegovina had the same position in 2019 as in 2013 – 16,6%, followed by Georgia with 16,5% declining from 32,7% in 2013 (twice less in 2019 than in 2013), followed by Montenegro – 15% in 2019 declining from 19,2% in 2013 and on the last position in Turkiye with only 3,9% of firms with women top managers declining from 5,5% in 2013.⁵ So, in terms of top management women are underrepresented even at a higher scale, on the extreme side being Turkiye with less than 4% women in top management and North Macedonia ranking first among candidate countries for which data is available with slightly above 21% in 2019.

Conclusion

The analysed data reveal a considerable variation among EU candidate states and potential candidate Georgia regarding gender equality, if some indicators some of EU candidate countries register values similar or even above the EU average, for the majority of considered indicators the values are below the EU countries average.

In terms of life expectancy at birth of women, all candidate countries register values below the EU average, and Moldova is the country registering the lowest value of 74,9 years in 2020 with 8,45 years less than EU average in 2020.

Regarding the mortality from CVD, cancer, diabetes or CRD among women between ages 30 and 70 higher, except for Albania, all the other candidate countries and Georgia, registered rates higher than the EU average in 2019. At the same time, a positive factor is that all countries registered a decline of the indicator in the period 2012-2019 which proves some progress in this area, but not yet at the expected levels.

There was registered a heterogeneous evolution in terms of employment to population ratio for women aged 15 and older in 2012-2021. All EU candidate countries registering in 2021 shares lower than EU member states average, of 47,5% - economically active women. Georgia and Albania are next ones after EU in terms of share of economically active women in 2021, and on the opposite side is Bosnia and Herzegovina – 26,5%, having a share with 21% lower than EU average.

The ranking is slightly changed if to consider the female labour force as a share of total labour force. From this perspective, Ukraine will register higher share than EU member states, with 47,7% active women in 2021, followed by Georgia (46,9% in 2021), on the third place is Moldova (46,8% in 2021) and EU is on the fourth place among analysed countries – with 46,4% in 2021. From the analysed countries the only exceptions that registered a slight increase of the share of female labour force in 2020 were EU countries, Serbia and Montenegro, in comparison with the other candidate countries that registered a decline in the year 2020.

From the point of view of the share of economically active women above the age of 15, the first in the ranking will be EU registering 51,33% in 2021, the EU candidate countries registering shares below the EU average, with Georgia and Albania having shares close to the EU average of 50,99% and 50,7% correspondingly. Turkiye registered the lowest share with 19,5% lower than the EU average.

The best performing EU candidate country in terms of lower share of vulnerable employment in total female employment is Montenegro with only 8,57% in 2019, followed by EU member states with an average of 8,82% in 2019. The country that registered the highest vulnerable employment rate is Albania with 51,05% in 2019, almost six times higher than the one of Montenegro or EU, and the share of vulnerable female employment in Georgia is 5,2 times bigger than the one of Montenegro or EU in 2019.

⁵ World Bank DataBank. <https://databank.worldbank.org/> (accessed on 4 January 2023)

Considering the share of wage and salaried workers among women, EU member states are on the first place among analysed countries with a share of 88,7% in 2019, followed by Ukraine (87,6%), Montenegro (86,8%), and on the opposite side is situated Albania with 47,8% in 2019, which is a sign of higher instability risk for women in this country.

From the perspective of starting a business by women, mainly the number of procedures required to register a business, Georgia is ranked 1st with only 1 procedure required in 2019, followed by Moldova (3 procedures) and Albania – with 5 procedures, while EU average number of procedures required to register a business is 5,37 in 2019, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is the country with the highest number of required procedures, being 13 times bigger than Georgia and 2,4 times higher than the EU average number of required procedures.

The leader in terms of the lowest cost of business start-up by women is Ukraine with 0,5% in 2019 (6,4 times less in comparison with EU average), followed by Montenegro with 1,2% in 2019, on the third place is Georgia with 2,1% of GNI per capita cost of business start-up in 2019, followed by Serbia with 2,3% in 2019, and North Macedonia – 3,1% in 2019. Thus 5 countries register lower costs of business start-up in comparison with EU and 4 candidate countries register higher costs than the EU average in 2019. Ukraine that registered lowest costs of business start-up for women, had a cost 27 times lower in comparison with Bosnia and Herzegovina that registered the highest costs in 2019. It is to be highlighted that all countries registered a decrease of the costs in the period 2012-2019, except for North Macedonia that registered an increase of costs. The country that registered the highest decline of costs in 2012-2019 was Ukraine with 4,4 times decline in costs.

In terms of top management women are underrepresented even at a higher scale in comparison with share of women in senior and middle management. Among EU candidate countries on the extreme side being Turkiye with less than 4% women in top management and the best placed is North Macedonia ranking first among candidate countries for which data is available for 2019 with a share slightly above 21%.

Although EU candidate countries have registered some positive trends in the last ten years in terms of ensuring gender equality, for some countries and some indicators the values being even above EU average, life for example cost of business start-up, or share of female labour force, for the majority of analysed indicators the values of EU candidate countries are lower than EU average, sometimes even several times lower. A significant gender inequality is highlighted by the very low share of women in top management where the best ranked, North Macedonia in 2019 registered 21%, while Turkiye – on the last place – only 4%.

The analysis shows that significant effort is still required at the policy level, institutional, and implementation level with corresponding allocation of required budget and resources in order to reduce gender inequalities and correspondingly contribute to sustainable development, but in many of the analysed countries there is an important drawback that is determined by the lack of political will in conducting sound reforms that would lead to reducing gender inequality and women empowerment.

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