



## The barriers in SEE countries to achieving gender balance

GEMAresearch in companieslocated in theSouth/EastEuropean (SEE) countries, specificallyBulgaria, Croatia, MacedoniaandSloveniadiscoveredthatmainbarriers to achievengender balance are organisationalculturesandpractices, women`sviewsofthemselves, lackofimportanceattached to thetopic, genderstereotypes, multiple rolesandwork-life balance andalsopatriarchal social norms.

Respondentsagreedthatbarriers to genderdiversity in boardsand top management teams are complex, multi-facetedandinterlinked, andtheyform a strongglasslabyrinth.

### Trapped under the glass ceiling or in the glass labyrinth?

Themetaphor**GlassCeiling**cameintopopularusefollowing a 1996 WallStreetJournalarticlebyCarolHymowitzand Timothy Schellhardt. It describedaninvisiblebarrierwhenwomenclimbedthecorporateladder up to a certainpointbeyondwhichtheycould not progress. More recently, a newmetaphorhas come intousage, thatofthe**GlassLabyrinth**proposedbyAliceEaglyand Linda Carli in 2007. Theyarguethatthe**GlassCeiling**can be mis-leadingbecause it implies a singleobstacle at one point in women`scareerpathswhilethemetaphorof a **GlassLabyrinth**symbolisesthecomplexityofbarriers to succeed, in GEMA researchfindingsevidented as:

A high-levelthemethatmergedfromthe data wasthat**traditional social normsandvalues**create a powerful impediment to womenprogressing to leadershippositions. Eventhough**equalopportunitylegislationexists in allthecountries**, these**deep-seatedtraditions**aboutgenderroles**shapethediscourseandbehaviour** in bothpublicandprivatedomains.



HRVATSKA UDRUGA POSLODAVACA  
CROATIAN EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION



Co-funded by the PROGRESS Programme of the European Union.

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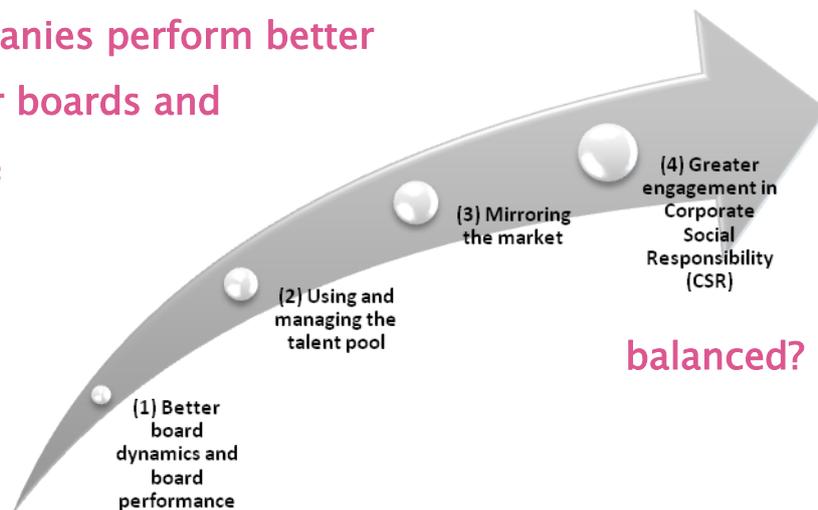
A second high-level theme from our data is **how women view themselves and their career paths.**

Strongly linked with wider socialisation into gender roles, our respondents noted that **many women may not wish to put themselves in the limelight**, underestimate their own abilities or simply do not have enough role models to follow.

These views are reinforced through discourses that **stereotype female leaders**, which are often associated with their perceived femininity, or lack of feminine qualities. Several respondents noted that this form of stereotyping creates a Catch 22 scenario that serves as a barrier to women putting themselves forward for high profile positions.

Finally, there are also **barriers at the organisational level**. First and foremost, respondents stressed that **gender diversity in decision-making teams is not on the agenda of many companies**, and if it is, it tends to have a low priority compared to other initiatives.

**Why companies perform better when their boards and TMT`s are gender-**





## Gender–Equal Management

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In their 2007 landmark study, McKinsey & Company showed that companies with more gender-diverse decision-making teams outperformed the industry average by as much as 48% points on EBIT (Earnings before Interest and Tax). Our results show that: (1) more gender-diverse boards are strongly associated with **strategic task performance**, and a higher proportion of females on board is associated with higher levels of **service task performance**, (2) **talented staff can and do progress**, (3) **women constitute an important consumer group** thus there's a need to capture their voice in top decision-teams, (4) improving gender diversity is important for **social justice** reasons, but there is also a **persuasive business case**. Gender diversity in boardrooms and management teams is associated with better team dynamics and team outcomes which ultimately affect companies' financial and social performance.

In NOVEMBER`s E-NEWSLETTER: Iceland case, author Sonja Robnik, Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and



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