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Gender Disparity Index in European Former Communist States: Assessing the Influence of EU Membership

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Abstract: This research is a reflection on the new challenges in former European communist countries in three areas of gender equality. The analysis employs the gender disparity index (GDI), which encompasses life expectancy, education, and income indices, each equally weighted by gender. The former communist states are categorized into two clusters: the first comprising European Union (EU) member states, and the second consisting of non-EU member states or those in the integration process. The findings indicate pervasive gender-based inequalities across the former European communist bloc. This study offers critical insights for countries seeking EU accession, highlighting the need for targeted policies to address gender disparities in multiple domains. Contrary to the hypothesis positing a connection between feminine cultural values and gender egalitarian practices, the data do not support this assertion. The implications of this research are particularly pertinent for aspiring EU member states, who must navigate issues of monopolism while striving to establish effective principles of business efficiency.



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1. Introduction

In the European context, there exists a demographic predominance of women over men, underscoring the significance of upholding gender parity and ensuring equivalent rights for all individuals (Tur-Sinai et al. 2022). This limitation of fundamental liberties can be construed as a direct impediment to the genuine economic empowerment of women. Despite considerable progress towards socio-economic development goals, it is noteworthy that none of the European nations have achieved full gender equality, encompassing equal opportunities and entitlements for both genders (Gallego-Sosa et al. 2021; Restrepo et al. 2021).

The failure of bureaucratic communism in Eastern Europe can be fully grasped in terms of economic problems, which have implications on income generation and various outcomes, including life expectancies (Sen 2000). Over the past four decades, the emerging nations of South Eastern Europe (SEE), irrespective of their previous affiliation with the Soviet Union, have earnestly endeavored to bridge the gap separating them from the levels of development observed in more advanced states. An important factor characterizing these emerging nations, distinct from the experiences of Western societies, is the challenge of accessing EU funding. This entails a range of issues stemming from a deficiency in skills and expertise to translate funding programs into straightforward operational guidelines (Mihali et al. 2022).

This investigation divides these nations from SEE into two distinct groups based on their political and economic trajectories. The first cluster encompasses countries in Europe that have emerged from the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, along with two Balkan

nations. The EU Cluster comprises Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In contrast, the non-EU group includes Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Russian Federation, Serbia, and Ukraine.

In SEE, there is a growing recognition among men and public authorities of the pivotal role women play as agents of change. This fundamental acknowledgment signifies a departure from the cultural neglect of women's needs. The opportunity for women to engage in gainful employment outside the home has a profound social impact, contributing to the amelioration of their circumstances (Sen 2000). Urban societies, in particular, foster women's contributions to the collective well-being of the family, concurrently affording women opportunities for skill development in specific domains. This dynamic engenders a collaborative spirit within families, establishing a foundation for a notably egalitarian community.

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of gender disparity levels among European former communist countries, with the objective of discerning the most egalitarian cluster.

In public discourse, the term "gender" often extends beyond binary conceptions of male and female to encompass diverse identities. However, for the sake of precision and clarity in our analysis, it is imperative to explicitly define our terminology. In this context, the term "gender" is employed exclusively to denote the categories of women and men.

Within the European Union, a mosaic of independent states with distinct identities exists, and the decision to integrate former communist states has amplified gender diversity. Presently, the process of Europeanization in post-communist states coincides with the Ukrainian conflict, engendering a climate of heightened tension (Rabbi et al. 2023; Grum and Grum 2023; Zatonatska et al. 2022). Nations that are characterized by robust sustainable development and viewed as pivotal agents in global progress exhibit enhanced efficiency, reduced risk exposure (Moens et al. 2022), and maintain an equilibrium between work and life, leading to heightened satisfaction levels.

Gender disparities, coupled with stress and professional isolation, have the potential to impact employee performance, subsequently affecting both financial and non-financial organizational outcomes (Neculaesei and Tocar 2023). This paper commences with a comprehensive literature review, elucidating the patterns of transition from communism to market-oriented economies, with a particular focus on the gender dynamics in post-communist Europe. Subsequently, we formulate research hypotheses, followed by a conceptual elucidation of the components comprising the gender disparity index (GDI). Lastly, we present our findings, engage in discussions, and proffer recommendations.

We commence from the premise that the European former communist countries constitute a diverse political and social landscape, marked by disparities in income, education, and life expectancies. Notably, there exists substantial variation in these values across different countries, with EU policies exerting a discernible influence on the societies of newly integrated member states, particularly in advancing women's emancipation.

The core objective of our research is to elucidate the extent to which women possess fundamental assets relative to men in contemporary societies of former communist states. This entails gauging the level of integration both genders experience in educational opportunities, as well as evaluating their societal influence vis-à-vis their income progression. Gender parity, underscored by the equitable significance of men and women, can be effectively operationalized to calculate the prevailing state of parity within a nation.

While life expectancy undeniably constitutes a pivotal facet of an individual's well-being, its direct correlation with the fundamental resources underpinning one's social standing is less pronounced. Other determinants influencing an individual's capacity to attain socially recognized success encompass the education and income indices.

Commencing from the premise that devising an index suitable for both highly developed nations and others with differing economic profiles poses significant challenges (Branisa et al. 2009; Plantenga et al. 2009), we have elected to focus on the former communist

countries. This cohort has been bifurcated into two distinct clusters: EU member states and non-EU members. The collapse of communism ushered in a period of transition and developmental uncertainty for the erstwhile states of the Soviet Union.

The triumph of emerging economies within the Eastern European former communist states is intricately linked with the sustainable productivity of their populace. The enduring performance of the workforce is contingent upon the quality of life, education, and income, a dynamic that pertains to both men and women. As a weakness, we agree that in emerging countries, like in our two clusters “where the rule of law is not yet well defined, public institutions operate discretionarily, not automatically, according to free market impulses, and the political factor can influence the lives of individuals more intensely and unpredictably, and, in most cases, with a negative impact on the social welfare of individuals, giving society as a whole an unstable decisional context, with too many elements of informational asymmetry” (Nuță and Nuță 2020).

The data utilized in this study were sourced from reputable international databases and the ensuing results were subjected to rigorous analysis employing the equation modeling technique as propounded by Muresan et al. (2010). The empirical data, drawn from Eurostat, the World Bank, and the Global Economy, spans the period from 2011 to 2021. The focal point of inquiry in this article revolves around assessing the influence of EU membership on the gender disparity index values within the Eastern former communist states.

2. Eastern Europe Transitional and Cultural Pattern

2.1. Evolution of Transition from the Communist Period to the Equalitarian Market Economy

Amidst the temporal expanse spanning the fall of the Roman Empire and the inter-ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia, and more recently, the Ukrainian war, the European continent witnessed its lengthiest period of inter-border tranquility.

The former communist states were under the sway of a singular, omnipotent political party. This communist apparatus held the conviction that it championed the most superlative socio-economic development strategy since the dawn of human civilization. At its core, communism advocated for the collective ownership of all natural resources and forms of property, vested in the nation and, by extension, the singular party. The mature populace was raised within an educational framework wherein propaganda sought to rationalize the purported supremacy of this ideology.

The fulcrum of communist ideology was the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), established in 1922 and subsequently dissolved nearly seven decades later in 1991. In addition to Russia, the Union encompassed 14 additional republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Kumo and Shadrina 2021). Notably, only nine of these socialist republics can be categorically affiliated with Europe, both in terms of geography and political orientation.

During its zenith, following World War II, the Soviet Union held influence over a variety of other European nations. After the dissolution of communism, these nations embarked on a sustained endeavor to enhance their quality of life (Hovakimyan et al. 2021). Subsequent to the revolutionary events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the former communist nations set their sights on reorienting their economies towards the paradigm of a free market system.

Evidently, in countries formerly under the umbrella of the Soviet Union, the communist ideology retained significant influence among a notable faction of political decision-makers. Over time, some of these figures moderated their stance, and in certain cases, underwent a degree of transformation in their authoritarian discourse.

The transition towards a free market system precipitated a slew of social reforms, although in many cases, these reforms proved insufficient in attaining the full trajectory of the Western cluster (Sachs and Woo 2014).

The former member states of the USSR presently operate mixed economies, yet they grapple with pronounced challenges in implementing principles of democracy and gender equality within both businesses and governmental institutions.

In principle, all former communist states concurred to limit the influence of political elite in pivotal social spheres, liberalize their markets, and institute privatization for the vast state enterprises, which proved unequal to Western competition (Chepurenskiy and Szanyi 2022).

Fostering a robust social meritocracy, independent from political affiliations and gender biases, is imperative for a sustainable future. Embracing a system of gender egalitarianism beyond conventional political rhetoric holds the potential to enhance the quality of corporate governance (Song et al. 2022) and facilitate the accession process into the European Union for nations keen on fostering a conducive social climate for long-term growth.

Within the former Soviet Union sphere, a handful of states managed to achieve market liberalization with limited interference from political factors. In the European segment, former communist countries undertook substantial privatization of their national enterprises (Orenstein and Bugarič 2022). Governments sought increased investments to facilitate EU integration, thereby cultivating a management ethos wherein all stakeholders receive equitable recognition for their contributions, regardless of gender or prior political standing.

In the former Soviet bloc, a tendency persists among governments to retain control and favor politically influential clienteles in the sale of companies, rather than engaging strategic investors. Additionally, there is a notable involvement from civil society institutions in the planning process, coupled with a lack of public endorsement for local government initiatives and policies (Tianming et al. 2021).

While some governments made commendable strides in establishing a performance-driven environment conducive to private sector growth, dismantling traditional patriarchal monopolies, characterized by opaque business practices, budgetary support for development, and market-oriented financial systems, remains a challenge.

Across all transitional countries, grappling with bureaucracy, wide scale corruption, and unbridled taxation (Kostadinova 2012) has been an enduring struggle, representing significant barriers to market liberalization and macroeconomic stability.

The states within the former communist cluster benefited from a pre-accession strategy extended to ten candidate countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The impact of this substantial enlargement, encompassing structural policies, budgetary considerations, and the agricultural sector, was elucidated in "The Commission Report—Agenda 2000: For a Stronger and Wider Union." The European institutions imposed the acceptance of the Copenhagen criteria on the aspiring candidates, comprising the following:

- Adherence to the rule of law, safeguarding of human rights, and the establishment of a democratic foundation as vital pillars for the stability of public institutions;
- Cultivation of a functional market economy and the establishment of privately owned enterprises;
- Strengthening of the capacity to navigate the competitive market forces within the EU;
- Wholehearted commitment to the objectives of the European Union, encompassing political union, economic and monetary union, achieved through the acceptance of the *acquis communautaire* (Lane 2007).

The Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, commonly referred to as the Istanbul Convention, represents a significant milestone in international efforts to address gender-based violence. At its core, the convention acknowledges that violence against women is a manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination, rooted in unequal power relations between men and women. By recognizing violence against women as a human rights violation, the convention places an obligation on states to take comprehensive measures to prevent, protect against, and prosecute all forms of such violence (Istanbul Convention 2011).

The Istanbul Convention not only recognizes the prevalence and severity of violence against women but also acknowledges the diverse forms it can take, including domestic violence, sexual violence, and harmful practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Moreover, the convention highlights the role of structural factors, societal attitudes, and cultural norms in perpetuating violence against women, calling for systemic changes to address these underlying drivers.

The fact that nine countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, and Slovakia, have not ratified the Istanbul Convention raises important questions about their commitment to addressing violence against women and upholding gender equality principles.

The non-ratification of the Istanbul Convention by these countries underscores the need for continued advocacy, dialogue, and collaboration at both national and international levels to promote the principles enshrined in the convention. Efforts to raise awareness about the importance of combating violence against women, to advocate for legal and policy reforms and to strengthen support services for survivors remain crucial in advancing gender equality and human rights across these countries and beyond.

The integration of feminine values into Eastern European society holds the potential for a transformative shift, where a balanced and diverse workforce can lead to not only enhanced productivity, but also the emergence of novel technologies and perspectives. This evolution challenges pre-existing notions, marking a step towards a more inclusive and harmonious future.

The EU enlargement and integration process has been marked by a complexity that extends beyond mere geographical expansion. Despite the European Union's commitment to promoting gender equality and perspectives across all its activities, the pre-accession period with Central and Eastern European countries revealed significant shortcomings in this regard. The absence of effective mainstreaming strategies during this phase highlights the challenges and resistance to change within EU policies.

The impediments to implementing mainstreaming strategies within the EU, as observed during the enlargement process, reflect a broader conflict between competing ideas and interests. This conflict inhibits the institutionalization of main principles not only in enlargement policies but also across various other EU policy domains (Bretherton 2001).

However, despite limitations and technocratic approaches to gender mainstreaming reforms, these efforts can serve as important entry points for feminists into state institutions. By engaging with public administrations through mainstreaming initiatives, feminists may cultivate alliances within these structures and advocate for gender equality paradigms (Rawłuszek 2018; Velluti 2014). This, in turn, could lead to a destabilizing impact on existing gender regimes within public administration.

In evaluating the impact of EU gender equality measures on Central and Eastern European countries, it becomes evident that gender initiatives have not only struggled to effect substantial change but have also underscored deeper systemic challenges. Nonetheless, by fostering feminist engagement within public administrations and legitimizing gender equality demands, these initiatives may ultimately contribute to shifting gender equality paradigms within the region.

2.2. Gender Roles in Post-Communist Europe

Gender inequality can be unequivocally characterized as a form of discrimination rooted in biological sex, bereft of any foundation in human rights. The imposition of excessive labor demands on females, epitomized by occupational segregation and discriminatory practices within the labor market (Taheri et al. 2021), serves to stifle the full potential of women's development and hinders their economic empowerment.

Contemporary human rights conventions unequivocally denounce gender-based discrimination, and international laws are increasingly assertive in their pursuit of parity in social standing between men and women, as exemplified by standards set forth by

(OHNCR n.d.), (OECD n.d.), and the (Council of Europe n.d.) in the realms of human rights and gender equality.

Gender disparity is distinct from gender inequality, as it assesses the level of status attained by individuals of both sexes within the specified group of countries and this assessment of status encompasses a suite of direct and apt metrics for inequality (Permanyer 2010; Bericat 2012).

According to The European Institute for Gender Equality (2022), genuine equality must be rooted in the social structure or microsystem, and exemplary practices ought to span national, regional, and local initiatives.

Gender discrimination entails the imposition of restrictions based on gender, resulting in impediments to the exercise of equal human rights. Previous studies have posited that gender stereotyping and organizational factors may contribute to such discrimination (Bobbitt-Zeher 2011). On the contrary, gender inequality constitutes another manifestation of intolerance and inequity, perpetuating a system where one gender is consistently favored and privileged over the other.

In stark contrast, gender equality represents an essential human right, one that is violated by both discrimination and inequality. Although discrimination is staunchly opposed by nearly every political regime, certain cultural and social norms persist, subjecting women and men to distinct gender roles from infancy. In some cultures, boys are typically encouraged to pursue education, while girls are often directed toward domestic responsibilities.

A true manifestation of gender egalitarianism lies in the degree to which a society mitigates disparities in gender roles. Traditional cultures have long entrenched and unequal norms regarding future prospects for young boys and girls, establishing lifelong consequences. Within patriarchal societies, boys receive both moral and financial backing for education, while girls are predominantly primed for household duties. Studies on gender egalitarianism seek to underscore the extent to which an organization or society diminishes gender role disparities, advocating for fairness and parity between genders (Chhokar et al. 2008).

In cultures with a masculine orientation, men typically have greater access to higher income, find smoother pathways to higher-ranking positions, and readily embrace challenges. In such regions, men are expected to exhibit assertiveness, while women are encouraged to dedicate a significant portion of their time to domestic responsibilities, embodying qualities of tenderness and, to some extent, submissiveness (Hofstede and Hofstede 2005; Sugiarti et al. 2021). Conversely, in feminine-oriented countries, both men and women are encouraged to exhibit modesty and a shared concern for enhancing overall quality of life (Gerlach and Eriksson 2021; Gallego-Álvarez and Pucheta-Martínez 2020; Cheryan and Markus 2020).

Over the past decades, all former communist states have navigated numerous social and economic transformations. The populace anticipates innovative policies that will effectively diminish gender disparities, thereby fostering enhanced social and economic landscapes.

The emancipation of women was an integral component of the communist political agenda, with a series of new laws enacted to ensure women's equality in leadership roles and protect their right to participate in political structures (Varbanova 2006). However, following the transition from communism to a free market economic system, there was a notable increase in gender discrimination, evidenced by the reduced participation of women in social, political, and economic spheres (Brown and Poremski 2014; Suad and Afsaneh 2005).

As the transition began in 1991 in the former Soviet Union states, women in the newly independent republics were predominantly concentrated in white-collar sectors such as healthcare, education, and trade. This led to a significant wage gap between men and women, as these sectors, considered nonproductive, were primarily state-funded and

subject to constant budgetary risks. Additionally, the region lagged behind developed countries in terms of labor productivity levels (Vaisburd et al. 2016).

Due to the concentration of women in the lower segment of the income distribution, social inequality increased, exerting an adverse impact on the gender income gap in the former communist states of Europe.

The process of joining the European Union has stimulated significant shifts towards gender equality, primarily through the enactment and revision of legislation and regulations to align with EU standards. However, beyond legislative reforms, EU accession has also exerted an influence on cultural aspects, particularly in SEE. Historically, the integration of women into the economy has followed a complex trajectory, marked by phases of inclusion, exclusion, and reintegration amidst ongoing modernization efforts. Despite marked national differences in women's labor market participation and engagement in part-time work, institutional conditions alone, such as childcare policies, do not adequately explain these variations. Rather, prevailing cultural norms and values regarding gender roles heavily influence women's choices in combining paid and unpaid work (Pfau-Effinger 1998, 2004). While EU accession has catalyzed positive changes in legislation, addressing deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and norms remains imperative for realizing substantive progress towards gender equality in SEE. Furthermore, initiatives like combating violence against women and domestic violence, although introduced as part of EU accession requirements, continue to face resistance in societies where traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched (Lomazzi 2023). Consequently, while legislative reforms are crucial, addressing cultural barriers is essential for fostering meaningful progress towards gender equality in SEE.

According to Hofstede Insights (2023), noticeable disparities exist in the acceptance of gender equality within the former communist cluster (Figure 1). Among the EU member countries, Latvia (score 9) and Lithuania (score 19) exhibit the lowest values, implying a social structure based on meritocracy and a tendency to allocate men and women in equal proportions in decision-making positions. Estonia (30), Bulgaria (40), Croatia (42), Romania (42), and the Czech Republic (57) reflect a blend of traditional and modern attitudes towards gender equality, demonstrating a relative equilibrium in the distribution of gender roles.

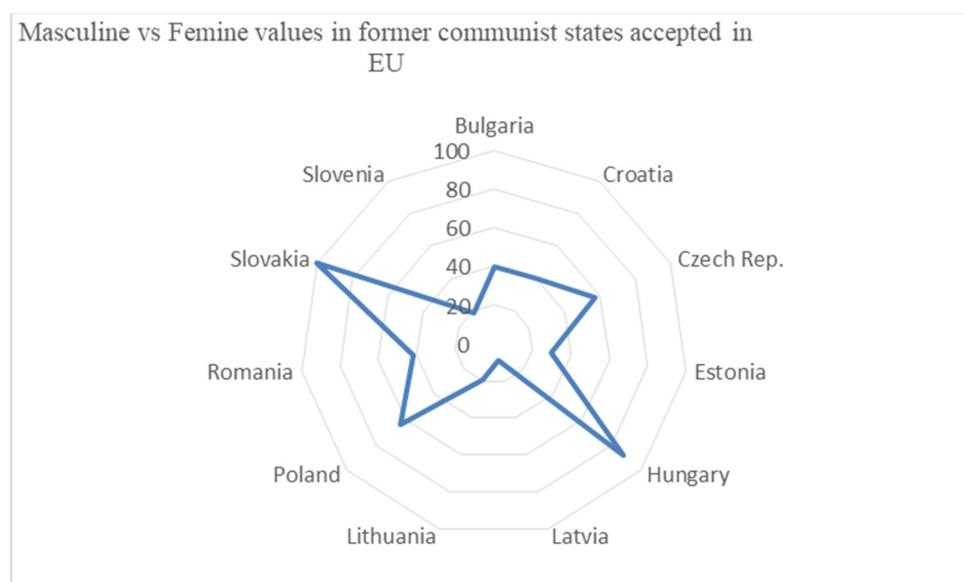


Figure 1. Feminine and masculine cultural values in Cluster 1.

Conversely, at the lower end of the spectrum, we find Poland (64), Hungary (88), and Slovakia (100), countries characterized by a more traditional masculine orientation. In these nations, facing high challenges and advancing to higher-level professions are regarded as significant achievements.

The second cluster (Figure 2) exhibits closer values, signifying a balance between masculinity and femininity as dimensions of societal culture. At the feminine end of the spectrum, we find Ukraine (27), Russia (36), and Moldova (39), indicating a cooperative approach and an increased emphasis on the quality of life, as well as a recognition of women as equal partners. Positioned in the middle are Armenia (50), Azerbaijan (50), Georgia (55), North Macedonia (45), and Montenegro (48), where both genders are encouraged to engage in significant activities and cooperate effectively.

The highest score is recorded in Albania (80), categorized by Hofstede as a male-dominated culture, where men are expected to be assertive, ambitious, and affluent.

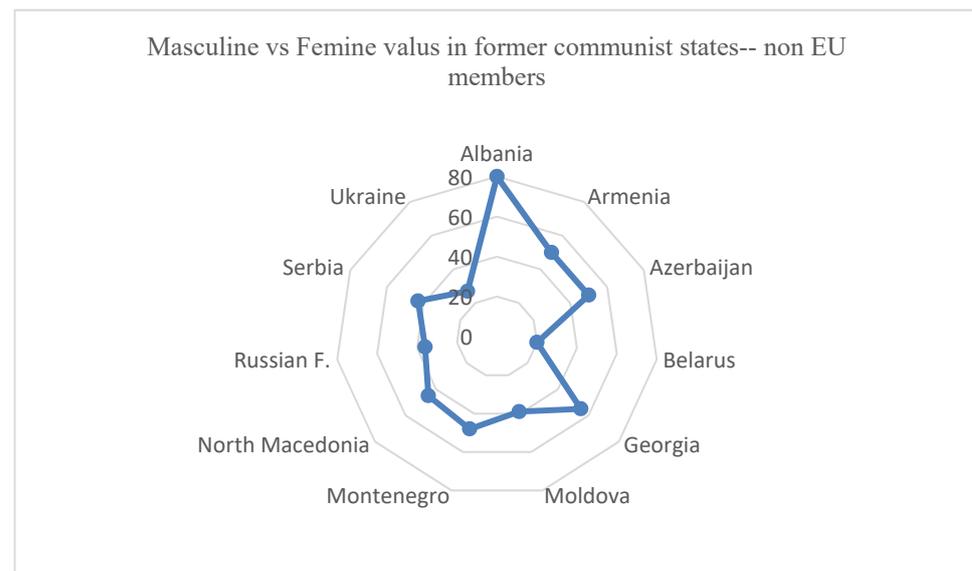


Figure 2. Feminine and masculine cultural values in Cluster 2.

In traditional SEE communities, distinct roles were assigned to men and women: men were predominantly engaged in activities outside the home, while women were responsible for domestic affairs. During the communist era, women were granted opportunities to participate actively in select sectors such as education, healthcare, and light industry. The communist states prioritized equal access to education and sought to balance income distribution between genders. However, in the aftermath of the fall of dictatorial regimes, the gender gap widened, and the new management style exhibited less concern for bolstering gender egalitarianism and reducing gender disparity.

Despite public discourse in the majority of countries in both clusters emphasizing feminine values, instances of misogyny persist, often hidden behind rhetoric extolling “family values,” contributing to issues like domestic abuse. With increased pressure from social activists, coupled with political and media support, there has been a notable rise in efforts to question the unequal economic standing of women, their limited access to investment resources, and the devaluation of underpaid and undervalued jobs (Bucur 2008).

As a consequence of gender gap preferences in workplaces and the influence of traditional perspectives in Central and Eastern European states, the status of women has seen incremental improvements over the last decades. Conversely, nations in the western part of the continent have generally exhibited a greater degree of liberalization in their attitudes towards women, both in domestic roles and in their professional pursuits.

3. Literature review and Research Hypothesis

In the aftermath of communism’s fall, SEE nations have increasingly prioritized ethical considerations regarding gender disparity in order to enhance the external image of their firms. The United Nations, through its Human Development Report, has extensively measured and publicly disclosed gender inequalities in the course of its history, shedding

light on the persistent challenges faced by women, including transgender individuals, religious and ethnic minorities. These groups often confront compounded forms of discrimination, with factors such as age, race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status exacerbating gender-based disparities. Regrettably, the picture of inequality and poverty in the developing world has become more pronounced compared to the late 1990s (Alvaredo and Gasparini 2015).

Nanda (2014) provided an excellent conceptualization of gender disparity, emphasizing that sex and gender diversity exhibit variations within cultures. The analysis of gender roles and identities necessitates an examination in conjunction with other cultural patterns. The author suggests that while broader cultural patterns elucidate the meanings of sex/gender diversity, they also shed light on other facets of culture. Building upon these premises, we selected the former communist nations within clusters, all of which experienced similar challenges during the transitional period from socialist governance to the highly competitive arena of market economy.

In 2016, a survey conducted by Noland et al. (2016) encompassing 21,980 firms across 91 countries concluded that the presence of women in corporate leadership positions exerts a positive influence and may enhance the long-term performance of the company. The study indicated a positive correlation between the presence of women in corporate leadership roles and various firm characteristics, including size, as well as national features such as the absence of discriminatory attitudes towards female executives and the availability of paternal leave. These findings suggest that the benefits of policies aimed at facilitating the advancement of women within corporate hierarchies could be substantial.

The findings of Francoeur et al. (2008) suggest that firms operating in complex environments demonstrate positive returns when there is a significant representation of women in positions of high authority. These results align with ongoing discussions in some former communist countries regarding policies aimed at promoting the advancement of women in the business sector.

Developing an index to measure gender disparity involves a complex interplay of conceptual, analytical, and empirical decisions, which accounts for the diverse array of approaches that have emerged in recent decades (Biström and Nilsson 2010; Bericat 2012). Our study introduces the gender disparity index (GDI), which incorporates a conceptual and analytical framework tailored to the nature of life expectancy, education, and income indices.

An index serves as a methodological tool for evaluating the performance of a group in a standardized and analytical manner. It enables the measurement of the sustainability and performance of a particular human value using a standardized methodology. The GDI offers a valuable benchmark for stakeholders seeking to assess the performance of egalitarian values between men and women within the same region. It provides investors with a streamlined overview of a large sector, in this case, the South Eastern European region, without the need to scrutinize specific attributes of the area.

The quality of an index is intrinsically linked to its validity, and the quality of the conceptual decisions not only defines its nature but also dictates the outcomes of its measurements (Bericat 2012).

Gender disparity can be assessed through various cultural dimensions that delineate the distinctions between women and men. Some indices are renowned for their precision. For instance, Hofstede developed one of the most widely used indices in cross-cultural research, which measures masculine and feminine values within a country (Hofstede Insights). Globe studies have further refined this comparison by measuring differences in social status between women and men (Chhokar et al. 2008). In a specific context, the GDI evaluates the extent to which former communist states are consolidating sustainable development without gender disparities.

The GDI represents a modern tool for quantifying the degree of equity or inequity associated with gender development (Muresan et al. 2010). The calculation formula incor-

porates life expectancy, education index, and income index related to gender, as depicted in the following equation:

$$GDI = (ILE + IE + IIN)/3 \quad (1)$$

In this context, the GDI is defined by three key components: the life expectancy index (ILE) related to gender and equally distributed, the education index (IE) related to gender and equally distributed, and the income index (IIN) related to gender and equally distributed. These indicators were selected based on their availability in statistical data and their descriptive relevance. Life expectancy serves as a crucial metric for evaluating population health, and the disparities related to this index remain substantial both across and within emerging countries.

The second dimension focuses on gender equality in terms of educational attainment and lifelong learning, aiming to identify the presence of educational segregation. The income index encompasses data pertaining to the entire spectrum of managerial positions in multinational corporations or leadership representation at the national level, both analyzed with respect to gender.

Various reputable sources, including the [European Institute for Gender Equality \(2023\)](#), the [Global Gender Gap Report \(2021\)](#) from the World Economic Forum, [Social Watch \(2012\)](#), [Frias \(2008\)](#), and [Bericat \(2012\)](#), calculate gender equality ratios from female to male perspectives.

A value of $R = 1$ signifies parity, while $0 \leq R < 1$ indicates inequality in favor of men. Conversely, $R \geq 1 > 0$ suggests inequality in favor of women. According to the formula:

A score of 1 denotes perfect gender equality.

A score above 1 indicates inequality in favor of women.

A score below 1 suggests inequality in favor of men.

The index does not operate as a competitive ranking system between women and men, but rather aims to reveal the extent to which gender equality is achieved within a specific cultural context. The qualities of an index lie in its feasibility, reproducibility, ease of interpretation for the broader public, and its intended societal impact upon publication of comparative results ([Bericat 2012](#)).

Drawing data from reputable international databases such as Eurostat, World Bank, and the Global Economy enhances the validity of the study and ensures pattern homogeneity.

Building on prior scholarly research, we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Proximity to the EU positively impacts life expectancy scores in Cluster 1 compared to Cluster 2.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *EU development policies for lifelong learning reduce educational gender gaps in Cluster 1 compared to Cluster 2.*

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Higher scores in feminine values in countries lead to decreased gender role differences and indicate an egalitarian approach to business.*

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *Limited reforms post the fall of the Iron Curtain hindered the pursuit of an income policy characterized by high levels of gender solidarity.*

Hypothesis 5 (H5): *Influence of the former communist elite, well-connected in local business environments, is negatively correlated with GDI evolution. This hypothesis suggests that gender disparity is influenced by life expectancy, income, and the historical educational process.*

4. Gender Disparity Index: Conceptual Evaluation of the Values

4.1. Life Expectancy Index Related to Gender and Equally Distributed

On a global scale, between 2000 and 2019, life expectancy (Table 1) has witnessed an increase of over six years, as reported by the ([World Health Organization n.d.](#)). Analyzing the collapse of bureaucratic communism in Eastern Europe necessitates an examination

beyond economic parameters like incomes; it mandates an evaluation of life expectancy outcomes. In this context, the former communist bloc demonstrated commendable progress in terms of life expectancies. However, certain former member states find themselves in a less favorable position compared to their communist-era standings. For instance, in Russia, the life expectancy for men plummeted to approximately 58 years, a significant deviation from countries like India or Pakistan (Sen 2000).

Nations boasting higher life expectancies tend to prioritize job satisfaction and actively promote entrepreneurial endeavors. It is noteworthy that life expectancy is, to some degree, influenced by factors such as job satisfaction, lower levels of stress, and reduced conflicts (Dhamija et al. 2019; Diriwachter and Shvartsman 2018). The impact of social norms and values on life expectancy levels plays a pivotal role in driving economic modernization, consequently contributing to an overall enhancement of living standards.

Life expectancy index (ILE) for women: ILE_w. For men: ILE_M

$$\text{Women } I_{LEW} = (LEW - LEW_{\min}) / (LEW_{\max} - LEW_{\min}) \tag{2}$$

$$\text{Men } I_{LEM} = (LEM - LEM_{\min}) / (LEM_{\max} - LEM_{\min}) \tag{3}$$

Life expectancy index related to gender and equally distributed:

$$I_{LE} = [\%PopW \times LEW^{-1} + \%PopM \times LEM^{-1}]^{-1} \tag{4}$$

Table 1. Life expectancy index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 1.

Life Expectancy Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (ILE)											
Year	Population Rate		Women’s Life Expectancy				Men’s Life Expectancy				Life Expectancy Index Equally Distributed
	Women	Men	LE	ILE min. UE	LE max. UE	ILE Fem.	LE	ILE min. UE	ILE max. UE	ILE Male	
Bulgaria	0.514	0.486	77.5	76.7	85.3	0.09302	70.1	70	81.6	0.00862	0.00788955
Croatia	0.518	0.482	80.9	76.7	85.3	0.48837	74.7	70	81.6	0.40517	0.22144941
Czech R.	0.508	0.492	81.3	76.7	85.3	0.53488	75.3	70	81.6	0.4569	0.24641197
Estonia	0.526	0.474	83	76.7	85.3	0.73256	74.4	70	81.6	0.37931	0.24990984
Hungary	0.524	0.476	79	76.7	85.3	0.26744	72.3	70	81.6	0.19828	0.11386139
Latvia	0.537	0.463	80.1	76.7	85.3	0.39535	70.1	70	81.6	0.00862	0.00843672
Lithuania	0.539	0.461	80	76.7	85.3	0.38372	70.6	70	81.6	0.05172	0.04558011
Poland	0.515	0.485	80.7	76.7	85.3	0.46512	72.5	70	81.6	0.21552	0.14727541
Romania	0.514	0.486	78.3	76.7	85.3	0.18605	70.4	70	81.6	0.03448	0.02909091
Slovakia	0.513	0.487	80.4	76.7	85.3	0.43023	73.5	70	81.6	0.30172	0.17734867
Slovenia	0.502	0.498	83.4	76.7	85.3	0.77907	77.8	70	81.6	0.67241	0.3609116

Data source: Eurostat, www.data.Worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).

The analysis indicates that within the first cluster, Bulgaria exhibits the lowest value, while Slovenia boasts the highest. This observation suggests that the coefficient of variation is relatively concentrated, ranging from 0.007 to 0.360.

Examining our data, it is apparent that the life expectancy for women surpasses the minimum benchmark set by the EU. However, none of the countries within this cluster have attained the maximum life expectancy observed in the EU. Conversely, the life expectancy values for men are less optimistic, with Romania, Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Latvia hovering close to the EU’s minimum threshold. Notably, Slovenia leads the rankings with the most favorable score for gender equality (0.3609), followed closely by Croatia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. These results serve as compelling evidence of their commitment to prioritizing social issues and enhancing overall quality of life.

As posited by certain scholars, the states formerly constituting the USSR can be characterized by a dearth of social norms designed to safeguard the vulnerable (Grachev et al. 2007). Our data for the second cluster paint a concerning picture, with six countries exhibiting negative values (Table 2), falling below the threshold of 0. In Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, Russia, and Ukraine, there has been a notable absence of progress in improving life expectancy over the past decade. This is despite the political rhetoric of their leaders, who often tout their organizational methods in front of foreign partners.

Table 2. Life expectancy index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 2.

Life Expectancy Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (ILE)											
Country	Population Rate		Women’s Life Expectancy				Men’s Life Expectancy				Life Expectancy Index Equally Distributed
	Women	Men	ILE AL	ILE min. UE	ILE max. UE	ILE Fem.	ILE AL	ILE min. UE	ILE max. UE	ILE Male	
Albania	0.491	0.509	79.6	76.7	85.3	0.33721	75.2	70	81.6	0.44828	0.19244513
Armenia	0.53	0.47	79.7	76.7	85.3	0.03448	73.1	70	81.6	0.26724	0.03054187
Azerbaijan	0.5	0.5	78.9	76.7	85.3	0.25581	74.3	70	81.6	0.37069	0.15136
Belarus	0.534	0.466	78.9	76.7	85.3	−0.1034	69.3	70	81.6	−0.0603	−0.0381125
Georgia	0.523	0.477	78.4	76.7	85.3	−0.1897	69.8	70	81.6	−0.0172	−0.0158046
Moldova	0.521	0.479	76	76.7	85.3	−0.6034	68	70	81.6	−0.1724	−0.1340996
Montenegro	0.506	0.494	78.8	76.7	85.3	−0.1207	73.2	70	81.6	0.27586	−0.2145594
N. Macedonia	0.5	0.5	76.7	76.7	85.3	−0.4828	72.2	70	81.6	0.18966	0.31237323
Russian F.	0.537	0.463	78.2	76.7	85.3	−0.2241	68.2	70	81.6	−0.1552	−0.0916928
Serbia	0.51	0.49	77.5	76.7	85.3	−0.3448	71.6	70	81.6	0.13793	0.22988506
Ukraine	0.537	0.463	78.3	76.7	85.3	−0.2069	68.4	70	81.6	−0.1379	−0.0827586

Data source: Eurostat, www.data.Worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).

4.2. Education Index Related to Gender

In our endeavor to investigate the gender disparity index, it is imperative to underscore the significance of democratic principles in the context of political freedoms and rights. In communities that prioritize freedom, such as South Eastern Europe, the educational landscape and intellectual milieu have undergone substantial transformations in recent decades. Research indicates an inverse correlation between the number of childbirths for women and the years devoted to education (Women’s Rights 2023). It is crucial to dismantle patriarchal attitudes that hinder access to high-level positions. A critical step is ensuring equal participation for women in education and providing essential educational services in rural areas, where a significant portion of the population resides in SEE.

The primary objective of modern education is to foster the continuous development of each individual by imparting a comprehensive set of knowledge and skills conducive to lifelong learning and growth (Simeunovic et al. 2022). The pivotal role of higher education in bolstering the sustainability of a social group through research, education, and outreach activities is well acknowledged (Sidiropoulos 2022).

Education index related to gender and equally distributed is calculated according to the following:

- Literacy index related to gender. For women: I_{LW} For men: I_{LM} .

$$\text{Women } I_{LW} = (LIT_W - 0.0)/(100.00 - 0.0) \tag{5}$$

$$\text{Men } I_{LM} = (LIT_M - 0.0)/(100.00 - 0.0) \tag{6}$$

- Education attendance rate related to gender. For women: I_{ATW} . For men: I_{ATM} .

$$\text{Women } I_{ATW} = (AT_W - 0.0)/(100.00 - 0.0) \tag{7}$$

$$\text{Men } I_{ATM} = (AT_M - 0.0)/(100.00 - 0.0) \tag{8}$$

- Education index (IE) is calculated for women: I_{EW} . For men: I_{EM} .

$$\text{Women } I_{EW} = (2 \times LIT_W + IAT_W)/3 \tag{9}$$

$$\text{Men } I_{EM} = (2 \times LIT_M + IAT_M)/3 \tag{10}$$

Education index equally distributed (IE) is presented in the next formula:

$$IE = [\%PopF \times IEW^{-1} + \%PopM \times IEM^{-1}]^{-1} \tag{11}$$

The scores for Cluster 1 indicate a discernible emphasis on performance, aligning with the broader European trend. While there is a slight favor towards men in terms of inequality, all scores are in close proximity to 1, signifying a concerted effort to achieve parity in planning and preparing for future endeavors among the educated citizens in this cluster. Notably, the educational disparity between women and men is among the smallest

when compared to other metrics integrated into the GDI. In essence, the educational values appear to mirror the European model, which places significant emphasis on formulating public policies geared towards cultivating an educated and informed society.

The outcomes for Cluster 2 also exhibit a commendable standard, indicating a societal inclination towards endorsing and acknowledging educated individuals. Furthermore, it is evident that the states within this cluster place significant value on performance and excellence. It is worth noting that our data do not provide an evaluation of teaching performance; however, in countries such as Russia, scholarly achievements in terms of research projects are globally recognized.

The findings presented in Tables 3 and 4 establish a non-discriminatory validity, demonstrating comparable levels of education with respect to gender. All the values in the current model are deemed appropriate and are in close alignment with European standards for acceptance in both clusters. It is widely held that education should be accessible to all citizens, and in South Eastern Europe, there exists a significant number of tuition-free universities.

Table 3. Education index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 1.

Education Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (IE)																	
Country	Population Rate Over 15 Years Old		Literacy Rate—Women Over 15 Years Old			Education Attendance Rate—Women Over 15 Years Old			IE Women	Literacy Rate—Men Over 15 Years Old			Education Attendance Rate—Men Over 15 Years Old			IE Men	IE
	Women	Men	National Value	min. UE	max. UE	National Value	min. UE	max. UE		National Value	min. UE	max. UE	National Value	min. UE	max. UE		
Bulgaria	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.86	0.71	0.99	0.946667	0.99	0.24	1	0.87	0.68	0.99	0.95	0.4741652
Croatia	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.87	0.71	0.99	0.95	0.99	0.24	1	0.88	0.68	0.99	0.9533	0.4758319
Czech R.	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.89	0.71	0.99	0.956667	0.99	0.24	1	0.87	0.68	0.99	0.95	0.4766608
Estonia	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.94	0.71	0.99	0.973333	0.99	0.24	1	0.93	0.68	0.99	0.97	0.4858319
Hungary	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.9	0.71	0.99	0.96	0.99	0.24	1	0.92	0.68	0.99	0.9667	0.4816609
Latvia	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.97	0.71	0.99	0.983333	0.99	0.24	1	0.96	0.68	0.99	0.98	0.4908319
Lithuania	0.61	0.68	1	0.249	1	0.95	0.71	0.99	0.983333	1	0.24	1	0.96	0.68	0.99	0.9867	0.4924986
Poland	0.64	0.69	0.98	0.249	1	0.96	0.71	0.99	0.973333	0.99	0.24	1	0.96	0.68	0.99	0.98	0.4883276
Romania	0.63	0.68	0.99	0.249	1	0.82	0.71	0.99	0.933333	0.99	0.24	1	0.82	0.68	0.99	0.9333	0.4666667
Slovakia	0.66	0.7	0.99	0.249	1	0.84	0.71	0.99	0.94	0.99	0.24	1	0.82	0.68	0.99	0.9333	0.4683274
Slovenia	0.62	0.66	1	0.249	1	0.99	0.71	0.99	0.996667	1	0.24	1	0.98	0.68	0.99	0.9933	0.4974986

Data source: Eurostat; www.data.Worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).

Table 4. Education index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 2.

Education Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (IE)																	
Country	Population Rate Over 15 Years Old		Literacy Rate—Women Over 15 Years Old			Education Attendance Rate—Women Over 15 Years Old			IE Women	Literacy Rate—Men Over 15 Years Old			Education Attendance Rate—Men Over 15 Years Old			IE Men	IE
	Women	Men	National Value	min. UE	max. UE	National Value	min. UE	max. UE		National Value	min. UE	max. UE	National Value	min. UE	max. UE		
Albania	0.68	0.68	0.98	0.249	1	0.94	0.71	0.99	0.966667	0.99	0.24	1	0.9	0.68	0.99	0.96	0.4816609
Armenia	0.68	0.67	1	0.249	1	0.91	0.71	0.99	0.97	1	0.24	1	0.91	0.68	0.99	0.97	0.485
Azerbaijan	0.7	0.69	1	0.249	1	0.92	0.71	0.99	0.973333	1	0.24	1	0.93	0.68	0.99	0.9767	0.4874986
Belarus	0.65	0.7	1	0.249	1	0.95	0.71	0.99	0.983333	1	0.24	1	0.95	0.68	0.99	0.9833	0.4916667
Georgia	0.63	0.66	0.99	0.249	1	0.98	0.71	0.99	0.986667	1	0.24	1	0.98	0.68	0.99	0.9933	0.4949944
Moldova	0.7	0.73	0.99	0.249	1	0.86	0.71	0.99	0.946667	1	0.24	1	0.86	0.68	0.99	0.9533	0.4749942
Montenegro	0.65	0.67	0.98	0.249	1	0.96	0.71	0.99	0.973333	0.99	0.24	1	0.95	0.68	0.99	0.9767	0.4874986
N. Macedonia	0.68	0.7	0.98	0.249	1	0.95	0.71	0.99	0.97	0.99	0.24	1	0.95	0.68	0.99	0.9767	0.486661
Russian F.	0.64	0.69	1	0.249	1	0.97	0.71	0.99	0.99	1	0.24	1	0.97	0.68	0.99	0.99	0.495
Serbia	0.64	0.67	0.99	0.249	1	0.95	0.71	0.99	0.976667	1	0.24	1	0.95	0.68	0.99	0.9833	0.4899943
Ukraine	0.64	0.7	1	0.249	1	0.93	0.71	0.99	0.976667	1	0.24	1	0.91	0.68	0.99	0.97	0.486661

Data source: Eurostat; www.data.Worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).

4.3. Income Index Equally Distributed (IIN)

In both clusters, income levels can be susceptible to various unethical practices such as corruption and favoritism, which have the potential to diminish overall performance. A work environment characterized by a deficiency in ethical and professional values is likely to yield negative job-related outcomes, thereby adversely affecting income levels (Khan et al. 2022). Attaining a satisfactory income is contingent upon a supportive work environment, and a deficient work environment may yield unfavorable job outcomes that, in turn, impact income levels.

The value of income is also closely tied to the stability of the work environment (Hackman 1980). It is posited that a positive synergy between employees and the organization contributes to an enhanced quality of life. One of the primary effects of this positive synergy is the realization of secure job outcomes, ensuring satisfactory remuneration for all stakeholders (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy 2013).

The period of extensive privatization of state-owned enterprises, which commenced in the immediate aftermath of the 1990s, witnessed numerous leaders amassing significant fortunes (Grachev et al. 2007), often without commensurate enhancement in the firms’ market value. In many cases within both clusters, financial success was achieved at the expense of basic ethical standards.

Our formula of calculation for IN is as follows:

$$\text{Salary index for Women } IN_W = (IN_W - IN_{\min W}) / (IN_{\max W} - IN_{\min W}) \tag{12}$$

$$\text{Salary index for Men } IN_M = (IN_M - IN_{\min M}) / (IN_{\max M} - IN_{\min M}) \tag{13}$$

Income index equally distributed IIN is calculated according to the formula:

$$IN = [\%PopF \times INW^{-1} + \%PopM \times 1INM^{-1}]^{-1} \tag{14}$$

In all the countries within Cluster 1 (Table 5), the state ensures a minimum standard of living, and our data indicate a growing pressure for women to receive greater recognition for their work. However, in the majority of these nations, subsidies for women remain relatively low, leaving limited room for substantial investments in improving the current status quo. The existing inequality in favor of men can be attributed, in part, to the limited influence of labor unions, which have not been as successful in macro-level management of East European society. Regrettably, the emancipation of women in terms of income has not significantly progressed towards greater equality over the years, and a gender wage gap persists.

Table 5. Income index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 1.

Income Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (IN) EU Members											
Country	Population Rate		Income per Capita—Women				Income per Capita—Men				INR
	Women	Men	Income	Minimum EU	Maximum EU	IN Women	Income	Minimum EU	Maximum EU	IN Men	
Bulgaria	0.514	0.486	6650	6600	87107	0.00062	6720	6630	87107	0.00112	0.00039931
Croatia	0.518	0.482	10821	6600	87107	0.05243	10995	6630	87107	0.05424	0.02665966
Czech R.	0.508	0.492	15818	6600	87107	0.1145	15860	6630	87107	0.11469	0.05729759
Estonia	0.526	0.474	16445	6600	87107	0.12229	16445	6630	87107	0.12196	0.06106184
Hungary	0.524	0.476	11974	6600	87107	0.06675	11998	6630	87107	0.06667	0.03336356
Latvia	0.537	0.463	12973	6600	87107	0.07916	12973	6630	87107	0.07882	0.03949441
Lithuania	0.539	0.461	14340	6600	87107	0.09614	14355	6630	87107	0.09599	0.04803269
Poland	0.515	0.485	12200	6600	87107	0.06956	12340	6630	87107	0.07095	0.03512433
Romania	0.514	0.486	9023	6600	87107	0.0301	9210	6630	87107	0.03206	0.01552342
Slovakia	0.513	0.487	14460	6600	87107	0.09763	14489	6630	87107	0.09766	0.04882162
Slovenia	0.502	0.498	19095	6600	87107	0.1552	19102	6630	87107	0.15498	0.07754492

Data source: Eurostat; www.data.worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).; www.theglobaleconomy.com (accessed on 21 March 2024).

The current trend does not unequivocally signal progress towards greater equality, necessitating concerted efforts to shift prevailing attitudes. This is particularly pertinent given the requirements of European Union policies, which call for increased female participation and representation.

According to our data in Cluster 2 (Table 6), we indicate the existence of a gap not only between rich and poor but also between men and women. Illegal migration to another countries is a sign of economic weakness and the discriminatory income policies may have added to the perception that the common people, especially the women, do not matter. These may be some of the reasons behind the desire for a radical improvement in the income index in Cluster 2.

The situation of income is quite severe in the two clusters, which is a strong indicator of an insufficient revitalization of the local economies. Based on our interpretation we can conclude that the presence of advanced industries with non-discriminatory gender policies is advancing at a very modest pace and the obsolete mentality in conducting business is still present.

Table 6. Income index equally distributed related to gender in Cluster 2.

Income Index Equally Distributed Related to Gender (IN) Non EU Members											
Country	Population Rate		Income per Capita—Women				Income per Capita—Men				INR
	Women	Men	Income Armenia	Minimum EU	Maximum EU	IN Women	Income Armenia	Minimum EU	Maximum EU	IN Men	
Armenia	0.53	0.47	3555	6600	87,107	−0.0378	3598	6630	87,107	−0.0377	−0.0188745
Albania	0.491	0.509	4108	6600	87,107	−0.031	4210	6630	87,107	−0.0301	−0.0152529
Azerbaijan	0.5	0.5	3511	6600	87,107	−0.0384	3622	6630	87,107	−0.0374	−0.0189334
Belarus	0.534	0.466	5195	6600	87,107	−0.0175	5214	6630	87,107	−0.0176	−0.0087616
Georgia	0.523	0.477	3565	6600	87,107	−0.0377	3612	6630	87,107	−0.0375	−0.0187999
Macedonia	0.5	0.5	4262	6600	87,107	−0.029	4377	6630	87,107	−0.028	−0.0142543
Moldova	0.521	0.479	2708	6600	87,107	−0.0483	2896	6630	87,107	−0.0464	−0.0236755
Montenegro	0.506	0.494	5426	6600	87,107	−0.0146	5533	6630	87,107	−0.0136	−0.0070454
Russian F.	0.537	0.463	8055	6600	87,107	0.01807	8186	6630	87,107	0.01933	0.00934128
Serbia	0.51	0.49	5450	6600	87,107	−0.0143	5527	6630	87,107	−0.0137	−0.0069946
Ukraine	0.537	0.463	1953	6600	87,107	−0.0577	2147	6630	87,107	−0.0557	−0.0283478

Data source: Eurostat; www.data.Worldbank.org (accessed on 21 March 2024).; www.theglobaleconomy.com (accessed on 21 March 2024).

The results provide support regarding how our theory is bolstering the empirical data. It enables us to empirically confirm the theory, according to which the traditional features of the past did not significantly change the business practices in either of the clusters.

In Cluster 2, our data reveal not only an economic gap between the rich and poor but also a gender-based income disparity. The prevalence of illegal migration to other countries may be indicative of economic vulnerabilities, and discriminatory income policies may contribute to the perception that the well-being of common citizens, particularly women, is not a priority. These factors likely underlie the strong desire for a substantial improvement in the income index within Cluster 2.

The income situation appears to be notably challenging in both clusters, indicating an insufficient revitalization of local economies. Our interpretation suggests that the adoption of advanced industries with non-discriminatory gender policies has progressed at a sluggish pace, and outdated business mentalities persist.

The findings align with theoretical expectations, affirming that traditional practices from the past have not undergone significant changes in the business landscape of both clusters.

5. Findings and Discussion

Our perspective emphasizes three crucial factors for promoting gender opportunities: equal life expectancy, comparable levels of education, and an equally distributed income index. This indicates a shared aspiration among South Eastern Europeans in both clusters to participate in decision-making processes, which can foster loyalty and collaboration between the working class and top management.

The findings are evaluated in accordance with Muresan et al.'s (2008) framework, wherein a value below zero indicates the persistence of traditional collectivist ideologies ingrained in the former communist doctrines. The occurrence of scores below zero is notably concentrated in Cluster 2, particularly among former Soviet Union members and three Balkan nations—Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. It is noteworthy that Russia stands as an exception, with its substantial natural resources bolstering the national budget and enabling authorities to navigate their relationship with the working class. Conversely, in the remaining nations—Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine—there appears to be a limited inclination towards expressing individual competitiveness, and there remains a prevailing adherence to artificial loyalty and obedience to the political system.

With regard to the educational index, all 22 countries demonstrate rankings falling within the range of 0.463 to 0.4925. Despite a prevailing masculine trend, this component of the GDI exhibits the most satisfactory outcomes. Even though the literacy rates in both clusters surpass the minimum set by the European Union, progress remains moderate due to the perception of educational development as an individual asset, rather than a means to advance societal progress.

The GDI value in Cluster 1 (Table 7), exerts a moderate influence in cultivating a positive and conducive environment for women to reside, work, and enhance their educational competencies. Contrastingly, values in Cluster 2 (Table 8), are even lower, signifying a lack of willingness to augment or alter the role of women within organizations and society at large. The absence of values approaching 1 in both clusters indicates a dearth of substantial actions in favor of feminine values. In countries where fundamental feminine cultural values are deeply ingrained, such as Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova, the GDI scores are notably low, underscoring a deficiency in advancing education and equitably accessible employment opportunities.

Table 7. GDI final score in Cluster 1.

Country	ILE	IE	IIN	GDI
Bulgaria	0.00789	0.47417	0.0004	0.160818
Croatia	0.22145	0.47583	0.02666	0.2413136
Czechia	0.24641	0.47666	0.0573	0.2601235
Estonia	0.24991	0.48583	0.06106	0.2656012
Hungary	0.11386	0.48166	0.03336	0.2096286
Latvia	0.00844	0.49083	0.03949	0.1795877
Lithuania	0.04558	0.4925	0.04803	0.1953705
Poland	0.14728	0.48833	0.03512	0.2235758
Romania	0.02909	0.46667	0.01552	0.170427
Slovakia	0.17735	0.46833	0.04882	0.2314992
Slovenia	0.36091	0.4975	0.07754	0.311985

Table 8. GDI final score in Cluster 2.

Country	ILE	IE	IIN	GDI
Albania	0.19245	0.481661	−0.015253	0.21962
Armenia	0.03054	0.485	−0.018874	0.16556
Azerbaijan	0.15136	0.487499	−0.018933	0.20664
Belarus	−0.0381	0.491667	−0.008762	0.14826
Georgia	−0.0158	0.494994	−0.0188	0.15346
Moldova	−0.1341	0.474994	−0.023676	0.10574
Montenegro	−0.2146	0.487499	−0.007045	0.08863
North Macedonia	0.31237	0.486661	−0.014254	0.26159
Russian F.	−0.0917	0.495	0.0093413	0.13755
Serbia	0.22989	0.489994	−0.006995	0.23763
Ukraine	−0.0828	0.486661	−0.028348	0.12518

Contrary to the anticipated outcome posited by Hypothesis 3 (H3), countries exhibiting high feminine values do not demonstrate a reduced score in gender role disparities. This suggests a dearth of egalitarian approaches towards conducting business. Notably, Russia exemplifies a marked disjunction between cultural values and practice, with a remarkably low score of 0.12518. Moldova occupies an even lower position, with a score of 0.10574, indicating that gender-defined social roles have not improved relative to other nations.

In the former Soviet Union states characterized by high feminine values, as presented by the Hofstede Center's assessment (2023), there appears to be no discernible correlation between the equitable distributions of income based on gender. Within Cluster 2, excluding Russia, all countries exhibit values below zero. This can be interpreted as indicative of a prevailing traditional authority structure, where allegiance to the collective is mandated, yet the role of women in public institutions or corporations remains modest and inadequately remunerated. Comparatively, Cluster 1 exhibits a slightly more favorable scenario with regard to income equity. The scores for all countries in this cluster surpass zero, indicating that EU policies pertaining to gender have not been entirely successful in providing women with ample opportunities for advancement to high-level positions. These observations further corroborate the validity of Hypotheses 4 (H4) and 5 (H5).

The data also suggest that the acceptance of EU membership substantially influences the level of gender equity in Cluster 1, thereby substantiating the validity of Hypotheses 1 (H1) and 2 (H2). Furthermore, it is concurred that the impact of EU membership in implementing egalitarian gender principles is more pronounced among member states compared to non-affiliated communist nations.

In Eastern Europe, certain women were educated for technical professions that have become obsolete in today's job market, particularly due to the near-total collapse of the industrial economy following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In emerging states, the future labor market is inclined towards flexibility, and a nation's success can be gauged by the extent to which its populace, irrespective of gender, is prepared for the ongoing acquisition of new knowledge through lifelong learning.

With regard to the educational process, it is imperative to note that the Eastern European educational system has made significant strides, achieving commendable scores in comparison to the maximum values observed in the European Union. This validates Hypothesis 2 (H2).

In both clusters, knowledge is disseminated in a performative manner to support social development. A significant challenge faced by local communities is the emigration of skilled and educated professionals, both male and female, who often opt to develop their intellectual capital abroad, particularly in Western Europe. The inadequacy of funding for research, a pivotal factor in the transition from communism to a knowledge-based society, has not effectively addressed economic challenges, resulting in a substantial exodus of skilled individuals seeking improved prospects overseas.

Based on the preceding data, it can be inferred that Cluster 1 exhibits a relatively higher degree of gender equality. To summarize the findings, the tested hypotheses regarding the influence of cultural feminine values and positive equalitarian values pertaining to gender disparity were not corroborated. To reiterate, out of the five hypotheses tested, four were validated. The hypothesis that was invalidated underscores the absence of a significant association between feminine and equalitarian cross-cultural values of a nation and various outcomes of gender inequality.

Our calculations have disclosed the subsequent relationships in the two clusters with regard to gender disparity: a modest impact on life expectancy, satisfactory outcomes in education related to gender, and weak performance in terms of equitably distributed income related to gender.

In no country within the two clusters did we observe the presence of inequality favoring women. Our calculations serve as evidence of a persistent bias in favor of men. Our research has identified Cluster 1 as exhibiting a very low profile in terms of the income index. Cluster 2 occupies an even more extreme position, with a negative income score in all countries except Russia, where a small positive value was identified. This disheartening reality may be interpreted as indicative of a deficiency in visionary management and social policies. The lackluster performance in income equalitarian orientation renders it challenging to motivate the workforce to focus on continuous improvement and training. In summary, these findings suggest that Cluster 1 has made progress in improving gender disparity index practices on the international stage, but there is still room for further advancement.

The current economic and social landscape for Cluster 1 is becoming increasingly predictable, and the competition within the European Union, both at central and national levels, could potentially foster long-term projects in the future aimed at ameliorating the fluctuating evolution of the gender gap.

In the short term, we anticipate that there will be no inclination towards cultural transformation in the countries of Cluster 1 and Cluster 2, where all final scores for the GDI favor men. As we endeavored to expound in this article, the gender disparity index ratio in Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 favors men in all facets of education, life expectancy, and income. This implies that the sociocultural values are rather unstable, and the economic environment lacks self-determination. We observed that the score for Cluster 1 aspires

to achieve high levels of equalitarianism. Organizations in both clusters exhibit minimal scores in the income index but aspire to attain medium levels in the education index. The index of life expectancy (ILE) manifests lower levels for the two clusters, underscoring the heightened need for greater gender egalitarianism, particularly within protectoral and financial services organizations, given their greater reliance on providing human capital with an extended life expectancy.

Limitations in our study encompass the need to acknowledge the significance of democratic principles, including political liberties and civil rights, in examining the gender disparity index. While our research primarily addresses income poverty, life expectancy inequality, and educational factors, it may not fully account for variables such as unemployment or gender-based social exclusion.

The intersection between structural elements and cultural dynamics in the context of gender equality merits a more nuanced examination. While our study primarily focuses on structural indicators such as access to education and life expectancy, the impact of EU membership and its proclaimed values on national gender cultures remains an underexplored aspect. For instance, observations from the Euromaidan protests reveal gendered divisions of labor and the reproduction of patriarchal gender stereotypes, indicating the need to analyze how EU values intersect with local gender dynamics (Martsenyuk and Onuch 2014). Despite declaratory changes initiated by governments with EU support, the efficiency of implementing action plans remains questionable, particularly in challenging deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and perceptions (Mikaia 2021). Furthermore, the influence of modernization and industrialization on gender arrangements varies depending on the prevailing gender culture, as evidenced by historical contexts such as Romania's, where traditional gender roles persisted despite broader societal transformations (Voicu and Tufiş 2012). A critical examination of the relationship between EU membership and national gender cultures is imperative for a comprehensive understanding of gender equality progress within member states.

In terms of recommendations, rectifying income distribution inequities in both Clusters necessitates the implementation of ethical norms that are highly valued within both corporate entities and society at large. Our analysis of educational, income, and life expectancy trends and patterns underscores the necessity for several measures to ameliorate the situation in the region.

The acceptance of European Union development projects for member states and neighboring nations stands to benefit national managers, fostering cultural synergies and reducing gender gap disparities at a regional level. The cultural norms, values, and shared political experiences prevalent in South Eastern European culture, characterized by an inclination towards an exaggerated state authority, ought to play a moderating role in mitigating gender discrepancies and placing heightened emphasis on short-term economic performance.

Incorporating Georgia and Ukraine into the non-EU cluster, while recognizing their recent applications for EU membership, presents an interesting dimension to consider in our framework. The prospect of EU membership holds the potential for significant changes in these countries, particularly regarding gender equality policies and practices. However, it is essential to recognize that the realization of these changes may be contingent upon various factors, including the resolution of ongoing conflict with Russia. Our suggestion is that substantial advancements in gender equality may materialize under the auspices of the EU, once the conflict with Russia is resolved.

Within a knowledge-based economy, investing in higher education serves as a stimulus for development and aligns the interests of major international stakeholders. Educational literacy, when assessed favorably, holds the potential to drive the transformation of countries into knowledge-based economies. To narrow the educational gender gap, it is advisable to equip women with specialized professional skills that enable them to meet the essential requisites for a myriad of occupations. Augmenting the pool of robust generic cognitive

skills forms the cornerstone for cultivating women's proficiency in applying information in contemporary work settings.

Enhancing the professional training and financial satisfaction of elementary school teachers, a traditionally female-dominated field, may contribute to bolstering income levels. Additionally, affording flexibility in part-time work options could bolster income, provided that such opportunities are regulated in a manner that ensures equitable access to well-remunerated positions for both genders.

Fostering a supportive climate and mitigating negative attitudes are pivotal in elevating life expectancy, as posited by [Rehman et al. \(2021\)](#). In our perspective, quality of life hinges on a set of social values that delineate the democratic ethos of a society. Organizations, in theory, advocate for the creation of an optimal work environment ([Schein 1984](#)) with the aim of optimizing company success, which should be reflected in higher incomes.

Promoting a range of flexible work arrangements forms the bedrock for augmenting life expectancy and diminishing gender inequality within Eastern European labor markets over the long and short term. Another facet that warrants reform involves the introduction of wage-setting schemes and transparent job evaluations to enhance both life expectancy and income.

While job opportunities may be constrained in former communist states, there remain avenues to enhance women's access to employment. Stimulating trends in childcare services through augmented funding and state-sponsored initiatives for firms providing nurturing services in schools is imperative.

Public opinion emphatically asserts that every individual, irrespective of gender, deserves equal opportunities to flourish within a secure social milieu. Compared to other global regions, gender discrimination ingrained in early childhood does not disproportionately impact life expectancy, access to education, or gender-based disparities in men's and women's income.

In select regions of Eastern Europe, particularly within traditional rural communities, job segregation constitutes a significant source of the wage gap between men and women. We recommend implementing the principle of equivalent value in wage settings, regardless of gender, as practiced in other regions such as the Nordic countries. This approach holds the potential to attenuate income and status differentials between male and female occupations.

6. Conclusions

Our study delves into the examination of the GDI within Eastern European states, scrutinizing three crucial dimensions: education, life expectancy, and income.

The analyses conducted in this research yield substantive findings, leading to the following conclusions: The post-communist transition in Europe proves to be a multifaceted and protracted endeavor, exerting far-reaching impacts on both the economic and social dimensions of prosperity in the region. The gender disparity index results, as gleaned from our investigation, serve as a poignant reflection of the arduous social and economic metamorphosis underway in South Eastern Europe.

Returning to the initial queries that prompted this research endeavor—namely, has EU membership demonstrably enhanced gender egalitarianism in comparison to other former communist nations now charting distinct political and economic trajectories? Our analyses of Eurostat databases and subsequent calculations reveal that, in the majority of instances, Cluster 1 (EU member states) exhibits superior outcomes relative to Cluster 2 (non-EU states).

Concerning the income index, we deduce that certain metrics of job segregation have not undergone significant transformation, as gender disparities in wages persist across all examined countries. We derived our data exclusively from internationally recognized statistical databases. We posit that crucial enhancements could be achieved through modernizing the statistical systems of the nations within the region and conducting fresh data

collection endeavors specifically designed to elucidate and broaden our understanding of gender disparities.

As evidenced by this research, statistics pertaining to the index of life expectancy play a pivotal role in monitoring progress toward gender equality in the region.

In both clusters, it is imperative to enhance women's access to remunerative employment and incentivize both men and women to more effectively balance professional commitments with familial responsibilities. This can be achieved by refining wage-setting mechanisms conducive to the establishment of equitable remuneration standards for comparable positions.

The historical trajectory of humanity demonstrates that the journey toward embracing and championing gender equality spanned millennia. In contemporary times, European states are making remarkable strides in transcending the confines of patriarchal societal paradigms and fostering heightened awareness surrounding injurious gender-based norms.

Attaining gender equality is not solely a cornerstone of human rights, but also a linchpin supporting sustainable, enduring prosperity. A concentrated focus on the implementation of gender equality stands poised to rectify prevailing disparities and attenuate other vulnerabilities affecting humanity, such as those rooted in race or socio-economic class.

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