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Author(s) / Autor(i): Matúš Sloboda – Veronika Valkovičová –  
Klaudia Šupáková

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# Gender (In)Equality in Slovak Ministries Through the Perspective of Gender Regimes<sup>1</sup>

**Matúš Sloboda – Veronika Valkovičová – Klaudia Šupáková\***

## ABSTRACT

European Union gender equality policies have been increasingly interested in benchmarking and promoting higher representation of women in non-elected positions of power. While former Slovak government (2016-2020) achieved the highest proportion of women in ministerial positions as yet, according to EIGE's Gender Equality Index, Slovakia still occupies lower tiers of the index with respect to "women in positions of power". What is more, the available descriptive data does not answer questions concerning career trajectories and gender-based barriers, which may be experienced by women at Slovak ministries, let alone how these may be changing when the share of women in leading positions increases. The following study is inspired by the concepts of descriptive and substantial representation as it adopts the analytical approach of gender regimes in organizations to study formal and informal norms of gendered organizations. Results show that greater representation of women in leading positions moves the gender regime closer to one that favourable to women. However, the Slovak case study suggests, that even dominant or balanced representation of women in positions of power does not eliminate experiences with discrimination or gender stereotyping.

**Key words:** gender regime, gender representation, decision-making positions, ministries

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\* Mgr. Matúš Sloboda, PhD. is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Mlynské luhy 4, 821 05, Bratislava, Slovak Republic, e-mail: matus.sloboda@fses.uniba.sk.

Mgr. Veronika Valkovičová, PhD. is a researcher and lecturer at the Department of Civics and Ethics Education, Faculty of Education, Comenius University in Bratislava, Moskovská 3, Bratislava 811 08, Slovak Republic, e-mail: veronika.valkovicova@uniba.sk.

Mgr. Klaudia Šupáková is an alumna of the Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Mlynské luhy 4, 821 05 Bratislava, Slovak Republic, e-mail: klaudiasupakova@gmail.com.

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## Introduction

In 2020, Slovakia marked the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. In 1920, women's suffrage enabled 12/200 mandates for women in the Czechoslovak Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly (Bútorová – Gyárfášová, 2020). In spite of one hundred years of active and passive women's suffrage, women's representation and positive attitudes towards it in the Slovak political culture remain low (European Commission, 2017). Even if women constitute half of the population, they are seldom represented as such in legislative and executive positions.

In the 2020 parliamentary elections in Slovakia, women obtained only 32 out of 150 mandates. In the largest legislative body of the Slovak republic, women have not yet reached the critical 30-percent representation (Bútorová – Gyárfášová, 2020). As for ministerial positions, the greatest number of seats held by women occurred during the previous government of Peter Pellegrini (SMER-SD, 2018-2020), when 5 ministries were led by women (33% of all highest positions). According to the Gender Equality Index 2020 of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the general indicator of women's access to positions of power in Slovakia varies – Slovakia placed 25th in the category of political power (Bútorová – Gyárfášová, 2020). Despite this, up to 40% of Slovaks believe that gender equality, i.e., equality between men and women in the political realm has already been achieved (European Commission, 2017).

Yet, the European Commission Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 emphasizes that not only in elected positions to legislative bodies, but also in other areas of political institutions (e.g., bodies of state and public administration, judicial bodies), there has been a long-term trend of greater representation of men in the highest positions throughout Europe (European Commission, 2020). Leading positions at ministries are key not only in terms of the creation of public policies, but also in terms of personnel politics.

The aim of this study, which strives to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender representation, is to gain an understanding of women's representation in leading positions in ministries in Slovakia with a special emphasis on ministries as workplaces. We utilize the concept of gender regimes (Connell, 1987, 2006) in organizations with regards to the changing gender balance in descriptive representation of women (Dahlerup – Leyennar, 2013). With the help of these concepts, we draw attention to those norms and social

practices in organizations which can complicate or compromise women's access to decision-making positions. If we are to understand the structural barriers women face when trying to access higher positions, we need to understand the gendered nature of organizational culture and practices. With the aim of measuring and comparing gender regimes with regard to the representation of women in ministries, this study offers a quantitative tool – the gender regime index.

## **1. The presence of women in non-elected positions of power – representation and gender regimes**

Studies on gender representation in both elected and non-elected positions have been dominated by the descriptive and substantive representation approach (Pitkin, 1967; Celis, 2009; Celis – Childs, 2014). Unlike concepts such as formalistic or symbolic representation (also theorized by Pitkin), the descriptive and substantive representation approaches assume a similarity between the “represented” and the “representative”. Hence, by “descriptive representation in contemporary democracies”, we may understand more specifically “to be and advocate for someone” or to “represent someone” in an **elected body based on specific external similarities (Maďarová, 2014)** such as belonging to a particular group or minority (sexual, racial, ethnic, religious or otherwise). Studies that rely on the descriptive representation approach focus on the numbers of women in elected bodies and on the observation of their numeric presence in elected and non-elected positions.

Pitkin also develops the concept of substantive representation, which aims to understand “interest representation”, i.e., which takes into account the degree to which the representative actually represents the “best interest” of the represented. According to Pitkin, the concept of substantive representation aims first and foremost to study the agenda in favour of the represented group and looks at the extent to which representatives are receptive to the group they represent, i.e., whether they account for their specific contexts, needs and interests (Pitkin, 1967; Celis, 2009). When it comes to the aforementioned representation of interests of specific constituencies, we must also reject the idea of discernible set of “women's interests”, since women as half of the population in any state do not constitute a sufficiently homogenous group (Celis – Childs, 2014; Kelly – Newman, 2008).

Nevertheless, inspired by the concepts of descriptive and substantive

representation, this study assumes that women in particular settings may experience shared, gendered barriers to achieving political functions. It is therefore necessary that the analysis of women's representation in ministerial positions takes into account equal representation of women as well as the conditions under which women experience professional growth and related gender-based barriers. We are also interested to understand the extent to which women in higher positions (or women present in greater numbers) are able to influence the conditions of the organizations they work for. With these aims in mind, we turn to the concept of gender regimes.

Taking the organization of the public sector in Australia for an example, Raewyn Connell (2006) understands the study of gender regimes as providing a complex picture of gender relations within organizations. These include, for example, the gendered division of labour, cultural significance ascribed to femininity and masculinity within organizations and the various resulting professional trajectories. According to Alena Křížková's study of Czech business environment (Křížková, 2003) and Tània Verge's (2015) account of political parties, the concept of gender regimes describes everyday functioning, as well as social interactions of men and women within organizations. Joan Acker (2006) reminds us that gender regimes in organizations are influenced by their specific social and historical contexts. The study of gender regimes can therefore take various forms. What has been of great recent interest to empirical researchers are "unequal" gender regimes. Connell (1987, 2006) assumes that social practices in organizations are gendered. In the same vein Verge (2015, 755) argues that organizations can also be "institutionally sexist". Men and women in these institutions experience inequality based on socially constructed ideas of gender (Hedlin – Aberly, 2020). Pease explicates the very same idea (2011, p. 408): "An unequal gender regime is characterized by unequal power relations between men and women and unequal gender roles". Aiming to understand gender regimes in organizations, Acker (2006) draws attention to formal organizational politics and processes, their functioning and implementation. She emphasizes that gender regimes also manifest in organizational ideologies, representation, and symbols that are collectively present in organizational culture. To a large extent, therefore, gender regimes are informed by managerial practices, as well as members of the organizations themselves (Acker, 2006; Hedlin – Aberly, 2020).

The concept of gender regime itself is a dynamic instrument that can be used to understand how an organization is gendered and how it relates to the

presence of women in the organization and their career growth. In order to distinguish the ministries in terms of numerical representation of women, this study adopts the classification of Dahlerup and Leyennar (2013) who theorize male dominance in elected political institutions. The authors distinguish four degrees:

- Male monopoly – percentage of women less than 10 %
- Small minority of women – percentage of women 10 – 25 %
- Large minority of women – percentage of women 25 – 40 %
- Gender balance – percentage of women 40 – 60 %

This classification constitutes a framework which is applied by the authors to establish what they understand to be a balanced gender representation.

The analytical framework adopted by this study combines three of six dimensions established by Dahlerup and Leyennar (2013) to study male dominance in political representation: women's numerical political representation, politics as workplace, and vertical sex segregation. To study these dimensions, it is essential to consider the various gender-based barriers, which influence the representation of women in elected and non-elected political positions. It is these factors that then shape organizational practices and gender regimes.

## **2. Gendered barriers to women's political representation**

Research dedicated to gender representation in elected political positions lists a number of cultural, socio-economic, and institutional factors which influence women's access and women's political representation (Maškarinec, 2018). Political science research indeed focuses on a variety of institutions - from the various types of electoral system, to the presence of women's and feminist social movements in political parties (Havelková, 2002; Tremblay, 2007; Dahlerup – Leyennar, 2013). Although it may seem that electoral systems themselves do not influence the presence of women in executive or managerial positions in bureaucratic structures, it is also important to note that access to direct or indirect women's suffrage (and how long this access is secured for) shapes political culture and hence also the interest and prospects of women considering access to this environment (Havelková, 2002; Stockemer, 2008).

Trying to understand the presence of women in non-elected functions also requires an approach that would be more suitable for researching the presence of women on the labour market (Filadelfiová, 2002; Kiaušienė – Štreimikienė –

Grundey, 2011), and which would also pay attention to norms, gender role expectations and gender stereotypes which occur in workplaces (Maďarová, 2014).

Gender stereotypes are the discursive and material expressions of expectations associated with the social construction of femininity and masculinity. This is why they can have a substantial influence on representation of women and men in non-elected functions, as well as on how they experience their careers (Ramsay, Parker, 1991; Dolan, 2000). In social settings, gender stereotypes create a hierarchy of gender. While the private sphere is perceived as the “natural” environment for women’s gender roles, the male gender role is perceived to be “naturally” political – abased in “masculine reason” and “rationality” (Connell, 1987; Bourdieu, 2002). Existing prejudices and perception of gender stereotypes in Slovakia have had a negative impact on the access of women to elected political positions<sup>2</sup> (Filadelfiová, 2002; Ulčín, 2016; Gyárfášová, 2018). As Jarmila Filadelfiová (2002) argues, it has long been part of Slovak political culture to consider higher political functions inappropriate for women with small children. Organizations through the practices of their members easily internalize such an approach into their workplace culture. A study conducted within 27 European Union countries accounting for almost three decades shows that women as ministers experience (compared to their male colleagues) a double barrier. Firstly, they are more likely to be assigned to a stereotypically “feminine” portfolio (e.g., family, education), after which they struggle to be assigned a portfolio associated with “masculinity” (e.g., foreign affairs, interior). Secondly, “female aspirants often reach prestigious offices after they have served in other positions for extensive periods” (Kroeber – Hüffelmann, 2021, 23), as compared to their male colleagues, who do not have to be as qualified. Baumann, Bäck and Davidsson (2018) claim within their Swedish case, that women-ministers are treated more harshly by the party if they deviate from expectations.

Gender stereotypes represent normalized cultural and social expectations of traditional women’s and men’s roles, characteristics, and values (Kiaušienė – Štreimikienė – Grundey, 2011). On the one hand, care work and family life can be completely ignored by the employer and can render the career growth of individuals (mainly women) who perform housework and care work

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2017 Eurobarometer, up to 83% of Slovak men and women believe that it is more likely that women will take decisions based on emotions (European Commission, 2017).

inaccessible. Gender stereotypes can manifest in specific gendered expectations placed on women and men. Family and care are still widely considered to be the women's domain. Hence, the home environment is perceived to be that in which women should be present in the first place<sup>3</sup> (Kiczková, 1997; Gyárfášová, 2018). According to Křížková and Vohlidalová (2009), "motherhood" is a fundamental prejudice that can lead to discrimination in the workplace and can also be the reason for lower salaries – resulting in the gender pay gap.

Besides prejudices towards "maternity" or "working mothers", the stereotyping of women and women's sexuality can also manifest in the cultural practice of organizational sexism and sexual harassment (Acker, 2006). Within workplaces, sexual harassment impacts the careers of women (and sometimes men) as a gender-based social practice, but what differs are the interpersonal, cultural and institutional factors which impact how the victims cope (emotionally and actively) with such form of oppression. Within the Slovak context, individuals who experience harassment seldom seek legal remedies or other forms of help, commonly for fear of reprisal. Typically, they choose to leave the organizations or structures and consequently lose their career options (Valkovičová – Kuruc, 2020).

According to Connell (2006), one of the dominant factors that influence the presence of women in managerial positions is the nature of managerial work itself, which often involves traveling for work, short-notice deadlines, or overtime. She argues that such organizational structuring is seldom feasible for individuals (typically women) with care responsibilities for family members since this means they cannot invest as much time and energy in the work as is expected. This is in line with Matejková's (2020) study of employment expectations, whereby as opposed to men, Czech and Slovak women are more in need of longer vacations and favourable working hours. The author establishes that these demands mitigate the work-private life conflict for women. Bútorová and Gyárfášová (2020) talk about the so-called masculine models of the labour market, in which the system of rewarding and organizing work is tailored to the average male life cycle and does not take into account the practice of women "dropping out" for pregnancy or care for children or other

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<sup>3</sup> Conventional perceptions of gender roles can also be internalized and consequently reproduced by women themselves – this can lead to lesser solidarity among women in political institutions (Filadelfiová, 2002).



family members. According to the authors, it is characteristic of the model that experience and qualifications gained outside of the workplace are not recognized. Connell (2006) also talks about “men’s clubs”, i.e., spaces in which men socialize as leaders and which remain closed to women (e.g., parties or sports events to which women are not invited).

Another related and relevant concept is the gender pay gap. This concept refers to the average differences between how men and women are remunerated in organizational and work sector practice. What is especially relevant about this concept is that it draws attention to the various factors and social practices in the household and in the labour market which can eventually lead to lesser earnings of women (Gyárfášová, 2018; Křížková – Marková – Volejníčková, 2018; Křížková et al., 2020). In Slovakia, it is still the case that the burden of care for children and the elderly falls primarily on women – often, this is because they get paid less and so the family loses less money if they drop out of paid labour<sup>4</sup> (Lutherová – Maříková – Válková, 2017). While insufficient anti-discrimination law can influence the gender pay gap, this phenomenon is more directly associated with factors such as horizontal segregation in the labour market (Kiaušienė – Štreimikienė – Grundey, 2011), where we find more women in less financially appraised sectors, while they are not necessarily less educated.

Gender stereotypes therefore significantly influence the presence of women in the labour market. It is precisely the gendered division of labour that is associated with greater participation of men and women in job sectors which “suit them” according to their social (gender) roles (Filadelfiová, 2002; Dolan, Sanbonmatsu, 2009). In some organizations, such “macro” gendered division of labour can present an active barrier for women trying to enter areas of work that are associated with political power. However, it is also the “micro” division of labour in organizations, which reveals what kind of work men and women perform in particular organizations (Connell, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs, the domestic and care burden of women constitutes the greatest barrier for women’s official representation in political life (81% of female respondents, 77% of male respondents) (Bútorová, Gyárfášová, 2020). We mustn’t forget about how widespread these attitudes are in cultural practice. A 2017 Eurobarometer survey showed that 73% Slovaks (both men and women) believe that the foremost social role of a woman is care for the household and family (European Commission, 2017). This social and cultural practice can put pressure on women to always be present in either or both spheres, but also influences income, career growth and old age earnings in the long run (Kiczková, 1997).

### 3. Methodology

This study is explorative, and its main aim is the analysis of the gender regimes in central state administration bodies - ministries, and how it relates to descriptive representation in leading positions (positions that confer decision-making authority) in these organizations. This article is also an analysis of the aspects of the careers and work of women in ministries (e.g., stereotyping during job interviews) and how they are related to the gender regime.

A partial aim of the study is also to compare specific ministries from the perspective of descriptive representation in leading positions. Therefore, we introduce the division of ministries and their respective organizational and personnel structures. Our ambition is to describe the reality of male and female representation in ministries in decision-making positions – i.e., within heads of units, sections and departments (*odbory, sekcie, oddelenia*). Simultaneously, we also analyse the experience within the gender regime by women-employees of ministries, as well as their perception of women's representation and stereotyping towards them in leading positions.

This article attempts to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What is the degree of representation of women in leading positions in Slovak ministries?

**RQ2:** How do women-employees in decision-making positions in ministries experience the gender regime of their organizations?

**RQ3:** What is the relationship between the gender regime and the degree of representation of women in ministries?

Moreover, we test the relationship between the degree of women's representation in decision-making positions and perceived stereotypes toward them in leading positions.

This study works with two types of data:

- The data on the representation of women in leading positions (the data from organizational structures of ministries).
- The data on the attitudes of women in decision-making/leading positions about career growth, gender-based barriers they face at work and perceptions of representation of men and women in leading positions (the data collected via questionnaire).

The first type is a statistic on the number of women and men in leading positions in sections, units, and departments in respective ministries. For the purposes of this study, we lean on organizational practice in ministries and distinguish between various levels of management as follows (the 1<sup>st</sup> level ranks highest):

1. level of governance: sections and their equivalent organizational components (minister's offices);
2. level of governance: separate departments, departments and their equivalent organizational components (bureaus, offices of the secretaries of state, the office of the secretary general of the service office);
3. level of governance: units.

This article analyses the representation of women in all thirteen ministries in Slovakia (Annex A) and it provides insights into the representation of women at the time of data collection – February and March 2020. We gathered essential information about women employed in leading positions predominantly from web sites of the ministries themselves, particularly from the sites where contact information of respective employees is publicly available. General election took place on February 29, 2020; however, it should not significantly affect the data. Given the lack of complete data in the case of MSVVaS SR, MV SR, and MO SR, we decided to exclude these ministries from our final data sample (see Annex A).

The scale of the degrees of representation of women in respective ministries enables us to divide the ministries from the perspective of the classification of Dahlerup and Leyennar (2013) who conceptualized male dominance in elected political institutions. The authors distinguish four degrees; however, we add additional degree (Majority of women) to cover all possible situations regarding representation of women.

- Male monopoly – percentage of women less than 9.99%
- Small minority of women – percentage of women 10 – 24.99%
- Large minority of women – percentage of women 25 – 39.99%
- Gender balance – percentage of women 40 – 59.99%
- Majority of women - percentage of women 60% and more

Furthermore, we can assume that a consequence of increased descriptive representation of women and their greater representation in leading/decision-

making positions, changes in the institutions themselves (Celis – Childs, 2008; Beckwith, 2007; Kelly – Newman, 2008). We can expect that the gender balance of women in decision-making positions affects and changes both the formal and informal rules of an organization in an environment that is favourable for women in terms of career growth, opportunities, work life balance, etc.

We test this assumption on collected data regarding the attitudes and opinions of women who work in leading positions in respective ministries, who were asked questions about career growth, gender-based barriers they face at work and perceptions of representation of men and women in leading positions. The inquiry on these attitudes was distributed in a questionnaire that was sent to a total of 333 women in leading positions in ministries on 4 May 2020 in a two-week period (including a reminder sent on 11 May 2020). The response rate was 35%, while three responses were returned incomplete. Given the overall high completion rate (between 71% and 89%), we have included these in the results. We did not apply any quotas for the response rate of respondents by ministry.

This questionnaire was a part of a larger study on women in leading positions in Slovak ministries. For the purposes of this study, we use nine questions about perceived representation of women at a ministry, opinions and attitudes about work position, career growth, salary, job interview, roles, and decision-making.

We have developed a gender regime index (hence only GRI). GRI is based on five questions (see Table 1) which are designed as a five-point Likert scale. One set of questions concerns the perception of men's and women's representation at a ministry from the perspective of the respective positions. The second set of questions concerns perception of the ways in which respective work positions are filled and about career growth opportunities. The index is calculated as an arithmetic average of these five questions for each respondent. Cronbach alpha, which measures the inner consistency of each set of responses by a respondent, is at 0,61; an acceptable level of inner consistency to the responses to the questions of which the GRI is composed. The minimum value of the GRI is 1, which indicates an unequal gender regime, one in which women experience inequality and discrimination. The maximum value of the GRI is 5, which indicates a gender regime in which women do not experience discrimination or inequality in relation to men.

We expect that the GRI value will be higher in ministries of which we knew (based on publicly available information on their organizational structure) that

women slightly or significantly dominated representation in leading positions. We expect that greater representation of women in these positions is also accompanied by more equal relations in the workplace, as well as less experience with stereotyping or sexual harassment and generally more equal gender regimes in the organization.

**Table 1:** Gender regime index

Question	Scale
Q1 – men's and women's representation generally	1 – significant male dominance, 5 – significant female dominance
Q2 – men's and women's representation in leading positions	1 – significant male dominance, 5 – significant female dominance
Q7 – perceived career growth opportunities	1 – significantly more difficult for women than for men, 5 – significantly easier for women than for men
Q9 – the process of occupying a position	1 – positions that require the most competence and professional skills are all taken by men, 5 – positions that require the most competence and professional skills are all taken by women
Q10 – the division of the highest paid positions in ministries between men and women	1 – the highest paid positions are all occupied by men, 5 – the highest paid positions are all occupied by women

Source: authors

Aside from using GRI, we analyse selected relations between perceived representation of men and women in ministries in leading positions (Q2), and:

- processes of filling job positions (Q9)
- division of the highest paid positions at the ministries between men and women (Q10)
- perceived opportunities for career growth (Q7)

For the analysis of the selected relations, we will utilize Kendall's tau-b,

since they are ordinal variables with the same number of categories – the Likert scale from 1 to 5.

Similarly, we analyse the relationships between perceived men's and women's representation in ministries in leading positions (Q2) and:

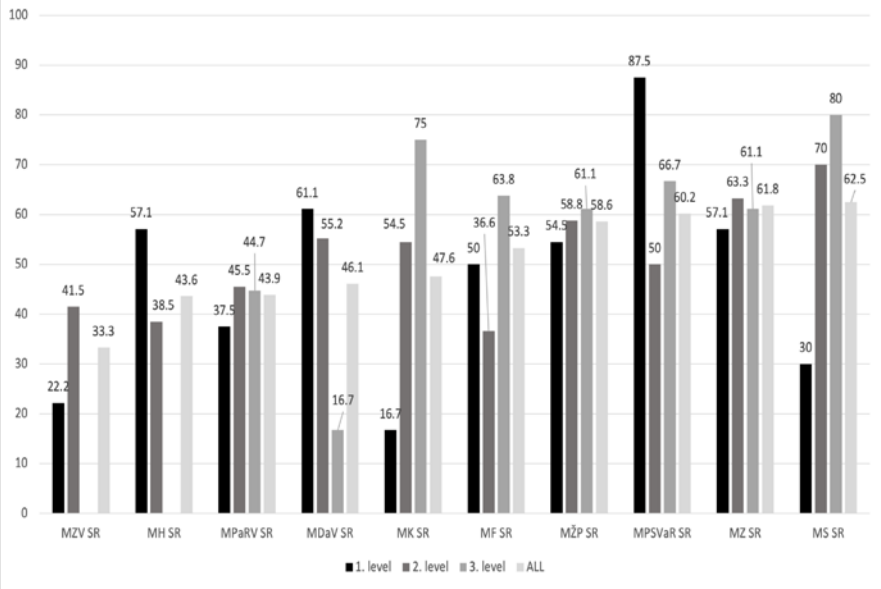
- perceived barriers during job interviews at a ministry (Q3)
- perceived barriers in career growth towards leading positions (Q5)
- the perceived degree to which the sex of the employees determined how roles are assigned and competence distributed (Q11)
- experience with rejection or acceptance of a decision for the reason that said employee is a woman (Q12)

For the analysis of these relations, we will use the Goodman and Kruskal gamma, an appropriate tool for the analysis of how ordinal variables without a matching number of categories relate. Questions Q3 and Q5 have four categories, the degree of agreement being 1 - yes, numerous; 4 – certainly not. All calculations were performed in R program.

## 4. Results

Based on data on organizational structures in Slovak ministries, we can analyse the degrees of representation in decision-making positions. This data on women's representation constitutes an important starting point for the analysis of the attitudes and experiences of women working in leading positions. In this study, we consider five degrees of representation of women in leading positions. A gender balanced representation of men and women, regardless of their place in the institutional hierarchy, can be found in six out of ten ministries. There is a majority of women in leading positions (regardless of the level of management) in three ministries. Data shows that women in leading position are in minority only in one ministry – Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, a closer look at the levels of managements provides a slightly different picture. The representation of women in the first level managerial positions is on average lower than in second and third level positions and women in leading positions are in minority in three ministries. Although the macro-view can provide an optimistic picture about representation of women in decision-making positions, this view is skewed due to higher representation of women in lower managerial levels.

**Figure 1:** Representation of women in leading/decision-making positions in ministries by percentage (February/March 2020)



Source: authors

Note: The percentage indicating women's representation in ministries is calculated based on accessible data from the leading positions in ministries.

The gender regime conceptualizes the gendered formal and informal norms of an organization (Verge, 2015), which means that we need to consider the possibility of the regime to inform career paths for women in the organization. This is particularly the case in overtly masculine collectives (Křížová, 2003). For the purposes of this study, we operationalize the gender regime as the arithmetic average of responses from female respondents to questions about perceptions of the representation of men and women in ministries (from the perspective of their respective positions), including their perceptions of how particular positions are filled, as well as their career growth opportunities. The index value is on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 indicates a gender regime, for which gender equality is characteristic. We estimate that the index value will be higher in those ministries with slight or significant dominance of women.

This expectation was fulfilled in the case of the first (highest) and third (lowest) level of management. At both levels of management, we see the growth

of the value of the GRI with the growing share of women in leading positions. In the case of the first level of management, the difference between Majority of women and both Large and Small minority of women is 0.49 points (16%) and 0.73 points (24%), respectively. Moreover, the index value is higher compared to Gender balance degree by 0.32 points (11%). We observe a similar pattern in GRI at the third level of management. In the second level of management, GRI achieves the highest values in gender balanced representation and the index values are very similar in the degrees of Majority of women and Large minority of women. The GRI, regardless of the level of management (all levels), has a value of 3.11 in the degree Majority of women, which is higher than the GRI value in Gender balance by 14%. The results indicate that a greater representation of women in decision-making positions increases the GRI value. This means that with greater representation of women in leading positions, the gender regime (GRI=3) moves closer to more equal regime (GRI=5), in spite it never reaches the close to the maximum value of GRP.

**Table 2:** Gender regime index by level of management

Degree of women's representation in ministries		Average gender regime index value
First level of management	Majority of women (N=39)	3.04 (SD=0.56)
	Gender balance (N=50)	2.72 (SD=0.48)
	Large minority of women (N=14)	2.55 (SD=0.71)
	Small minority of women (N=12)	2.30 (SD=0.67)
Second level of management	Majority of women (N=13)	2.68 (SD=0.54)
	Gender balance (N=74)	2.83 (SD=0.63)
	Large minority of women (N=28)	2.63 (SD=0.53)
	Small minority of women (N=0)	



Third level of management	Majority of women (N=76)	2.93 (SD=0.55)
	Gender balance (N=9)	2.62 (SD=0.78)
	Large minority of women- (N=0)	
	Small minority of women (N=15)	2.56 (SD=0.41)
All levels of management in total	Majority of women (N=37)	3.11 (SD=0.56)
	Gender balance (N=69)	2.67 (SD=0.51)
	Large minority of women (N=9)	2.03 (SD=0.52)
	Small minority of women- (N=0)	

Source: authors

Note: the percentual degree of women's representation in ministries calculated based on publicly accessible data from the management structures at the ministries.

The Table 3 illustrates the strength and direction between the GRI and the representation of women in leading positions in ministries. The correlation of GRI and the degree of representation of women in decision-making positions, without distinguishing between levels of management, is at 0.46, which indicates a moderately strong positive and statistically significant correlation. The original relational level between women's representation in leading positions and the gender regime can be observed on the first and third level of management. Considering the GRI values according to management level (Table 2), it is not surprising that women's representation in leading positions on the second level of management has only a weak positive relation with GRI. And yet, similarly to the results indicated above, even the correlation coefficient confirms that as the number of women in decision-making positions grows, so does the GRI value. The second management level, which represents the leading positions at the level of departments and their equivalent organizational

components (e.g., the offices of state secretaries, the office of the secretary general of the service office) shows that the perception of gender regimes is not clearly bound to degrees of women's representation leading positions. One explanation for this can be the lack of data because only one out of ten respondents works at a ministry where there is a majority of women on this level of management.

**Table 3:** Correlations of GRI and levels of management (management)

First level of management (N=115)	0.49*
Second level of management (N=115)	0.17**
Third level of management (N=109)	0.42*
The sum of all levels of management (N=115)	0.46*

Source: authors

Note: The relation (Pearson  $r$ ) between GRI and the first or third level of management is statistically significant (moderately strong positive correlation) at a significance of  $p < 0.05$ . The relation between GRI and the second level of management is statistically significant at  $p < 0.1$  (weak positive correlation).

The perception of the degrees of women's representation in leading positions in a ministry in which a respondent was employed correlates with perceived opportunities for career growth, the ways in which positions are filled and the allocation of the best paid positions (Table 4). The data suggests that the best paid positions, according to the respondents, are more often distributed equally between men and women, when the representation of women in leading positions is higher. This indicates a moderately strong positive and statistically significant correlation. We can observe a similar relation and trend between perception of women's representation in leading positions and the process of the positions acquisition, as well as career growth options at the ministry. In the first case, we see that a higher degree of representation of women in leading positions leads to a more positive perception about the process of acquiring a job position. In the second case, it means that the more respondents felt that they were represented in leading positions, the less difficult their career growth was at the respective ministry. These results indicate that women in leading

positions can have a positive effect on the careers of other women in ministries.

**Table 4:** The correlation of perceived men's and women's representation in leading positions, career growth and wages

	Perception of men's and women's representation at ministries in leading positions (Q2)
Perceived career growth opportunities (Q7)	<b>0.4645658*</b> (117)
The process of job position acquisition (Q9)	<b>0.4359826*</b> (118)
The allotment of the best paid positions at ministries between men and women (Q10)	<b>0.5417199*</b> (100)

Note: Kendall's tau-b, \*the relation between variables is at  $p < 0.05$

The degree of women's representation in leading positions in ministries influences women's perception of barriers in career growth towards leading positions and assignment of roles with greater managerial competences (Table 5). The growing perception of women's representation in leading positions strengthens the belief of women that decision-making roles in organizations are not distributed via gender stereotyping. We can observe a similarly strong correlation in the case of perceived barriers towards career advancement towards a leading position. In both cases, this is a moderately strong positive and statistically significant correlation. However, the data does not indicate a statistically significant relationship between perceived women's representation in leading positions and perceived barriers during job interviews and the degree of acceptance of women's decisions in the context of a work-related agenda.

**Table 5:** Correlation between perceived men's and women's representation in leading positions and barriers at ministries

	Perceived men's and women's representation in leading positions (Q2)
Experience with rejection or acceptance of a decision for the reasons that the employee is a woman (Q12)	0.0499002 (111)

Perception of the degree to which the sex/gender of employees influences the ascription of roles with managerial competences (Q11)	0.38291139* (98)
Perceived barriers during job interviews at ministries (Q3)	0.2608137 (123)
Perceived barriers to career growth towards a leading position (Q5)	0.3927018* (123)

Note: Goodman and Kruskal's gamma. The relation between Q2 and Q12 is not statistically significant. \*The relation between Q2 and Q11 is statistically significant at 0.05. In the question regarding perceived barriers to career growth towards a leading position, the response "yes, but only in the past" was coded as 3.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Women's representation in non-elected leading positions in Slovak ministries indicates a balanced representation or majority of women at nine out of ten ministries. However, a closer look at the degrees of women's representation at the respective levels of management does not give us a clear picture of the degree of women's representation in leading positions. The degree of women's representation in leading positions is, to a great extent, influenced by the context of a given ministry. It is not necessarily the case that a greater number of women at the first or second level of management also leads to greater representation of women at the third level of management. This data is of a descriptive nature and therefore only partially attest to the career trajectories of women, i.e., it does not allow us to sufficiently address more specific questions about barriers which prevent more gender balanced political representation at the highest positions.

This study applied the concept of gender regime with the aim of understanding the gendered nature of Slovak ministries (Connell, 1987, 2006). It is precisely the perspective of gender regimes that allows us to better understand the formal and informal norms in organizations, gendered divisions of labour, and experience with discriminating or stereotyping social practices. We consider these to constitute gender-based barriers that prevent women from

eventually occupying higher positions (Filadelfiová, 2002; Maďarová, 2014; Ulčín, 2016; Bútorová – Gyárfášová, 2020). We created a gender regime index that contained several basic indicators on experience with gender discrimination in the recruitment process and during career growth processes, as well as various experience with gendered stereotyping in the work environment.

Women's representation in leading positions has a positive influence on the career growth of women in ministries. The results of the analysis indicate that greater representation of women in leading positions moves the gender regime closer to one that is favourable to women. Yet, in spite of a balanced state or even in the case of a majority of women in decision-making positions, women still experience gender-based barriers in their careers – e.g., discrimination and experiences with stereotyping. The presence of women in leading positions creates positive workplace conditions for the career growth of other women, however, this does not necessarily mean that the gender regime in an organization will be unconditionally positively attuned towards women. Furthermore, higher representation does not have a significant influence on experience with gender stereotyping during decision-making processes in a workplace. A possible explanation of this can be an organizational culture in which a manager's opinion and decision are accepted regardless of their gender.

We consider the gender regime index to be a useful tool for the study of gender-based barriers and gender representation in elected and non-elected political functions, particularly when comparing ministries. The index could be used for the purposes of a gender audit in organizations. However, we recommend expanding this index by adding more indicators or verifying results with qualitative data. An example of an indicator that was not used in the index is the influence of political nominations and existence of "men's clubs", which were also listed in the feedback section of the questionnaire submitted by participating respondents.

Our results support the conclusion that it is necessary to gradually increase the concentration of women in leading positions, as well as to secure sufficient support for them in bureaucratic structures of the state. If women are guaranteed a sufficiently supportive, barrier-free environment and if the degree of conflict between the values of individual women and the respective agenda of a given state institution (organization) is minimal, women's political participation will improve not only from the descriptive but also from the substantive perspective (Celis, 2009; Celis – Childs, 2014; Dolan, 2000).

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## Annex A

Ministries based on the degree of basic acquired data about the representation of women in leading positions – information available from websites

Name of ministry	Shortcut	Percentage of acquired data	Number of employees in leading positions
Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic	MH SR	60%	65
Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic	MF SR	100%	120
Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic	MDV SR	59.4%	128
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic	MPRV SR	100%	98
Ministry of Interior Affairs of the Slovak Republic	MV SR	82.6%	23*
Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic	MO SR	12.7%	126
Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic	MS SR	81.6%	49
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic	MZV SR	100%	58
Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic	MPSVR SR	100%	88
Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic	MZP SR	100%	71
Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic	MSVVS SR	19.5%	77
Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic	MK SR	55.3%	38
Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic	MZ SR	94.9%	58

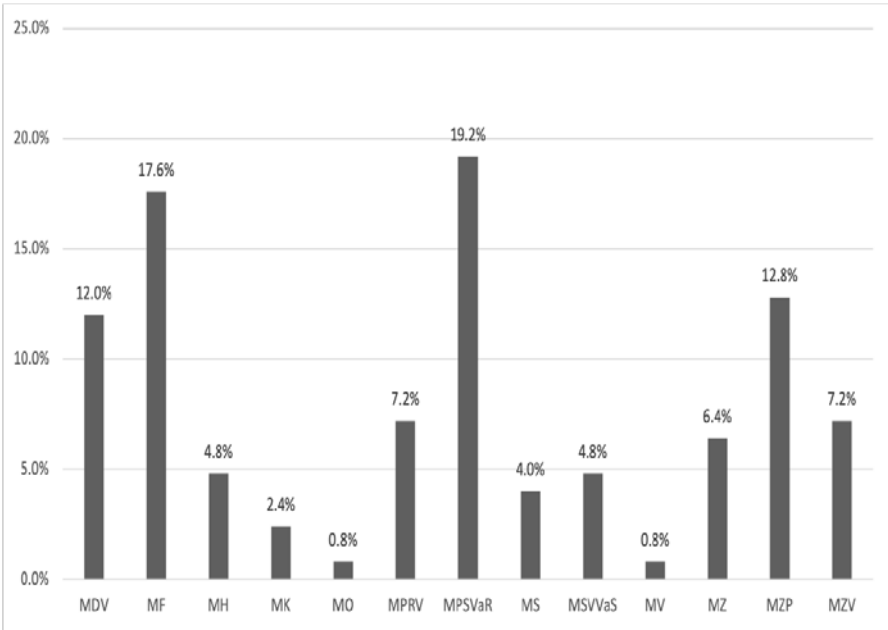
Source: Authors

Note: Data about the number of employees (men and women in all organization of a given ministry)

\* The Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic has incomplete public information about its structure.

## Annex B

Distribution (share) of respondents (women) by ministry who answered and completed questionnaire



Legend:

MDV - Ministry of Transport and Construction

MF - Ministry of Finance

MH - Ministry of Economy

MK - Ministry of Culture

MO - Ministry of Defence

MPRV - Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

MPSVaR - Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family

MS - Ministry of Justice

MSVVaS - Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport

MV - Ministry of Interior Affairs

MZ - Ministry of Health

MZP - Ministry of Environment

MZV - Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs