JEAN MONNET MODULE
EUROPEAN UNION AND GENDER EQUALITY

JEAN MONNET MODUL
EUROPSKA UNIJA I RODNA RAVNOPRAVNOST

EUGEquality

September 24, 2026

International Scientific Conference "EU of Gender Equality"

Faculty of Law Osijek

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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INTRODUCTION

The International Scientific Conference "EU of Gender Equality," held at the Faculty of Law in Osijek on September 24, 2026, marks the final activity of the Jean Monnet Module "European Union and Gender Equality – EUGEquality." This project was approved and funded by the European Union through the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) under the Erasmus+ programme. The project spanned three years, running from November 1, 2023, to October 31, 2026.

The theme of the Conference is in line with one of the goals of the project: to respond to the challenges associated with building an inclusive and gender-equal European society through the implementation of legally oriented research, and to contribute to the involvement and openness of young people and to raising the awareness of young people and the general public about understanding the context of the EU, especially with regard to its common values, with an emphasis on gender equality. Therefore, the purpose of the Conference was to address the need to present the results and findings of the Jean Monnet Module, as well as to provide a platform for stimulating discussion on key issues affecting gender equality policy in the EU and its Member States.
The international character of the Conference emphasizes the importance of the project and the Conference itself through connecting institutions and participants from different countries, with an emphasis on neighboring countries, and analyzing the challenges of achieving various aspects of gender equality both at the EU level and at the level of individual EU member states or candidate countries.
This Book of abstracts contains the Conference program (with the note that, due to unforeseen circumstances, some scheduled presenters did not attend the conference) and the abstracts of the papers presented at the conference, arranged alphabetically by author(s).
We would like to thank all conference participants who, with their attendance, interesting and topical presentations, and submitted papers (selected ones of which will be published in a special issue of *Pravni vjesnik*), contributed to the organization and quality of the conference.

On behalf of the Organizing Committee,

Anita Blagojević
Coordinator of the Jean Monnet Module "European Union and Gender Equality"



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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JEAN MONNET MODULE EUROPEAN UNION AND GENDER EQUALITY

PRAVOS

International Scientific Conference

EU of Gender Equality

September 24, 2026

Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Law
Stjepana Radića 13

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

09:00 - 10:00 Registration & Coffee

10:00 - 10:15 Opening Session

1. Prof. Dunja Duić, PhD, Vice Dean for Science and International Cooperation, Faculty of Law Osijek
2. Prof. Anita Blagojević, PhD, Jean Monnet Module "EU and Gender Equality (EUGEquality)" Coordinator, Faculty of Law Osijek

10:15 - 12:00 Keynote speakers

1. Višnja Ljubičić, Ombudsperson for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia
2. Prof. Timea Drinoczi, PhD, Mykolas Romeris University: Vilnius, Vilnius, Lithuania
3. Prof. Anita Blagojević, PhD, Faculty of Law Osijek

12:00 - 13:00 Lunch Break

13:00 - 16:00 Conference Sessions

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SESSION 1
Stjepana Radića 13, Faculty Hall
13:00-16:00

(chair: Ivica Pavić)

1. Ana Horvat Vuković: PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE OR CONSTITUTIONALIZING THE MARKET? THE CROATIAN SURROGACY TURN
2. Matija Miloš: ADDRESSING GENDER ESSENTIALISM THROUGH THE EUROPEAN LAW OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
3. Antonija Petričušić: ASSESSMENT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN CROATIA: IN THE CONTEXT OF EU EFFORTS TO HARMONIZE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS THROUGH ANALYSIS OF THE OMBUDSPERSON FOR GENDER EQUALITY ANNUAL REPORTS
4. Nina Gumzej: EQUALITY AND EU ARTIFICAL INTELLIGENCE GOVERNANCE: THE AI ACT IN LIGHT OF EMERGING COUNCIL OF EUROPE NORMS
5. Jakub Żurek: GENDER-BASED DICRIMINATION AGAINST MEN IN THE POLISH LEGAL FRAMEWORK
6. Jozef Kotasek: COMBATING SEXIST ADVERTISING IN EUROPE: FROM ETHIC TO LAW AND BACK
7. Anita Blagojević, Ivana Tucak, Ivica Pavić: THE RISE OF POPULISM AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN CROATIA: SOME CONSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

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SESSION 2
Stjepana Radića 17, Classroom 3
13:00-16:00

(chair: Barbara Herceg Pakšić)

8. Lucie Prenosilova: WHAT DOES "FACILITATING TAKE-UP OF PARENTAL LEAVE" MEAN IN EU LAW? INTERPRETING ARTICLE 8(3) WLBD
9. Ružica Šimić Banović, Ana Marija Sikirić Simčić, Natalija Babić: "MOTHERHOOD PENALTY" AND CAREER PROGRESSION IN THE CROATIAN LEGAL PROFESSION
10. Jovana Rajić Ćalić: WORK-LIFE BALANCE - THE CHALLENGE OF FAMILY LIFE AND GENDER EQUALITY
11. Draga Gajić: THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY (EIGE) - ADVOCATING FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE DIGITAL AGE
12. Vesna Nagy: THE PROTECTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE GROUNDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS
13. Igor Milinković, Milijana Buha: THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY IN CRIMINAL PROCEDURE: GENDER PERSPECTIVES, ETHICAL STANDARDS AND THE CHALLENGES OF AI
14. Barbara Herceg Pakšić: ON THE POSITION AND MEANING OF GENDER IN CRIMINAL LAW - CURRENT STATE AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

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SESSION 3
Stjepana Radića 17, Classroom 4
13:00-16:00

(chair: Marinela Boras)

15. Remzije Istrefi: FORMAL COMPLIANCE AND LIVED REALITIES: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON KOSOVO'S ALIGNMENT WITH EU GENDER EQUALITY STANDARDS

16. Debora Boletini: HEALING INVISIBLE WOUNDS: ALIGNING MENTAL HEALTH IN KOSOVO WITH EUROPEAN UNION STANDARDS AND GENDER EQUALITY

17. Saiful Islam Mosumder: LOCALIZING EU GENDER EQUALITY DIRECTIVES: THE CASE OF FOREIGN WOMEN IN SERBIAN MUNICIPALITIES

18. Andreja Files-Ružić: ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN POLICIES AND INSTRUMENTS AIMED AT ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUAL TREATMENT TO ROMA WOMEN IN CROATIA

19. Petra Jurina: WHY 2026 WILL BE BIG FOR WOMEN ON BOARDS OF DIRECTORS?

20. Marija Karadža, Dragana Bjelić Gaćeša: THE GLASS CEILING IN SPORT: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

21. Marinela Boras: GENDER EQUALITY IN EFL CURRICULA IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA AS AN EU COUNTRY

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The rise of populism and the rights of women in Croatia: Some constitutional considerations

Over the past thirty years, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been undergoing transition, including democratic transition, which was marked primarily by adopting the EU acquis, including that on gender equality and women's rights.
These processes have not been welcome everywhere and by all political actors. As a result, in the conditions of polarization of society between the progressive liberal left and the conservative and populist right, which is gaining more and more momentum, a democratic crisis widely regarded as democratic regression and illiberalism has emerged.
The aforementioned populist movement processes often put in the political foreground, often as the basic or unifying idea (opportunistic synergy) of the right-wing political spectrum, certain democratic achievements of women's rights and gender equality, such as the right to abortion or the Istanbul Convention, but only with the aim of protecting so-called traditional values, the traditional family and protecting national identity in the context of the relationship between national and European norms from "dangerous" "gender politics" and "gender ideology" imposed by the corrupt EU political elite.
The strengthening of these processes was also influenced by some other socio-political, economic and technical circumstances, such as the migrant and health crises, economic crisis, but also the development of technology and social media, which enabled the global networking of anti-gender actors.
Anti-gender movements and strategies are not unknown even in the sphere of constitutional law, and, according to an interesting classification by Rubio-Marin, there are three basic strategies recognized to have been used by the aforementioned anti-gender actors, which are: regressive constitutional regression, constitutional entrenchment and constitutional preemption.
The described processes and movements did not bypass Croatia either, for which the paper follows the implementation of the described strategies on practical examples: the regulation and interpretation of the right to abortion, the constitutional referendum on marriage and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Keywords: women's rights, citizens' initiative referendum, populism, abortion, Croatia

Debora Boletini, MSC in Global Mental Health, Researcher
Institute for Women Peace and Security, Jahjaga Foundation, Prishtina, Kosovo

Healing Invisible Wounds: Aligning Mental Health in Kosovo with European Union Standards and Gender Equality

The gender-based violence, displacement and overall psychological consequences of 1999 war has left lasting impacts on women in Kosovo. The trauma, depression, and anxiety among others hinder their equal participation in social, economic, and political life. Addressing these invisible wounds is essential for advancing gender equality, a core European Union (EU) value enshrined in the *acquis communautaire* and reinforced through directives on healthcare, non-discrimination, and social inclusion.

In 2015, Kosovo authorities signed the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA) and consequently committed themselves among others to align the legal framework with EU standards. Although, this commitment demonstrates Kosovo's readiness to uphold European values and build a resilient, inclusive society, this process seems to be slow.

A decade after the signing of the SAA, in its 2025 Kosovo Report**,** the European Commission noted that the Law on Mental Health is being revisited to better align it with the EU *acquis*. While, the European Commission's annual reports have explicitly noted mental health legal gaps and needs for reform, there are not however academic studies that do so.

Employing a qualitative doctrinal and comparative legal methodology, combined with policy analysis, and mixed-methods approach this study, aims to fill this gap. This study's main research question is: to what extent Kosovo's mental health legal and policy framework is aligned with EU standards, and to what extent this alignment strengthens rights-based and gender-responsive mental health services in Kosovo? At first, the Kosovo's legal framework and strategies on mental health are examined to evaluate their formal compliance with EU specific mental health and gender equality standards. Then, combining an online survey with health service users and semi-structured interviews with the mental health policy makers and professionals the study aims to identify: the gaps in service quality and gender-sensitive access to care in Kosovo, and assess if mental health system addresses the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women in the post-war contexts.

This study aims to contribute to the scholarly literature and inform policymakers on relevance of EU standards in advancing, equality and non-discrimination in mental health care.

Keywords: mental health, gender equality, EU standards, Kosovo

Marinela Boras, PhD
Faculty of Law Osijek, University of Osijek

Gender Equality in EFL Curricula in Secondary Schools in the Republic of Croatia as an EU country

In today's globalised world, especially as the Republic of Croatia is a member state of the European Union, the development of intercultural competence of students and teachers and raising awareness of gender (in)equality is of high importance. Interculturalism brings openess to other cultures, what is important in learning and teaching foreign languages. In this paper presence of gender equality in the curricula of English as a foreign language in secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia was analysed. The aim of the research was to determine if and to which extent is gender equality as intercultural content present in the EFL curricula in secondary schools. The research was conducted through content analysis of the EFL curricula which included research matrix based on the official documents of the European Union, systematic classroom observation of EFL teaching with the help of a protocol and qualitative analysis of videos of EFL teaching. Analysis of the EFL curricula in secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia has shown that gender equality as intercultural content is present as a part of an intercultural teaching topic in EFL teaching. One of the most represented intercultural teaching topic in secondary schools is 'Human rights' in which gender equality is represented. Systematic classroom observation and qualitative analysis of videos of EFL teaching have shown that gender equality as intercultural content is present as a part of an intercultural teaching topic and that EFL teachers implement intercultural teaching of gender equality. One of the most represented intercultural teaching topic is 'Human rights', as in the EFL curricula, with an emphasis on womens' rights in EFL teaching. The scientific value of this paper is the determination of gender equality as intercultural content in the existing EFL curricula, especially in the field of womens' rights, as a starting point for improvement of representation of gender equality as a part of intercultural education in the Republic of Croatia as an EU country.

Keywords: content analysis, curricula of English as a Foreign Language, gender equality, interculturalism, systematic classroom observation, videos of teaching English as a Foreign Language, womens' rights

Prof. Tímea Drinóczi, PhD
Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Verbal and Symbolic Aggression and Hostility: Discursive Power, Equality, and Constitutional Subjecthood

Drawing on interdisciplinary evidence, this article examines verbal and symbolic hostility toward women and LGBT+ people as a structural form of gender inequality that undermines democratic participation and constitutional subjecthood. These practices not only operate through speech acts or formal legal rules, but are also produced and reinforced across discourse, digital platforms, political narratives, and institutional routines.

Building on insights from linguistics, discourse and media studies, gender and queer theory, and constitutional and human-rights scholarship, the article develops a unified analytical account of how ridicule, shaming, symbolic erasure, purity narratives, and strategic legal framing interact to shape who is heard, whose claims are taken seriously, and who is recognized as a legitimate political and legal subject. Across diverse political and institutional contexts, these dynamics generate cumulative and transnational patterns of exclusion that chill participation and contribute to processes of democratic and constitutional erosion.

The central claim of the article is that these dynamics cannot be adequately understood, traced, or regulated within any single disciplinary or legal framework. Because discursive hostility circulates across digital communication, party politics, administrative practice, and legal doctrine, it is only partially and asymmetrically recognized within existing equality, speech, and human-rights regimes.

By bringing together linguistic and media-analytic approaches, perspectives from constitutional and human-rights frameworks, scholarship and theories, the article shows why an explicitly interdisciplinary approach is necessary to grasp how verbal and symbolic hostility reshapes democratic participation and constitutional belonging. It concludes that without such a cross-domain framework, the cumulative effects of gendered and sexualized discursive harm will remain systematically misrecognized, leaving courts, regulators, and scholars ill-equipped to address one of the most pervasive forms of contemporary democratic and constitutional erosion.

Keywords: verbal and symbolic hostility, unified analytical account, patterns of exclusion, partial and asymmetrical recognition, interdisciplinary approach

Andreja Fileš Ružić, Lawyer, Croatia

Analysis of the impact of european policies and instruments aimed at achieving gender equality and equal treatment of Roma women in Croatia

As one of the most significant values and principles of European Union, gender equality is, at the same time, seen and recognized as a fundamental value in itself, as well as one of the conditions and tools for achieving the objectives of the EU. As such, it has been built in the legal framework of the EU from its very foundations, including the Treaty on European Union, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Treaty of Lisbon, as well as secondary legislation: Recast Directive, Gender Goods and Services Directive, Work-Life Balance Directive, Directive 97/7/EEC and 2010/41/EU which promote the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security and self-employment, Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, among others. European Union has continuously been promoting the achievement of gender equality and equal treatment through its policies and strategies, such as Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 (and previously the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy, framework for Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019**,** 2011-2020 Gender Equality Pact), the European Pillar of Social Rights**,** 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These instruments are aimed to enhance achieving the objects of gender equality and non-discrimination in all the member states and for all the citizens and residents of the EU. But some groups experience more difficulties or are even excluded from benefiting from these policies, due to the socio-economic conditions they leave in. One of these groups are women belonging to the Roma minority in most member states, in Croatia among them.

In the research conducted in the form of a focus group with women from the Roma national minority from the Croatian region of Međimurje, I gained insight into the position and experiences of women belonging to this group, the problems they encounter in exercising the entire spectrum of rights, and the still-present numerous forms of gender inequality they experience both within their minority community and outside it, as well as the experiences of intersectional discrimination to which they are exposed.

The paper will present and analyse the legal framework of the European Union for achieving gender equality, and then, based on the insights, data and information collected within the above mentioned research - focus group, analyse whether and to what extent women from the Roma national minority are able to enjoy the benefits of European policies aimed at achieving gender equality and equal treatment, and whether the effects of these policies and strategies reach them, and to which extent.

Keywords: gender equality, equal treatment, EU instruments, exclusion of the Roma minority, Croatia, experiences, present inequalities, focus group

Prof. Nina Gumzej, PhD
Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Equality and EU Artificial Intelligence Governance: The AI Act in Light of Emerging Council of Europe Norms

Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (AI Act) establishes a horizontal, risk-based regulatory framework for artificial intelligence. Yet in its binding obligations equality, especially gender equality, largely appears as a compliance concern. Providers must manage risks and minimize bias in datasets, while broader questions of structural and intersectional discrimination remain addressed through the EU equality *acquis* and related frameworks. This paper revisits this model of „procedural equality" at a moment of increasing normative development.

In March 2026 the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)1 on equality and artificial intelligence and Recommendation CM/Rec(2026)2 on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. Together with the 2024 Framework Convention on AI, which sets out overarching principles of equality and accountability, the Council of Europe's 2026 Recommendations give these principles more detailed practical expression. They call for equality specific impact assessment across the AI lifecycle, standards for discrimination audits, stronger oversight powers, and remedies including collective avenues of action and compensation. They also address gender-based harms linked to AI systems, including cases where algorithmic systems contribute to spread of abusive content directed at women and girls, and treat such harms as matters that may require accountability under criminal, civil and administrative law.

The paper draws on a doctrinal analysis of the AI Act, including deployer Fundamental Rights Impact Assessments, powers of fundamental rights authorities and the right to explanation, in light of the EU Charter, EU equality law and CEDAW. On that basis it examines how EU AI governance can better address gender equality. Building on doctrinal and policy proposals, the paper identifies several mutually reinforcing elements. These include stronger consideration of equality and intersectionality in AI impact assessment and standardization processes; closer institutional cooperation between AI regulators, data protection authorities and equality bodies; audit and transparency obligations adapted to sector-specific gender equality risks, including online violence and harmful digital content, and clearer pathways to collective redress and liability linking AI Act enforcement with EU equality law and data protection frameworks.

Keywords: AI Act, risk management, procedural equality, Council of Europe Recommendation, doctrinal analysis, reinforcing elements

Prof. Barbara Herceg Pakšić, PhD
Faculty of Law, University of Osijek, Croatia

On the Position and Meaning of Gender in Criminal Law – Current State and Perspectives in the Republic of Croatia

This paper examines the role and relevance of gender in criminal law, with reference to the normative and practical framework of the Republic of Croatia. The analysis explores whether and to what extent Croatian criminal legislation and judicial practice incorporate a gender-sensitive approach, especially in the context of specific criminal offences.
Firstly, the theoretical foundations of gender as a legal and criminological category are outlined. Then we analyze key provisions of the Croatian Criminal Code and related legislation, assessing their alignment with international standards, including the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), as well as relevant European Union directives.
Particular attention is devoted to the treatment of gender-based violence, sentencing policies, victim protection mechanisms, and the recognition and validation of gender as a potential aggravating or qualifying circumstance. The paper also addresses challenges in implementation, including evidentiary standards, stereotypes in judicial reasoning, and the need for specialized training of criminal justice professionals.
The research suggests that, while the Croatian legal framework formally recognizes gender-based violence and provides protective mechanisms, further development is needed to ensure consistent gender-sensitive interpretation and application of criminal law. The paper concludes with thoughts aimed at strengthening substantive equality and enhancing the effectiveness of criminal law in responding to gender-based harm.

Keywords: gender in criminal law, framework in Croatia, gender sensitive approach examination, alignment with international standards, treatment of gender-based violence

Prof. Remzije Istrefi, PhD, Constitutional Court Justice
Constitutional Court of Kosovo,
Faculty of Law, University of Prishtina, Kosovo

Formal Compliance and Lived Realities: A Critical Reflections on Kosovo's Alignment with EU Gender Equality Standards

Kosovo's legislative framework has been progressively aligned with European Union (EU) directives on gender equality, reflecting its formal commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. On paper, the country demonstrates compliance with EU standards through constitutional guarantees, anti-discrimination laws, and sector-specific policies. Yet, women in Kosovo continue to face persistent inequalities in employment, political participation, and access to justice. The absence of robust monitoring mechanisms and the limited integration of gender perspectives into policymaking perpetuate a disconnect between formal compliance and lived realities. This article argues that Kosovo's alignment with EU gender equality standards remains symbolic unless accompanied by substantive institutional reforms, stronger accountability measures, and cultural transformation. Employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates doctrinal legal analysis, policy and institutional evaluation, and critical discourse analysis, the study examines both the formal compliance of Kosovo's gender equality laws with EU directives and the practical challenges hindering their implementation. It begins with an overview of the incorporation of international gender equality standards into the post-war legal framework during United Nations administration, before critically assessing the legal framework enacted after Kosovo's declaration of independence. The analysis maps areas of formal alignment with EU directives while highlighting persistent enforcement gaps, weak monitoring mechanisms, and cultural barriers that render compliance superficial. Intersectional dimensions, including the experiences of minority and marginalized women, are incorporated to illustrate the lived realities behind the law. Ultimately, the article contributes to comparative studies on the alignment of national legal frameworks with EU gender equality standards, positioning Kosovo as a valuable case study for scholars and practitioners examining gender equality in transitional contexts and in states outside full EU membership.

Keywords: gender equality, non-discrimination, Kosovo, European Union

Petra Jurina, LLM, PhD Candidate
Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Digital Transformation, Zagreb, Croatia

Why 2026 Will Be Big for Women on Boards of Directors?

This paper examines the European Union's gender balance policy with a particular focus on Directive (EU) 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures. The so-called "EU Women on Boards" Directive represents a significant step in the EU's long-standing efforts to address structural gender inequalities in corporate governance by introducing binding minimum targets for the underrepresented sex on corporate boards, alongside procedural requirements to ensure transparent and merit-based appointment processes. The Directive's principal objective is that at least forty percent of non-executive director posts, or a third of all director posts on publicly-listed corporations, irrespective of whether they are executive or non-executive, be composed of the under-represented gender by 30 June 2026. The analysis situates Directive 2022/2381 within the broader EU equality framework and explores its legal objectives, scope, and enforcement mechanisms.

The second part of the paper explores the transposition of the Directive into Croatian national law, using the Croatian Companies Act as a case study. The paper assesses the extent to which existing Croatian corporate governance rules align with the Directive's requirements and identifies the legislative amendments necessary to ensure full compliance. In doing so, it highlights key challenges related to corporate autonomy, proportionality, sanctions, and the practical effectiveness of gender balance measures.

The paper builds on the solutions adopted in German, French, and Spanish law, highlighting the differences in quota requirements, enforcement measures, and corporate compliance strategies. Before the EU Directive, France was one of the first countries in Europe to introduce binding provisions to promote gender balance within the boards of directors of commercial companies through Law n°2011-103 of 27 January 2011. The Ordinance No. 2024-934 of 15 November 2024 strengthens the system for listed companies by extending it to members of the representatives of employees and of employee shareholders. Germany has existing gender-quota rules that pre-date the Directive, notably through the *Führungspositionsgesetz I* and *II* (Management Positions Act). Because Germany already contains gender balance targets and enforcement mechanisms, Germany may be able to suspend or "opt out" of certain procedural requirements of the Directive under Article 12. In Spain, Organic Law 2/2024, also known as the Parity Law, came into force in August 2024. Spain has not merely transposed the EU directive word-for-word. The new law extends its reach beyond the corporate world, imposing mandatory gender-balance quotas across a broad range of public and private bodies.

The paper concludes that, while Directive 2022/2381 strengthens the normative commitment to gender equality in corporate leadership, its ultimate impact will depend on careful national implementation and consistent enforcement, particularly in Member States with traditionally low female representation on corporate boards.

Keywords: Directive 2022/2381, gender balance, women on boards, quotas, Croatian Company act,

Marija Karadža, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Tourism and Rural Development, Požega, Croatia
Prof. Dragana Bjelić Gaćeša, PhD, Faculty of Law Osijek, Croatia

The Glass Ceiling in Sport: An Analysis of Women's Representation in Leadership Positions in Sports Organizations

Achieving gender equality is one of the key goals of contemporary society and has been the focus of numerous renowned scholars. Despite the fact that in the Republic of Croatia, as well as in the European Union, there are normative and institutional frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, available data on the share of women in leadership positions in sports organizations are not encouraging. Therefore, the question legitimately arises: does the concept of the glass ceiling also exist in sport? The concept of the glass ceiling refers to artificial obstacles and invisible barriers that limit women's access to leading positions of decision-making and management in various organizations.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the representation of women in managerial positions in sports organizations and to compare the situation in the Republic of Croatia and the European Union. Specifically, the analysis covers three levels of managerial functions: presidents of sports organizations, vice-presidents, and members of management or executive boards. Special attention is devoted to identifying the share of women at the aforementioned levels of managerial functions and to examining differences between the Croatian and European contexts.

The research is based on the analysis of secondary data, relevant documents of sports organizations, as well as a review of scientific literature. Furthermore, the paper employs a comparative method, the use of which is justified by the analysis of the situation in the Croatian and European contexts, with the aim of identifying similarities, differences, and patterns of gender representation at the observed levels of managerial functions in sports organizations.

The paper contributes to a better understanding of the issue of gender (in)equality in the context of leadership positions in sports organizations and provides recommendations for overcoming the challenges faced by women.

Keywords: gender equality, glass ceiling, sports organizations, Republic of Croatia, European Union.

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Prof. Milijana Buha, PhD
Faculty of Law, University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Hercegovina

The Principle of Equality in Criminal Procedure: Gender Perspectives, Ethical Standards, and the Challenges of AI

The principle of equality before the courts is enshrined in all relevant international and regional human rights instruments. It constitutes one of the core principles of judicial ethics and a foundational guarantee of criminal procedure, closely linked to the requirements of fairness, impartiality, and the rule of law. Traditionally conceptualised as equality of arms and the equal treatment of parties before judicial authorities, this principle is increasingly challenged in contemporary criminal justice systems by structural inequalities and implicit biases. These challenges are further intensified by the growing reliance on artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic decision-support systems, which raise complex issues of transparency, accountability, and the risk of unequal effects in judicial decision-making.

In the first part, the paper examines the principle of equality in general and its significance for criminal procedure. It analyses selected provisions of criminal procedure legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (its entities, the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Brčko District) focusing on the mechanisms designed to ensure the effective realization of this principle. Within this framework, particular attention is given to several unresolved issues related to its practical implementation, including the procedural status of the injured party, examined through the lens of the principle of equality. The analysis further considers the extent to which existing procedural safeguards are capable of preventing discriminatory treatment of women and other gender-sensitive or otherwise vulnerable groups.

In the second part, the paper addresses the challenges posed by the introduction of AI-based tools in criminal procedure, such as risk assessment algorithms and decision-support tools. While AI is often presented as a means of enhancing efficiency and objectivity, the paper highlights the risk that algorithmic systems may replicate or even amplify existing gender biases embedded in training data and institutional practices. In this context, the paper also examines whether and to what extent the use of AI-based tools is appropriate in cases involving gender-based violence, given the heightened risks of discrimination and hermeneutical injustice. The paper argues that AI-based decision-support systems in criminal procedure must be carefully constrained and subject to effective human oversight in order to prevent discriminatory effects and to ensure full compliance with the principle of equality.

Keywords: Principle of equality, Criminal procedure, Gender equality, Artificial intelligence, Algorithmic bias

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Gender Dimensions of the European Law of Political Participation

In this paper, I delve into the interplay of law and gender in the European law of political participation. Although the economy was always the leitmotif of the integration process, the political dimensions of the Union were never entirely absent. In time, they have gained a more articulated presence and have ultimately, with the Lisbon Treaty, become enshrined in several provisions of the Union's primary law, most notably those on democratic principles. In this paper, I trace the contours of this development, arguing that it establishes a frame for a European law of political participation. I look at how its central components, namely representation, deliberation, and contestation, may be reflected in tackling gender essentialism. In this respect, I suggest two venues for further research. One is the interplay of political participation and the "de-coring" process of the Union, whereby the single market stops being the only central consideration of the Union's legal order. The other is the feminist theory of nomadic citizenship, which may provide an alternative vision of women's political participation, more grounded in their experiences that resist simplified narratives.

Keywords: gender equality, European Union, essentialism, representation, participation

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The Protection of Artificial Intelligence on the Grounds of Human Rights

In the framework of the Artificial Intelligence- systems has provided the secondary Law of European Union through the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonized rules on artificial intelligence, as *Artificial Intelligence Ac*t. In accordance with Artificial Intelligence Act, AI is a fast-evolving family of technologies with European International protection by European Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), which contributes to a wide array of economic, environmental and societal benefits across the entire spectrum of industries and social activities. For the improving prediction, optimizing operations and resource allocation and personalizing digital solutions available for individuals and organizations, the use of AI can provide key competitive advantages to undertakings and support socially and environmentally beneficial outcomes, as "in health care, agriculture, food safety, education and training, media, sports, culture, infrastructure management, energy, transport and logistics, public services, security, justice, resource and energy efficiency, environmental monitoring, the conservation and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems and climate change mitigation and adaptation"[3]. The use of AI may generate risks and cause harm to public interests and fundamental rights, which are protected by Union law, and level of technological development. Such harm can be `material or immaterial` in the sense of private civil commercial and public administrative criminal social law, including physical, psychological, societal or economic harm. AI can have effect on society and the need to build trust, it is vital for AI personality and its regulatory framework to be developed in accordance with Union values as enshrined in Article 2 TEU, as the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined, pursuant to Article 6 TEU, also in the Charter. As a prerequisite, AI should be a human centrist technology and serve as a digital technical tool for people, with the ultimate aim of increasing human well-being. In order AI-Regulation has to ensure a consistent and high level of protection of public interests as regards health, safety and fundamental rights, common rules for high-risk in the AI systems should be established. These rules should be consistent with the Charter, non-discriminatory and in line with the Union`s international trade commitments. In addition, they should take into account the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade and the Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI of the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (AI HLEG). Diversity, non- discrimination and fairness means that AI systems are developed and used in a way that includes diverse actors and promotes "equal access, *gender equality* and cultural diversity", while avoiding discriminatory impacts and *unfair* biases that are prohibited by Union or national law. All state citizens are same in according to the *Federal Constitutional Act* in Austria as a equal Member State of the European Union. In other Member States, as in *Croatian Constitutional Act*, by the security from the public danger can not be inequality of persons based on race, skin colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin. A *Union legal framework* laying down harmonized rules on AI is needed to foster the development, use and uptake of AI in the internal market that at the same time meets "a high level of protection of public interests, such as health and safety and the protection of fundamental rights, including democracy, the rule of law and environmental protection as recognized and protected by Union law".

Keywords: AI Act, advantages, risks and harm, effect on society, AI as tool, common rules, gender equality framework

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Assessment of Gender Equality in Croatia: in the Context of EU Efforts to Harmonize Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights through Analysis of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality Annual Reports

This paper analyses the right to abortion in Croatia through the lens of gender equality, drawing on selected findings from the annual reports of the Croatian Ombudsperson for Gender Equality on reproductive health.Methodologically, the paper employs qualitative legal analysis of the Ombudsperson's casework and recommendations from 2007 to 2024, complemented by doctrinal analysis of Croatian law and relevant international human rights instruments. The paper focuses on three interrelated dimensions identified in the reports: (1) systemic barriers within the healthcare system, particularly the widespread and poorly regulated use of conscientious objection; (2) inconsistent and legally incorrect practices of healthcare institutions, including restrictive interpretations of statutory time limits; and (3) financial, geographic, and informational obstacles that disproportionately affect women in vulnerable socio-economic positions. These factors collectively undermine substantive gender equality and place Croatia at odds with evolving European and international women's reproductive rights standards.

Access to reproductive health services constitutes a core component of gender equality, bodily autonomy, and the right to health under EU law and international human rights standards. While abortion remains primarily within the regulatory competence of EU Member States, the European Union increasingly frames reproductive rights as integral to gender equality, non-discrimination, and human dignity. The analysis in this paper situates national practice within broader European debates on reproductive rights, including recent resolutions of the European Parliament and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. The paper argues that Croatia exemplifies a model of formal legality without substantive accessibility, in which gender-neutral legal frameworks mask gender-specific disadvantages experienced by women seeking abortion services in Croatia. Such a model raises serious concerns regarding compliance with EU gender equality objectives, particularly in relation to indirect discrimination, reproductive autonomy, and equality in healthcare access. The paper concludes by highlighting the normative and policy implications of the Ombudsperson's findings for EU gender equality discourse. It argues that reproductive rights should be more explicitly recognized as a structural component of the Croatian gender equality policy, and that national equality body (i.e. the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality) plays a crucial role in exposing the disconnect between law on the books and law in practice.

Keywords: women's rights; sexual and reproductive health and rights; Ombudsperson for Gender Equality; Croatia

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What Does ‘Facilitating Take-Up of Parental Leave’ Mean in EU Law? Interpreting Article 8(3) WLBD

Since fathers remain underrepresented in caregiving across the EU, the Work-Life Balance Directive (WLBD) aims to encourage their engagement in childcare, and thus promote gender equality. Among the adopted measures is the non-transferable part of parental leave under Article 5(2) WLBD, accompanied by an allowance provided during its use. While the proposal of the directive provided for a minimum amount of the benefit (equivalent to sick pay), such a requirement was removed during the legislative process. Consequently, Article 8(3) WLBD solely requires Member States to provide adequate remuneration or allowance to "facilitate the take-up of non-transferable part of parental leave by both parents." Yet, this wording is ambiguous as to the substantive content of the "facilitation" requirement.

The interpretation of Article 8(3) WLBD is closely intertwined with Article 5(2) WLBD, which requires part of parental leave to be non-transferable between parents. In Czechia and Slovakia, both parents hold separate entitlements to parental leave (up to three years) exercisable simultaneously. If fathers do not use their entitlement, it expires, while mothers’ entitlements remain unaffected. While this formally satisfies non-transferability (fathers cannot transfer their unused entitlement to mothers), it creates no pressure for fathers to participate in childcare. Consequently, in systems with dual parental leave entitlements, the allowance under Article 8(3) WLBD becomes the primary mechanism to achieve the Directive's objectives.

The paper addresses the interpretation of both Article 5(2) and Article 8(3) WLBD and their interrelationship, posing the following research questions. Regarding Article 5(2), does the provision require an explicit reservation that restricts mothers' leave if fathers do not take parental leave at all? Regarding Article 8(3), what is the meaning and scope of the facilitation requirement? Does it concern only allowance amounts or extend to other features such as conditionality on personal care, individual reservation, or duration? How should compliance with the requirement be assessed, particularly where allowance equivalent to sickness pay prove insufficient to motivate fathers' take-up of parental leave?

Using doctrinal analysis grounded in textual, contextual and purposive interpretation, the paper considers the Directive's recitals and CJEU case law. Accordingly, the paper provides a doctrinal foundation for assessing the implementation of Articles 5(2) and 8(3) WLBD.

The paper argues that Article 5(2) WLBD can accommodate the identical individual entitlements, provided other measures (such as flexibility of the take-up or adequate benefit design) ensure fathers' take-up of parental leave. Indeed, by requiring allowance that "facilitates" the take-up, the Directive itself acknowledges that non-transferable leave alone is insufficient. Regarding Article 8(3) WLBD, the paper argues that the facilitation requirement encompasses not only the amount of the allowance, but also other features affecting its uptake. This assessment holds significant implications for Member States, who must carefully design allowance schemes considering their specific socio-economic contexts, existing gender disparities, and cultural factors affecting fathers' participation in childcare. Therefore, by replacing the original minimum amount with an outcome-oriented facilitation requirement, Member States may paradoxically face more demanding obligations.

Keywords: father underrepresentation in caregiving, Work-Life Balance Directive, allowance, parental leave transferability, doctrine and case law

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Work-life balance - the challenge of family life and gender equality

The paper deals with the topic of work-life balance, currently a crucial topic in legal research, especially after the adoption of the EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance. This is the first time that the right of paternity leave is recognised on the European Union level and found a place in one directive appreciating the need of fathers to participate in raising children. In addition to the impact of the aforementioned directive, the paper aim to discuss the gender dimension of WLB, and the obstacles to the establishment of work-life balance for both men and women. Author starts from the point of view that paternity leave, which was proclaimed by Directive 2019/1158, is not enough to introduce a greater participation of fathers in family duties and create opportunities for a balance between family and professional life. In support of such a thesis, the author points to the provisions of comparative law countries before and after the adoption of the directive based on the literature, with reference to the situation in the Republic of Serbia, using reference material. Paternity leave is only one of the measures that should be taken, along with the comprehensive family-friendly policy, that must be design taking in mind gender dimension. It seems that the most important thing is to bring about a change in awareness about the importance of an equal division of responsibilities between spouses, which might be managed by education.
Using the normative and comparative method, this paper aims to examine the importance of the institute of special protection of women in the labour law, but also to highlight the role of stereotypes in the formation of gender roles in society that are related to work-life balance. The connection between long working hours and work-life balance, as well as the increasingly prevalent remote work, will be examine. The paper also points out the consequences of the absence of work-life balance, and a special place in the paper is taken by the Directive EU 2019/1158 on work-life balance and paternity leave, whose role in the establishment of this concept is particularly significant for the establishment of work-life balance. After the Introduction part, the second part of the paper explains special protection of women in labour law. The fourth part will be devoted to the obstacles of work-life balance such as long working hours, remote work, stereotypes related to gender roles. The fifth part, before Conclusion, will highlight the main observation on the relation between the Directive 2019/1158 and work-life balance.

Keywords: gender equality, discrimination, work-life balance, women, paternity leave.

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'Motherhood Penalty' and Career Progression in the Croatian Legal Profession

The paper explores how young women lawyers in Croatia navigate motherhood in a feminised yet highly competitive and pressure laden legal profession, with a particular focus on legal practice in law firms. In Croatia, women numerically dominate many segments of the legal field, outperform at all stages of education, yet still face vertical segregation and persistent cultural expectations regarding care and availability. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with early career female lawyers, the study examines how motherhood is constructed as a professional liability and how this perception shapes career choices, progression and everyday work–family strategies. Situated within broader European debates on unpaid care work and gendered labour market inequalities, the paper links individual narratives with structural patterns of gendered organisation of work and care.

Preliminary findings indicate, first, that the unequal distribution of unpaid care and household responsibilities between men and women, well documented at the EU level, is reproduced and amplified once women become mothers, deepening gendered constraints on their employment trajectories. Second, the culture of long and unpredictable working hours characteristic of legal practice, especially in law firms, renders standard childcare infrastructures such as kindergartens and schools insufficient, pushing mothers to rely on extended family or costly market-based care and intensifying work–family conflict. Third, respondents describe motherhood as reducing access to equal opportunities at work, including high profile cases, partnership tracks and promotion, due to assumptions about reduced commitment and availability that echo international evidence on pregnancy and 'motherhood penalty' in the legal workplace. Fourth, the study reveals very low awareness of, and limited organisational support for, structured onboarding and reboarding, flexible working arrangements and family friendly career paths after maternity leave, despite growing recognition of such measures as key for retention and advancement of women professionals.

The paper makes an original contribution as (to our knowledge) the first in depth qualitative study of motherhood and legal careers in Croatia, offering contexts specific insights that are highly relevant for employees, employers and policy makers. By foregrounding women lawyers' lived experiences, it highlights the gap between formal gender equality and everyday practices in a profession. The findings point to the need for comprehensive change of employers' and families' mindset, including more equal sharing of unpaid care, stronger institutional support for reboarding and flexibility, and targeted professional policies to ensure that motherhood does not remain a systemic barrier to equal participation and progression in the Croatian legal profession.

Keywords: motherhood, maternity leave, legal profession, gender equality, Croatia