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## Gender differences in social integration

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## Introduction

Women's and men's lives have been profoundly transformed since the collapse of the communist regimes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The complicated and often painful process of market liberalisation and democratisation, accompanied in some countries by economic, political and military crises, affected both men and women, but not necessarily in the same way. This gender difference has received considerable scholarly and policymaking attention.<sup>1</sup> The findings of this chapter build on this, but also address a broader range of issues related to social integration. Using data from the second wave of the Life in Transition Survey, this chapter examines women's and men's experience of the transition and their expectations for the future, taking into account their views on the emerging political and economic systems in their countries and their ability to participate in building democratic and "open" societies.

There are persistent gender differences in the degree and patterns of people's integration into society all through the post-socialist region. First, women face more obstacles than men entering the labour market and are less likely than men to become entrepreneurs. This is despite the fact that women have equivalent levels of education, training and skills as men and share positive values regarding the free market and competition. One of the most important factors contributing to this gender disparity is the fact that women are primarily responsible for domestic work and childrearing, both of which have become more time-consuming and difficult as state funding for social services, such as child care or elderly care facilities, have been cut back.

Second, in terms of political integration, women's disadvantage seems smaller, since they hold fairly similar views regarding the importance and trustworthiness of democratic institutions and claim to be just as likely to vote as men. However, women lag behind men in their political experience, willingness to take concrete political action and political representation.

Third, the size of the gender difference varies greatly across countries and regions. Women are doing best in central Europe and the Baltic (CEB) region, where they seem to face similar obstacles and hold largely comparable views to women in western European societies. Women suffer more disadvantages in south-eastern Europe (SEE) and in many, although not all, of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Mongolia (CIS+M).

Finally, although women may suffer more disadvantages compared to men, their overall satisfaction with life and their assessment of how they and their families have fared in the recent past is quite similar to those of men. There are exceptions, however; for example, single parents, most of whom are women, report a lower level of life quality and satisfaction, suggesting that families and households are important in mitigating women's perception of disadvantage.

The first part of this chapter focuses on economic integration, highlighting gender differences in education, participation in paid work, entrepreneurship, and values and behaviour. The second section considers gender differences with regard to political participation. The concluding section explores the links between economic and political participation and overall life satisfaction.

## Forms, experience and conditions of labour market integration

Women's lives before 1989 varied quite significantly across the diverse set of countries called the "communist bloc" in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A few similarities must be noted, however, especially those whose legacies carry over to the present. Most importantly, communist parties in all countries of the region proclaimed that women's emancipation was an important political goal. The crucial process through which this goal was supposed to be realised was the integration of women into the paid labour force. As a result, women's rate of employment increased everywhere and many gained experience in professional and semi-professional white-collar positions. By the early 1980s most women of working age expected to be engaged in paid work throughout their adult lives.<sup>2</sup>

However, although most women worked for wages, these were significantly lower than those of men, and gender segregation was prominent, both in paid and unpaid work. Communist policy-makers did not encourage a redistribution of domestic responsibilities, and the gender gap in leisure time increased.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, different groups of women fared quite differently. For example, those belonging to certain religious or ethnic minorities faced discrimination and were less likely than those of the majority to be working for pay.

Although historical legacies linger on, the societies of the region were transformed profoundly during the early 1990s – with an ambiguous impact on gender equality. Some researchers have claimed that transition has had disproportionately negative consequences for women. They argue that unemployment and inactivity rates have increased, as has discrimination against

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, UNIFEM (2006), Pollert and Fodor (2005) and Pascall and Kwak (2005).

<sup>2</sup>See Haney (2000).

<sup>3</sup>See Einhorn (1993), Drakulic (1993), Funk and Mueller (1993).

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women, especially those with young children. The real value of state subsidies has declined, bringing about a rise in women's risk of poverty as well as a growth in domestic responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> Other studies emphasise the usefulness in a capitalist market of assets that women acquired during the communist period, and argue that women are not necessarily the "losers" of the transition, even though their lives (just like the lives of men) have been transformed.<sup>5</sup>

These issues are addressed below by reviewing different aspects of women's (and men's) integration into the emerging economies in transition countries in terms of education, paid labour force participation and access to entrepreneurial opportunities.

### Education

After the Second World War educational opportunities expanded and became more equal all over the world. Communist countries, in particular, made concerted efforts to achieve social mobility by guaranteeing access to educational institutions for those previously excluded. Less successful in transforming class inequalities, this campaign led to a near-complete equalisation of men's and women's level of educational attainment, although sharp distinctions remained in the types of degrees that girls and boys received.

The legacy of this achievement is evident even in the 21st century and the contrast with western Europe is still apparent in the working age populations. Chart 5.1 shows that women outnumber men among those with university and postgraduate degrees in the CEB countries, while there are no gender differences in the SEE and CIS+M regions. By contrast, significantly more men than women have university degrees in the five western European countries included in LiTS II.

### Access to paid employment

Women in transition societies suffer marked disadvantages in the labour market, particularly at the point of entry to paid employment. Indeed, this is an area where the life experiences

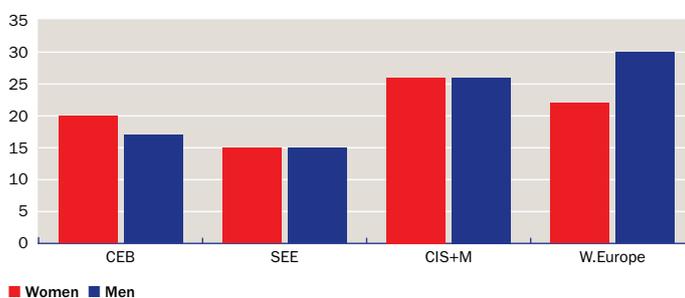
of communist and transition generations of women differ sharply. For communist generations, paid work was a given: it was a personal and political necessity and not working for wages was simply not an option for most. In the transition generation, work has been scarce and almost half of all women of working age (and about one-third of men) are jobless.

Chart 5.2 shows the proportion of women and men who had paid jobs at any time in the year prior to LiTS II.

Women are less likely than men to have worked for wages everywhere but there is variation in this regard across the countries. Women in the CEB region have the highest chance of having been in paid employment: 61 per cent reported having worked for wages in the year prior to the survey, while only 50 per cent of women in the CIS+M region and 47 per cent of those in SEE did so. The employment rate of women in CEB countries is closest to that of women living in the five western European comparators (at 67 per cent). However, variations within each subregion are large. For example, within the CIS+M area, only about 25-28 per cent of women have worked for wages in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, while 67-70 per cent have done so in Belarus and Russia.

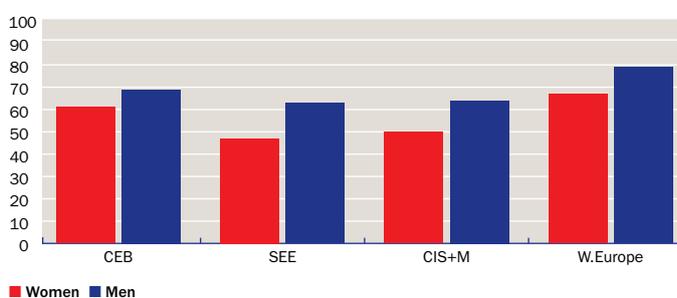
Certain groups of women, such as those living in rural areas, the less educated, mothers of young children and those who belong to ethnic or religious minorities may face more obstacles to entry to the labour market. Indeed, data suggest that women have particular difficulties finding paid employment in rural areas. This is most pronounced in the SEE region, where only 37 per cent of women who live in the countryside, compared to 51 per cent of those in urban areas, were engaged in paid employment. The difference between women's employment chances in rural and urban areas is almost negligible in the western European comparator societies. Some of the rural gender gap may reflect the way that women who work as unpaid family members on family farms are accounted for. Even in this case, however, it is significant if these women do not think of themselves as paid workers but rather as being outside the labour market.

Chart 5.1  
% of women and men (18 years old or over)  
with post-secondary education



Source: LiTS II (2010).  
Note: Percentage of those with post-secondary education. Working age population 18-64 years old.

Chart 5.2  
% of women and men of working age (18-64)  
in employment at any time in previous 12 months



Source: LiTS II (2010).  
Note: Working age population between 18-64 years old.

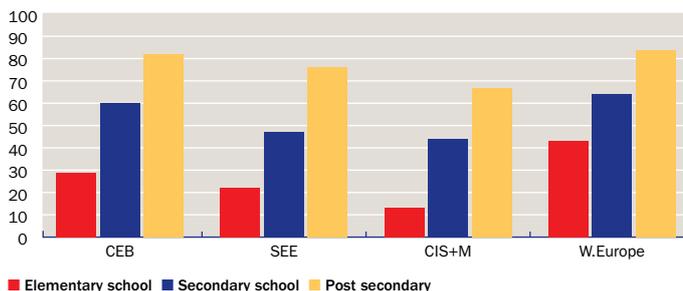
<sup>4</sup>See Gal and Kligman (2000), True (2003), Glass (2008), UNIFEM (2006).

<sup>5</sup>See Fodor (1997), Ghodsee (2005).

Education increases women's labour market integration (see Chart 5.3). In the CEB countries, for example, over 80 per cent of college- and university-educated women had paid work in the year prior to the survey, compared to only around 30 per cent with elementary education or less. The pattern is similar in the SEE and CIS+M countries, although the benefits of education are somewhat smaller. The gender gap in access to employment is large at the lower educational levels, but it disappears for those in the highest educational brackets in all regions except the CIS+M, where men's advantage is marked even in this elite group. Note also that in western Europe unskilled women have a much better chance of finding paid work than in the post-communist region: 43 per cent of women with elementary education or less worked for wages in the five western European countries included in the survey, while only between 13-29 per cent of women did in the transition region.

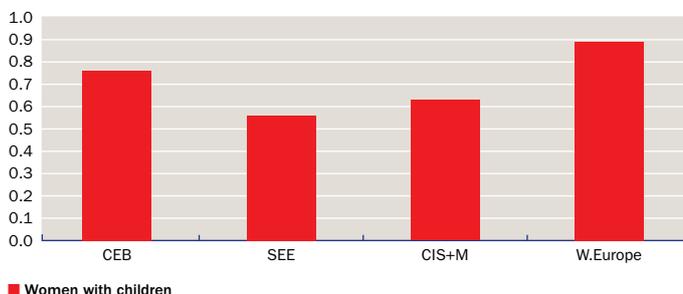
Having children is another reason why some women are unable to work for wages. Studies have found that employers discriminate against women with children,<sup>6</sup> and child care is unavailable or unaffordable in many transition countries. In some countries, lengthy paid parental leave policies make it difficult for women to re-enter the labour force.<sup>7</sup>

**Chart 5.3**  
% of working-age women (18-64) employed in the year prior to the survey by educational level



Source: LITS II (2010).  
Note: Women only, working age 18-64.

**Chart 5.4**  
Odds ratios of working for women with children compared to men without children (aged 18-64)



Source: LITS II (2010).  
Note: Odds ratios are calculated from logistic regression equations, predicting the odds of having worked in the 12 months prior to the survey, and including the following independent variables: gender, age, educational level, (Muslim) religion, urban/rural area, married, having children under 12 in the household, country, and the interaction term between gender and having children under 12 in the household.

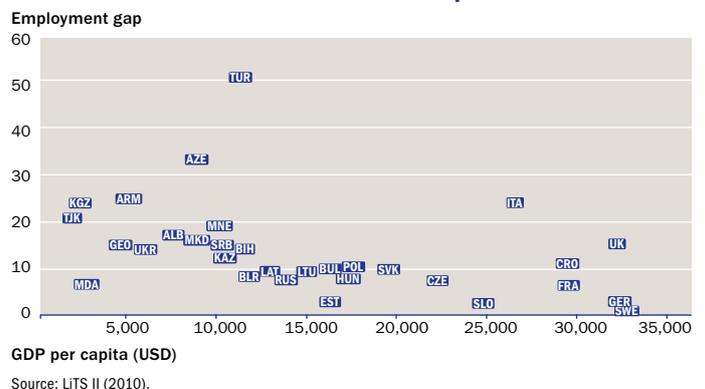
<sup>6</sup>See Glass and Fodor (2011).  
<sup>7</sup>See Saxonberg (2006).

Because of its importance, this chapter explores the impact of children on women's work activity in more depth. Chart 5.4 presents the regional odds ratios of working for women who live in the same household with children under 12, controlling for other factors such as age, education, single parental status, location of residence and religion. While having a child of one's own is the most common reason why women suffer labour market disadvantages, in many transition countries grandmothers are the primary carers of young children – a responsibility which may enable their daughters to seek paid employment but will limit their own chances.

In all regions, the employment odds for women with children are only 60-76 per cent of those for men without children once other factors are taken into account. The "motherhood penalty" is highest in the SEE region (odds of 56 per cent) and lowest in CEB (76 per cent) compared to men without children. This suggests that, as elsewhere, women responsible for children are less likely to be integrated into the labour market, while the odds of working for men with children are higher than those of men without offspring. This finding is not unique to the transition countries, but the data suggest that the cost of raising young children is higher in the transition region than it is on average in the western European comparators.

Having considered factors at the individual level that contribute to people's labour market integration, we now turn to country-level variables which may also determine the size of gender inequality and specifically the gender gap in employment. Chart 5.5 shows the relationship between the level of economic development and the percentage gender difference in employment rates by country. On average, richer countries exhibit lower levels of gender inequality in access to employment than countries with lower GDP levels. This relationship may be due to a variety of factors: the availability of jobs, the level of welfare spending on services which enable women's participation in the labour force, or values regarding women's role in society which are also associated with levels of economic development.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that the relationship between economic development and gender inequality is in fact quite complex: Chart 5.5 indicates a lot of variation in the

**Chart 5.5**  
% difference in the employment rate of men and women and the level of economic development



Source: LITS II (2010).

<sup>8</sup>See Inglehart and Norris (2003).

gender gap at the two ends of the distribution, which means that factors other than the level of economic development will also have a significant impact on women's employment chances and intentions.

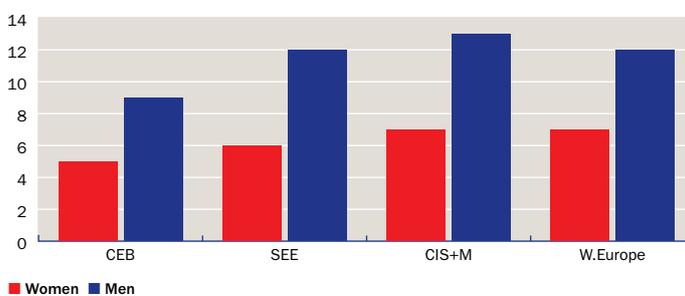
At least for EU member countries, data from the Labour Force Survey show that a large part of the gender difference in employment is due to the unavailability of part-time employment in the transition region. When work patterns are examined using full-time equivalencies, it is evident that the difference between transition societies and western European ones becomes quite small.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the pattern suggests that in the transition region work is divided less equitably than in the western comparator countries: participation in the labour market is restricted to a smaller number of people (among both men and women, but especially women) who are also working longer hours than their western counterparts.

Further inequalities in labour force participation are also evident. When workers see no chance of finding employment, or when outside factors (such as unmet child care needs) would prevent them from working should they find a job, they often give up their search. Women in the transition region are less likely than men to be actively seeking employment. For example, in the CIS+M region 22 per cent of women claimed to be looking for work, compared to 31 per cent of men. This, together with women's lower level of employment, suggests both a high degree of discouragement among women and possibly a higher level of social acceptance of women's labour market inactivity than men's.

### Entrepreneurial activity

Self-employment is a special form of labour force participation, providing an opportunity for prosperity to people who may have trouble finding other types of employment.<sup>10</sup> Chart 5.6 shows that while there are more people who work on a self-employed basis in the CIS+M and western comparator countries than in the other regions, women in all areas are underrepresented. In general, men are about twice as likely to be self-employed as women. There is no difference in the size of this gap in terms of educational level, age group, marital status, having children or urban/rural status.

Chart 5.6  
% of self-employed women and men (aged 18-64)  
in previous 12 months (among those doing paid work)



Source: LiTS II (2010).  
Note: Working age population, 18-64.

<sup>9</sup>See EU Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>See Seguino et al (2010), Werner (2004).

This stable gender gap is in line with differences in men's and women's stated preferences. Across the transition region, the majority of women (between 50 per cent and 63 per cent) and more women than men would prefer to be working for a state-owned company or the government, while men express a stronger preference for self-employment. However, Chart 5.7 shows that significantly more women would like to work on a self-employed basis than are able. In CIS+M countries, for example, only 7 per cent of women were self-employed in the year prior to the survey but 29 per cent would prefer this type of employment.

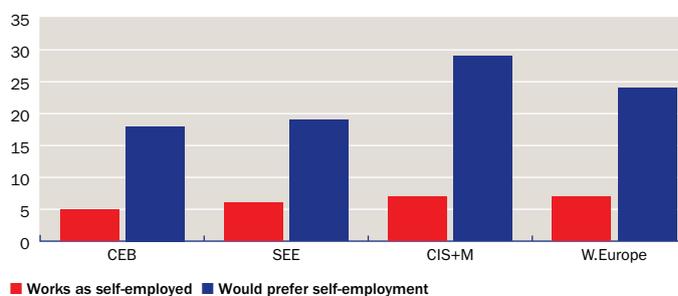
LiTS II also asked respondents whether or not they have ever attempted to start their own businesses. In each transition subregion about 18-21 per cent of men and 11-13 per cent of women have tried to become entrepreneurs. Women were not significantly less successful than men, as about the same percentage managed to set up a business of their own. The overall rate of success ranges from 50 per cent in CIS+M countries to about 80 per cent in CEB, but there is no gender difference in any of the transition subregions.

Borrowing money to start a business did not seem to be a particular hindrance to women entrepreneurs. About the same proportion of men and women sought funding, and women did not, in general, report any less success than men. In CIS+M countries the data reveal some gender disparity, but the difference is small (with 70 per cent of women and 74 per cent of men managing to access start-up finance). Women in the SEE region reported more success than men, with 83 per cent (compared to 75 per cent of men) getting a loan. These figures, however, should be treated with caution as the number of respondents in each category is quite small. Moreover, these findings are not entirely consistent with previous research which found small but statistically significant gender differences in access to and cost of finance.<sup>11</sup>

### Values and behaviour related to a competitive market

People's attitudes and values influence the choices and decisions that they make about their own labour force participation and the market-related strategy that they use for their own or their family's economic survival. Although LiTS II did not ask respondents explicitly about how they feel about work or

Chart 5.7  
% of women (aged 18-64) who work as self-employed  
and those who would prefer to



Source: LiTS II (2010).

<sup>11</sup>See Muravyev et al. (2009), who found that firms managed by women entrepreneurs (defined as owner-managers) have a five per cent lower probability of receiving a bank loan and pay half a percentage point higher interest rates, although the level of gender discrimination declines as the level of financial development increases.

women's role in paid work, it is still possible to identify at least two areas where gender differences in certain attitudes may influence finding work or becoming an entrepreneur.

First, social and geographical mobility – the willingness to work outside one's home country or move within a country for a job – can improve people's access to work or business opportunities. Across the transition region, men are more likely to be willing to move abroad or within their own country to access work. In the CIS+M region about 30 per cent of working age men would move either within their own country or abroad for work, while only 20 per cent of women would do so. In CEB and SEE countries, people express slightly more willingness; about 30-40 per cent of men and 20-35 per cent of women would be ready to move. Both men and women in the western comparator countries express a greater willingness to relocate than those in the transition region, especially within their own countries. This most likely reflects both the relative ease and wider social acceptance of such an option.

The second area where gender differences may influence access to work or becoming an entrepreneur is risk aversion. Taking risks is a necessary part of self-employment, so exploring gender differences in this respect helps to shed light on why women are less likely than men to become entrepreneurs. Across the transition region women are, on average, more risk-averse than men (see Chart 5.8).

There is less gender difference in other values. Chart 5.9 describes how people feel about the market economy 20 years after its reintroduction in their countries. What is striking is that people in the CEB countries tend to have less faith in the market, while those in CIS+M countries and the western comparators display the most. Women are rather more reluctant to endorse the market economy than men, while more women than men believe that economic systems make little difference in their own lives.

The vast majority of people in the transition region and the western European comparator countries believe that the gap between the rich and the poor should be reduced. Women are slightly more supportive of this position than men, but the difference is small (for example, 78 per cent of men and 80

per cent of women in the CEB countries). Women are no more likely than men to support an increase in the state's role in the economy and are just as likely to believe in the positive impact of competition on people's performance. Men and women hold similar views on the importance of merit in getting ahead, and there is no gender difference in how people explain why some groups are impoverished (attributing it mostly to injustice and then to laziness). In summary, while women exhibit slightly more empathy towards less fortunate people, their overall approach to the capitalist system and market economy is quite similar to that of men.

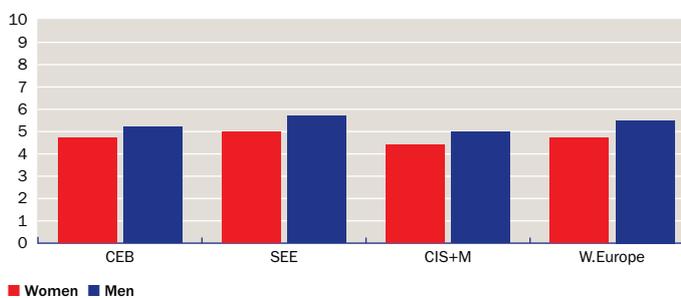
## Political participation and integration

Political participation can take a number of different forms. During the communist period, quotas guaranteed that women would be represented in the most visible, although not most powerful, political decision-making bodies. Since voters could not choose from among candidates, but were expected to elect a designated nominee, achieving the requisite representation of women did not constitute an administrative hurdle. Accordingly, women made up around one-third of the members of national parliaments, but their representation in government or the highest party organ, the Politburo, remained low.<sup>12</sup>

After 1989 new forms of political participation and new avenues of political integration emerged. However, studies show that women's representation in the post-communist parliaments is lower than before 1989.<sup>13</sup> This decline has been attributed to several factors, including a backlash against communist gender quotas, a general notion that politics is "men's business" and the fact that electoral systems do not facilitate the participation of women, as well as to women's lack of leisure time and experience in political organisations.

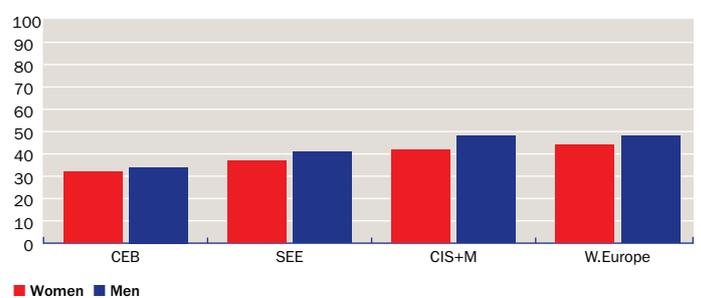
The variation among countries in terms of women's parliamentary representation is significant and ranges from a high of 22-24 per cent in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Uzbekistan to a low of 4-8 per cent in Georgia, Mongolia and Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> Women's representation is higher in the five western European comparator countries, ranging from 45 per cent in Sweden to 19 per cent in France. However, women's political

**Chart 5.8**  
Mean of risk aversion for men and women. Average values on a 10-point scale



Source: LiTS II (2010).  
Note: On the ten point scale, 1 represents "Not willing to take risks at all" and 10 represents "Very much willing to take risks". Therefore a lower score indicates higher risk aversion.

**Chart 5.9**  
% of women and men who deem a market economy is best for their country



Source: LiTS II (2010).

<sup>12</sup>See Eglitis (2002).

<sup>13</sup>See Rueschemeyer (1998).

<sup>14</sup>Source: Interparliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>; accessed February 15, 2011.

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participation is higher at the sub-national level. Many women enter politics at the local level, especially as NGO workers and civic activists.<sup>15</sup>

In the transition region, support for democracy is not gender-neutral, although differences in men's and women's political attitudes are small. Most notably, women are marginally less likely than men to believe that democracy is preferable to any other form of political system (see Chart 5.10). In SEE, for example, 52 per cent of men but only 47 per cent of women agree with this statement, while in the CIS+M countries 60 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women do so. There is a similar gender gap in the western European comparators, but no difference in the CEB region. More women than men also claim that it makes no difference to their lives whether the government is authoritarian or democratic.

Men and women express a similar degree of trust in political and democratic institutions. Most people believe that elections are necessary and only about 10 per cent of the population in the transition region believe that leaders should be appointed (about the same proportion who agree that authoritarian rule is acceptable). There is practically no gender difference in this regard. It is therefore not surprising that men and women claim to have voted in the same proportions across the region, both at national and local

election level. This may not reflect actual voting patterns, but it does suggest that both men and women consider voting to be a political obligation.

However, while the overall percentages are small, fewer women than men are members of political parties (see Chart 5.11) or have participated in political activities (such as attending lawful demonstrations, participating in strikes or signing petitions). There is no gender difference in trade union membership or in membership of humanitarian or charitable associations. However, while almost 20 per cent of people in the western comparator countries are members of such organisations, no more than 3 per cent are in any of the transition subregions. Since women tend to start their integration into politics through such local activities, the fact that this percentage is small is an indication, and possibly a cause, of women's relatively low rate of participation in public life.

Having access to a support network is a form of societal integration. While women are no less likely than men to use contacts to get jobs, settle disputes, get into university and so on, men can name more people who they can turn to for such help. In particular, men are more likely to be able to mobilise workplace friends or superiors for support. This is due, at least in part, to men's higher level of labour force participation and their consequent access to a wider and more powerful network of acquaintances.

Chart 5.10  
% of women and men who believe that democracy is preferable to any other form of political system

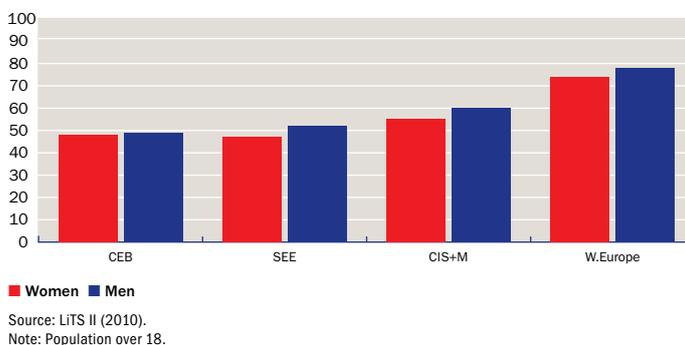
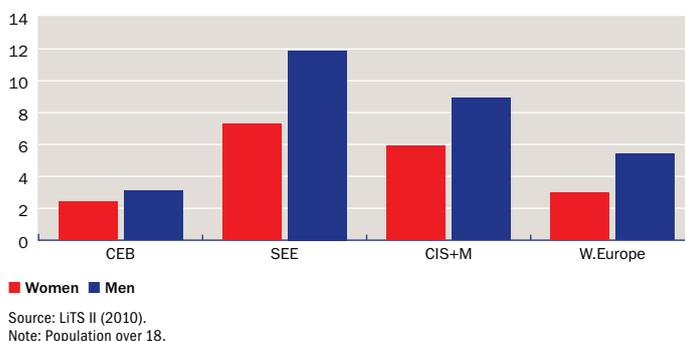


Chart 5.11  
% of men and women who are members of political parties



## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted gender differences in social integration 20 years after the collapse of communism. The most important change since 1989, and the main difference in the lives of the past two generations of women, is apparent in women's relationship and access to paid work. Women across the transition region are significantly less likely than men to be working for wages. There are, however, some notable differences among subregions and across countries. The most important gender-related factors that disadvantage women's entry to the labour market include having children, low levels of education and living in a rural or less developed area. Women and men do not differ significantly in terms of social attitudes towards the market economy or democracy, but women's political integration is more tenuous. While they are just as likely as men to be passive spectators of politics, they are less likely to participate actively.

There is little gender difference in how people view their overall well-being. Women are just as likely as men to say that they are satisfied with their lives and jobs and that they feel that they have been successful. When asked how they have done relative to others, both men and women respond similarly. The level of education, location or age do not alter this gender neutrality, which is probably due to the fact that women and men share households and social well-being depends more on household resources than on individual fortunes.

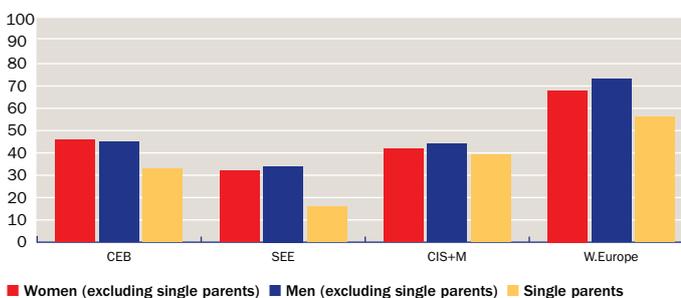
<sup>15</sup>See Ghodsee (2005).

Indeed, those who cannot rely on resources generated by other adults and who must take care of dependents alone are, on average, less satisfied with their lives. Single parents – 90 per cent of whom are single mothers – express lower life satisfaction than others (see Chart 5.12). They feel more disadvantaged in terms of economic well-being and are more likely to respond negatively when asked if they have done well/better than their parents or are satisfied with their lives. The differences across the regions are also large. Single parents seem to be the least satisfied in south-eastern Europe, where only 16 per cent claim to be satisfied with their lives – half as many women and men as do in the general population.

This chapter has identified a few key issues that policy-makers may fruitfully address. Entry to the labour market is important for women to support their families and gain self-sufficiency. Even though women possess the same level of education and skills and hold roughly the same views about market competition as men in transition countries, they are significantly less likely to be working for wages. This, as well as the fact that general levels of economic development are related to the size of gender inequality, suggest that factors at the societal rather than individual level should be addressed to promote equality in this respect.

This chapter has explored patterns of gender inequality and gender differences across the transition region. Importantly, factors such as ethnicity, location, educational level and having young children in the household interact with gender as a determinant of inequality. Variations are significant, not only across subregions but also countries. Levels of economic development are related to the gender employment gap, as are other factors including cultural variables, forms of social protection and family structures.

Chart 5.12  
% of women and men and single parents who claim to be satisfied with their lives overall



Source: LITS II (2010).  
Note: Population over 18.

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