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**Societal and political factors influencing gender equality policy:
experiences from Slovenia and Hungary**

**A nemek közötti esélyegyenlőségi politikát befolyásoló társadalmi és
politikai tényezők:
tapasztalatok Szlovéniából és Magyarországról**

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Introduction

Slovenia and Hungary are two Central European countries with a connected history, partly because of intertwined territories and also because of their socialist heritage from the 20th century. They both joined the European Union in 2004. Despite this shared milestone, their journey towards gender equality reveals evident disparities. In the results of EIGE's Gender Equality Index Slovenia consistently hovers around the EU average, while Hungary keeps ranking among the lowest scoring EU countries, simultaneously witnessing an overall decline in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index rankings since 2006 and a stagnation in the last decade in the World Health Organisation's Gender Inequality Index (see Appendix A and B).

In this paper, I will explore the factors that contribute to the differing approaches in gender equality policy, legislation, and institutional frameworks in these two countries. These factors encompass historical context, cultural values and norms, as well as the prevailing political ideologies influencing public policy.

Social inequality, encompassing gender inequality, is defined by unequal access to and distribution of benefits and rights. This disparity, rooted in biological and psychological differences between genders (Mittal, 2019) disproportionately affects women and girls worldwide (Amnesty International, 2023). Certain philosophers argue that gender constitutes a social role or a set of behavioral patterns within a societal framework, suggesting that norms attached to gender exhibit cultural relativity (Mckitrick, 2015).

Critics expressing right-wing or conservative viewpoints frequently misunderstand gender equality, often equating it with the pursuit of (gender) sameness. They argue that aims for gender equality contradict existing biological differences between genders (Vezjak, 2023). However, the true objective of gender equality initiatives lies in ensuring that women have access to equal opportunities and rights as men.

As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) summarize, the existing inequality between the genders is a consequence of patriarchal patterns and the historical neglect and denial of women's rights and opportunities. The differences are stemming from the biological fact that on average, men possess greater physical strength than women, whereas only women have the capability to bear and breastfeed children. Compared to the hunter-gatherer era, the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry brought on new tasks, jobs and societal roles, nevertheless labor division remained. Women were primarily engaged in home-related activities, while men took on roles outside the home. Consequently, this resulted in the establishment of traditional gender roles.

As feudalism waned and industrialization advanced, education became more widespread, infant mortality rates dropped, and a growing demand for labor resulted in the widespread employment of children and women. Later on, during World War I. and II., women were mobilized to undertake roles traditionally occupied by men. This has led to a decline of the male dominance in the workforce and subsequently in public life and politics (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

In the late 19th century women began to fight for equality in many European countries and the US. Slowly, they gained the right to vote and began gaining visibility in politics as well, but this was (and still is) rather an exception to the rule¹. In a broader context, despite decades of struggle for change and real progress, gender equality remains an ongoing challenge even in developed nations. The European Union's Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) summed it up as follows: “Although gender equality is a universal right, women continue to face certain barriers which affect their status in all areas of life in society, whether public or private, in the family or the labour market, in economic or political life, in power and decision-making, as well as in social gender relations. In virtually all societies, women are in an inferior position to men.” (EIGE, 2016).

The very concept of gender equality as a social problem to be measured is complex. The main two gender equality indexes that I will be focusing on in this paper are the EIGE's Gender Equality Index and the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report. My analysis will also be supported by the findings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) established by the UN, based on their most recent observations on the two countries.

While legal frameworks lay out the basis for effectuating gender equality, policies play a crucial role in its implementation. However, even with the most progressive policies, deeply ingrained patriarchal patterns persist within society, presenting obstacles for implementation in practice.

This study represents one of the pioneering analyses focusing specifically on Slovenia and Hungary from the perspective of public policy and institutional frameworks concerning

¹ The State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs granted universal suffrage to women in 1920 (the decree was then revoked in 1921 and reinstated in 1945).

During the Hungarian Soviet Republic, in 1919 voting rights were extended to women, allowing them to vote for the first time in open voting elections, followed by a conservative turn before WW2. Between 1920 and 1944, a total of five women secured seats in parliament in Hungary (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2019).

gender equality. By highlighting their role, it emphasizes the importance of governance structures in advancing gender equality agendas.

My research question is the following: What are the key factors contributing to the differing rankings of Slovenia and Hungary in gender equality indices, considering historical context, cultural values, political ideologies, policy implementation, and institutional frameworks?

First, I will introduce the position of gender equality goals within international organizations that both countries are members of, illustrating how these global trends have influenced the development of country-specific policies. Furthermore I aim to provide a brief history of the socialist heritage of both countries and examine how their predecessors addressed gender inequality. Following this,

Secondly, I will specifically investigate the impact of EU accession on the adoption of more comprehensive gender equality policies and institutions. I will further explore the legal framework, including the presence of gender equality in the constitution and the specific gender equality institutions, as well as their placement within the state administration hierarchy. Additionally, I will highlight specific examples of each country's approach to motherhood and family policies, analyzing the message they convey to women and families.

Finally, I will examine the causes of divergence in the aforementioned areas, considering factors such as the strength of democracy, the presence of civil society, and cultural values and norms.

I. The development of gender equality initiatives

I.1. Global changes: the influence of the United Nations frameworks

Gender equality is a goal employed by influential supranational organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), which includes it in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On a global level, the UN has played a pivotal role in accentuating the importance and providing guidelines for achieving gender equality. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) sets out that: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion,

political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (United Nations, 1948).

As members of the United Nations, Hungary and Slovenia² have signed numerous declarations and participated in efforts aimed at promoting gender equality and human rights. The influence of the United Nations has been a palpable force in shaping their policies and promoting the advancement of gender equality agendas on national level. In the subsequent part, I will aim to delineate the integration of gender equality within the framework of the United Nations, charting its historical trajectory and key milestones.

The United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) established numerous foundational works and institutions that played a crucial role in significantly advancing gender equality worldwide. The first World Conference on Women convened in 1975, followed by three more in 1980, 1985, and 1995. They advanced women's equality through various declarations and measures and laid the groundwork for the creation of institutions. The year 1984 marked a significant milestone in this progression, as the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) established a distinct fund known as UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women – later known as UN Women), aimed specifically at enhancing the status of women.

During the 1990's, gender integration received impetus from the international women's movement, and the UN mandated 'gender mainstreaming' as “a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes (Bunch, 2009).

The 1993 United Nations Vienna Declaration on Human Rights is widely touted as the first “gender-mainstreamed” human rights document for its recognition of women's rights as human rights (Krook & True, 2012). Central to the idea of gender mainstreaming is the fact that women and men experience political, economic, social, and cultural life in diverging ways due to socially constructed gender differences and ideologies. United Nations member states recognized that if policies fail to take these differences into account, they are unlikely to be effective or to meet their intended goals, and gender injustices and inequalities affecting both women and men will be perpetuated. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, ratified by member states emphasized the necessity for such considerations across all policy areas at all levels of governance (Parisi & True, 2013). It also serves as a foundational framework for the EIGE,

² Hungary has been a member since 1955. The predecessor of Slovenia, Yugoslavia joined in 1945, and Slovenia as an independent state in 1992.

which utilizes it to assess Member States' performance in gathering data concerning institutional mechanisms for gender equality promotion and mainstreaming, as outlined in Area H of the Beijing Platform for Action.

During the Decade for Women, in 1979, the UN Commission on the Status of Women laid the groundwork for the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Hungary ratified CEDAW in 1980, and Slovenia in 1992. The Convention requires governments to submit national reports every four years, with the Optional Protocol, in force in Hungary since 2000 and in Slovenia since 2004, allowing complaints to be considered by the CEDAW.

Building upon these milestones, UN Women emerged as the main institution tackling gender equality among UN entities today. Established in 2011 as a merger of UNIFEM and other institutions, it helps support Member States implementing standards set out by e.g. CEDAW, and provides technical and financial support for doing so.

I.1. Women's emancipation in CEE: the socialist heritage

In the previous century, during the socialist period in both countries, gender equality was a part of the socialist ideology, which focused mainly on women's participation in the workforce. This meant women could access educational and employment opportunities previously unavailable to them. Besides that, the government in both the Hungarian People's Republic and Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia provided social support for working mothers in terms of widely accessible childcare and generous maternity leave benefits, which were supposed to enable women to balance their responsibilities in both work and family life (Stropnik & Korintus, 2011).

The predecessor of Slovenia, Yugoslavia embarked on a unique experiment during its existence from 1945 to 1991, aiming to eradicate sources of social, economic, and gender inequality while establishing a foundation for a society where men and women could enjoy complete equality in politics, education, careers, and family life. Although similar aspirations were shared with other communist countries, Yugoslavia differentiated its approach by integrating institutional changes through self-management organs and a delegate system (Simmons & Ramet, 2001). Compared to the previous system during the interwar period, the socialist system implemented in Yugoslavia brought some advancements in terms of gender

equality, nevertheless it did not completely achieve the level of gender equality it aimed for or promised to achieve.

It is essential to acknowledge that gender equality in socialist states was not without its limitations and challenges. During the communist era in both Hungary and Slovenia, gender equality was more of a consequence of a productivist economic model than a progressive state ideology. Women were mandated by law to participate in the workforce. As Nagy and colleagues (2016) summarize, "Historically, the full employment of women - which was shaped by the (top-down) decision of a centralized, plan-directed system and was therefore both an opportunity and a constraint - is at odds with the struggle of Western women's movements for women's right to work [...] This shift also resulted in a transition from women's previous dependence on male family members (father, then husband) to a dependence on the state - due to the state being the employer and provider of social benefits (Nagy et al., 2016).

During the pre-1956 Stalinist era, Hungary, as a member of the Eastern bloc, implemented a strict natalist policy drafted by Anna Ratkó, the Cabinet Minister of Health from 1950 to 1953 - and as such- the first female cabinet minister in the country. The policy included a strict abortion ban and imposed a special tax on childless women, resulting in a notable increase in the fertility rate during this period. However, following the 1956 revolution, the abortion ban was lifted, and the child tax was subsequently abolished. Today, the Act LXXIX of 1992 on the protection of fetal life stipulates that pregnancy termination is permissible only in cases of danger or serious crisis for the pregnant woman³.

The belief that "It is a human right to decide freely on the procreation of children" was already present in the 1970s in Tito's former SFRY. Yugoslavia used to stand out as a unique example worldwide for including the right to abortion in its constitution. After the break-up of Yugoslavia, the individual countries abolished or modified this constitutional right (Bauer, 2022). No state, other than the former Yugoslavia, has ever written a right to abortion into its constitution (European Centre for Law and Justice, 2022), a status that remained unchanged until France did so in 2024.

Today, in Slovenia, Article 55 of the Constitution guarantees "Freedom of Choice in Childbearing," ensuring that everyone shall be free to decide whether to bear children. The state

³ An amendment in 2022 introduced a modification, requiring pregnant women to provide a report from an obstetrician-gynecologist confirming that they have been informed by their healthcare provider of clearly identifiable indications of fetal vital signs - that is hearing the fetus's heartbeat, before undergoing an abortion.

shall guarantee the opportunities for exercising this freedom and shall create such conditions as will enable parents to decide to bear children.

I.2. Gender equality in the European Union

Equality between women and men is one of the European Union's founding values. Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) sets out the principle of equal pay for work of equal value (European Charter for Equality, n.d.).

Gender mainstreaming was originally launched in 1996 to promote gender equality in all EU policies, in the context of international and European mobilization on women's issues. It was aimed to transform mainstream policies by introducing a gender equality perspective (Stratigaki, 2005). Since 1996, the Commission has committed itself to a 'dual approach' towards realizing gender equality. This approach involves mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities (EIGE, n.d.). Gender equality is a horizontal aspect in EU policy processes - i.e., in principle, gender impact is considered in every decision, therefore being reflected throughout EU's legislation, case law, and amendments to the Treaties, and present in institutions, strategies, measures, policies and funding allocations.

According to experts, in the beginning of the 21st century, compared to other EU social policies, the gender equality policy was seen as unique, especially, since it was the only policy area which surpassed the often-seen approach of compromise, that is establishing basic, standardized rules while keeping regulations minimal to address diverse interests or concerns. Instead, the promotion of gender equality and the fight against sex-based discrimination was seen as one of the rare areas in which the EU went beyond the mere fluidification of the market, by imposing on Member States a set of norms and values that surpass those prevalent in the majority of countries (Jacquot, 2020).

In terms of institutions, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), established in 2006, plays a pivotal role in advancing gender equality across Member States. Through research and data provision, it assesses and monitors the status of gender equality. Every five years, a Gender Equality Strategy is unveiled, with annual reports mandated by Member States to track progress. Since 2019, the Commissioner for Equality has been overseeing matters related to equality. Additionally, the Gender Equality Commission, consisting of members appointed by Member States, operates within the Council of Europe. Its central aim is to

mainstream gender equality across all policies and initiatives, ensuring coherence with international obligations and addressing challenges faced by women in Europe.

In 2014, the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention (Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence), became the first legally binding measure in Europe aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Both Slovenia and Hungary signed it in 2014, but only Slovenia ratified it in 2015, meaning it has not yet entered into force in Hungary as of April 2024 (European Parliament, 2024).

Even amidst clear efforts, Jacquot (2020) argues that the EU gender equality policies have been facing challenges after 2010, despite historical significance, due to budgetary constraints. She states that gender equality policy dismantling is connected to The Great Recession and argues that it has had some direct (budgetary reduction) and indirect (unwillingness to legislate and to commit to common standards, administrative rationalization aimed at improving efficiency, increased competition among actors for scarce resources) effects which have transformed a process of policy change into a process of policy dismantling (Jacquot, 2017). Diminishing visibility, financing, and legislative initiatives all indicate a potential erosion of its effectiveness which is also due to evolving political dynamics. This erosion highlights the risk that the symbolic significance of gender equality within the EU's identity may overshadow actual efforts to address gender inequality (Jacquot, 2020).

I.3. Journey to EU accession: legislative alignment of gender equality in Slovenia and Hungary

During their path to EU accession, Slovenia and Hungary, like other candidate countries, had to align its legislation with EU standards, particularly regarding gender equality.

In both countries' cases, the process of EU accession initially focused on de jure harmonisation of legal legislation with EU directives (before accession), while later on the integration of policy initiatives (such as reconciliation policies) became dominant (Krizsán & Zentai, 2006; Křížková et al., 2010). This shift involved incorporating policies aimed at reducing gender segregation in the labor market and promoting a healthier balance between work and family (Nagy et al., 2016). Slovenia adopted the Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2837. Zakon o enakih možnostih žensk in moških (ZEMŽM), stran 6104) in 2002. Concurrently, Hungary

passed the Law CXXV on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in 2003 (2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról).

Before accession both countries had to comply with Directive 76/207/EEC, which focused on equal treatment of men and women in various aspects. Compliance with this directive was a criteria for EU membership. The directive was later replaced by Directive 2006/54/EC, which continued to emphasize gender equality in employment, vocational training, promotion, and working conditions.

Furthermore, in addition to directives, EU Member States must also adhere to regulations within the EU legal framework concerning gender equality. One such significant regulation is Regulation (EU) No 606/2013, which addresses the mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters. While primarily focused on civil protection measures, this regulation also incorporates provisions related to gender equality and combating gender-based discrimination.

While participation in gender equality strategies is not mandatory under EU law, member states are encouraged to adopt and implement measures to promote gender equality in line with EU values and objectives. Both countries have indeed taken steps in this direction. In Hungary, the "Empowering Women in the Family and Society Action Plan for 2021-2030" (A nők szerepének erősítése a családban és a társadalomban (2021–2030) akcióterv) has been established. Similarly, in Slovenia, the "Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2023-2030" (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030) reflects the commitment to advancing gender equality.

II. Measuring equality globally

Commonly used comparative quantitative analyses of gender inequality primarily rely on sex-disaggregated data provided by national statistical offices, typically covering areas such as health, education, employment, political participation and income. Widely used sources, such as Global Gender Gap Index nevertheless fail to include information on social institutions, which have been identified as an important determinant of the well-being of women and the long-term prospects for economic growth (World Bank, 2001; Antecol, 2003). Therefore, I will

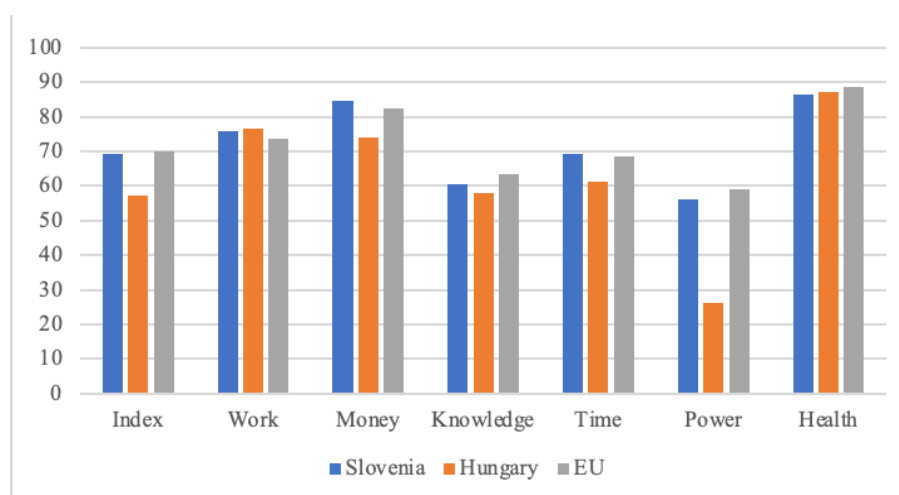
supplement my analysis with sources providing a different, less quantitative perspective, such as CEDAW reports, which encompass institutions and legislation, among other factors.

II.1. Present state of gender equality in Slovenia and Hungary: results of indexes

The European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE's) Gender Equality Index has been assessing EU countries since 2013 according to the following domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. The methodology is as follows: data is disaggregated by gender, and value sets concerning men and women are compared. A value of 100 signifies the attainment of full gender equality, while as the value approaches 0, the degree of equality diminishes.

Figure 1

EIGE's 2023 Gender Equality Index Scores



Note. Adopted from “Gender equality index” by the European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/>

In the overall ranking, Hungary is positioned 26th, with only Romania scoring lower. Slovenia, on the other hand, ranks 12th, slightly above the EU average. While Hungary performs better than Slovenia in the work and health domains, Slovenia excels in the money, knowledge, time, and power domains.

In the work domain, the measure of equal access to jobs and favorable working conditions for both genders is assessed, with Hungary taking the lead in this aspect.

The money domain evaluates gender inequalities in financial resource access and the economic situation of men and women. Slovenia demonstrates superior performance in this area compared to Hungary.

Knowledge assesses gender disparities in educational attainment, lifelong education and training participation, and gender segregation. This domain contributes 15.9% to the Gender Equality Index score growth since 2022, with notable improvements observed in Slovenia.

Time measures gender inequalities in time allocation for care, domestic work, and social activities, where Slovenia again surpasses Hungary.

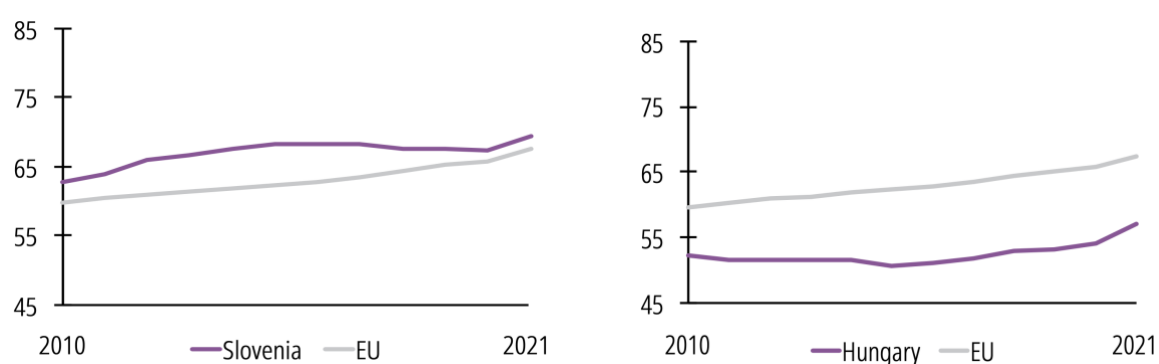
Power evaluates gender equality in decision-making positions across political, economic, and social spheres. In early 2023, both Hungary and Slovenia saw their first female presidents⁴. However, gender imbalances persist in national-level political roles, with over 80% of government positions held by men in several countries, including Hungary. Legislated quotas have positively impacted women's representation in parliament, particularly in Slovenia.

The health domain evaluates gender equality in various aspects such as health status, behavior, and access to services. Slovenia has demonstrated significant long-term progress, showing a 5.3-point improvement since 2010, followed by Hungary with a 4.2-point increase.

Although the area of violence is also considered among the domains examined, no score is provided in the violence domain due to a lack of comparable EU-wide data in both countries.

Figure 2

Convergence of the Gender Equality Index, scores, 2010-2021



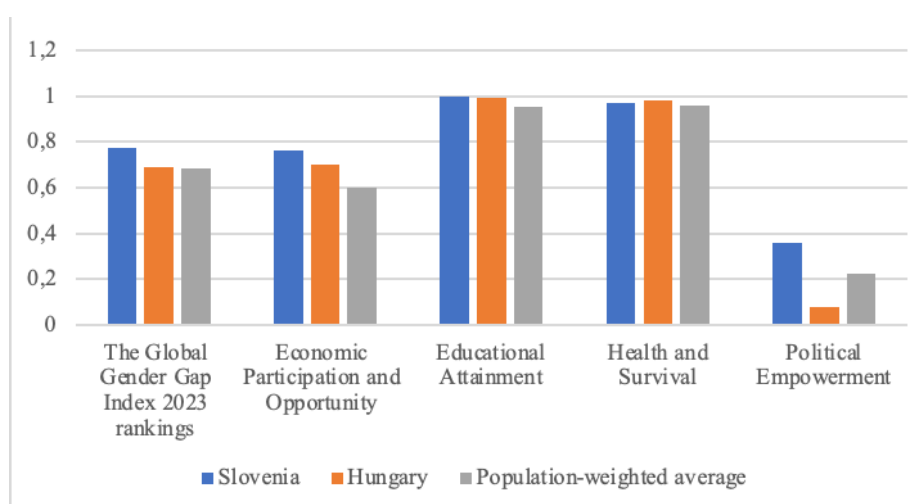
Note. From “Gender equality index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy.” by the European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023, p. 26

⁴ Since March 2024, Hungary has a male president yet again.

Data from the period between 2010 and 2021 on the convergence of Gender Equality Index scores indicates a mean convergence trend, suggesting a reduction in differences or disparities in gender equality outcomes among Member States, signifying overall improvement in gender equality across the analyzed region (see Figure 2). Despite their different starting points, 15 Member States (including Slovenia) have come closer to the EU average over time. The remaining 12 Member States (including Hungary) have increased their distance from the EU average. According to longitudinal analysis, the rate of convergence of the Gender Equality Index score has been faster in Slovenia than the EU average, while Hungary has been stagnating below the average in the past decade - its slower progress in gender equality is leading to widening disparities with the EU over time.

Figure 3

World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index Scores



Note. Adopted from “Global gender gap report 2023” by the World Economic Forum, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>

Similarly, as shown in Figure 3, significant disparities are found in gender equality outcomes between the two countries in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index (a framework of the World Economic Forum), where Slovenia ranks 29th, while Hungary is in the 99th place.

The index consists of four different domains, namely: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and finally, political empowerment. The most staggering difference between the two countries investigated is found in the political empowerment scores, which are calculated by giving scores to the % of women in parliament, % of women in ministerial positions and years with female/male head of state (last 50). Hungary

is well below the population-weighted average (being 130th of the 148 countries with a declining score compared to last year), while Slovenia is above it. Looking at the specific, more recent data as of April 2024, the percentage of women in parliament in Hungary is 14%, on the other hand in the Slovenian parliament 37% of members are women. As of April 2024, Hungary has no female ministers, whereas Slovenia has five female ministers out of 20 (25%) (Parlameter, 2024). Over the past 50 years, Hungary has had one female head of state, Novák Katalin, who recently resigned, while Slovenia has had one as well since 1991; Nataša Pirc Musar, who has been in office since 2022.

On the other hand, in the health and survival domain Hungary has a higher score than both Slovenia, and the global average score. This is due to the higher score in the sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy. This does not indicate that life expectancy is high overall, but that the gap between men and women is relatively small in the given country.

In the educational attainment domain Slovenia ranks better overall, this is due to lower scores of Hungary in the % of enrolment in primary and secondary education.

In the economic participation and opportunity domain Slovenia is 30th, while Hungary is 62nd out of 146. Both countries rank high in the % of professional and technical workers, but Hungary ranks significantly lower in the rest of the subdomains, particularly in the percentage of labor-force participation rate, which stands at 79% for men and 71% for women as of February 2024 (KSH, 2024). In Slovenia, the participatory rate for women is 73% (SURs, 2024). Additionally, Hungary faces challenges in the representation of legislators, senior officials, and managers, in the wage equality for similar work and estimated earning income.

II.2. The UN Framework: exploring CEDAW reports

In the next part I will analyze and summarize the main issues mentioned during the discussion of the two countries CEDAW reports. The CEDAW periodic reports are submissions made by countries to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee), detailing their progress in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These reports provide information on legislative, judicial, administrative, and other measures taken to address gender discrimination and promote gender equality within the country. The CEDAW Committee reviews these reports and provides feedback and recommendations to the countries for further action. In addition to government submissions, NGOs have the option to submit shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee. These reports offer independent assessments of the country's

progress in implementing CEDAW and provide valuable insights and an independent perspective. The CEDAW Committee considers both the government's and shadow reports during its review process.

In reviewing both Hungary's (ninth) and Slovenia's (seventh) periodic reports to CEDAW, notable legislative and institutional advancements were acknowledged alongside persisting challenges in promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights.

In Hungary's report, the Committee welcomes the efforts made towards legislative reforms that facilitate gender equality, including the extensions of parental leave, amendments to the Criminal Code to define rape, and improvements in the institutional and policy framework. These efforts have also encompassed the adoption of action plans targeting gender equality and the ratification of international conventions aimed at protecting vulnerable groups. Specifically, the Committee noted the adoption of the Empowering Women in the Family and Society Action Plan for 2021-2030, National Anti-trafficking Strategy for 2020–2023; and ratifying the Lanzarote Convention (Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

However, the Committee expressed deep concern over retrogressive movements aiming to erase gender references from political, educational, and social discourse in the State party, emphasizing that its equality policy is centered around traditional family roles. They noted a rise in stereotypical attitudes towards gender roles, absence of gender studies in public universities, and stressed that women's rights extend beyond familial roles. Furthermore, they noted the absence of specific legislation concerning women's rights, particularly due to the State party's failure to ratify the Istanbul Convention, jeopardizing efforts to combat violence against women and domestic violence.

The Committee also highlighted concerns regarding the limited representation of civil society organizations, especially women's groups, especially in implementing the national action plan. They recommended integrating a gender-responsive budget and establishing indicators for regular monitoring, along with accountability mechanisms.

Additionally, they expressed worry about the Ministry of Culture and Innovation's oversight of women's issues since 2022, fearing it might reinforce traditional gender roles and reducing the capacity to ensure that gender equality policies are effectively implemented and that gender is mainstreamed across all government departments. Notably, no impact assessment

has been conducted on the Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2010–2021, raising further concerns about policy effectiveness.

Additionally, the Committee expressed concern over the inadequacy of legal provisions in addressing certain forms of rape and the limitations of civil restraining orders for victims not legally recognized as intimate partners. They highlighted potential risks within mandatory mediation processes in child custody disputes, particularly regarding historical violence examination and possible financial burdens on victims. Recommendations emphasized the need for stronger victim support services and the encouragement of reporting gender-based violence without fear of reprisals.

The Committee also raised alarm over the country's status as a hub for trafficking in women and girls, underscoring the reliance on non-governmental organizations for shelter services.

While acknowledging advancements like increased female representation in diplomatic roles and the election of the first female President, they expressed ongoing concern about the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions across various sectors.

Issues such as gender stereotypes in education, the gender pay gap, limited access to reproductive healthcare, and discriminatory practices against women with disabilities were also noted. Specifically, concerns were voiced regarding the lack of availability of medical abortion despite the legality of termination of pregnancy, restricted access to modern contraceptives, and forced sterilization of women with disabilities without their consent. They also criticized the Family Protection Action Plan for its potential to exacerbate violence against women. Specifically, the plan's measures aimed at promoting the traditional family structure and increasing the population, such as offering joint loans for property purchase, tax breaks for women raising four or more children, and preferential loans for young women entering their first marriage, may inadvertently trap women in abusive relationships. Moreover, in cases where children are not born within the designated commitment period, women may be obligated to repay subsidies with penalty interests, disproportionately affecting them.

The Committee's seventh periodic report on Slovenia highlights several positive developments in legislative reforms aimed at promoting gender equality. These include amendments to various laws such as the Companies Act, Criminal Procedure Act, Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act, Non-Governmental Organizations Act, Protection against Discrimination Act, Domestic Violence Prevention Act, International Protection Act, and Residence Registration Act. Additionally, Slovenia has established several institutional and

policy frameworks to address issues which touch upon the gender aspect, including resolutions on crime prevention, mental health, family policy, measures for the Roma community, and equal opportunities for women and men.

However, the Committee noted with concern that the Convention, its Optional Protocol, and the Committee's general recommendations are not widely known and rarely invoked in courts. Furthermore, while the Committee welcomes the statement made by the delegation that the State party is fully committed to cooperating with women human rights defenders, it notes with concern that no civil society organization has engaged in preparation of the consideration of the seventh periodic report.

The report also raises concerns regarding the impact of COVID-19 recovery strategies on women's rights, the absence of comprehensive strategies to address gender-based violence, lenient sentences for perpetrators of such violence, and insufficient resources for gender equality initiatives. Furthermore, the presence of discriminatory gender stereotypes in the media, the lack of coordination mechanisms to address violence against women, and the absence of comprehensive data on gender-based violence are also highlighted as areas of concern.

The report acknowledges certain positive developments such as the reduction of the gender pay gap, improvements in reproductive health care, and recognition of same-sex marriage. However, it also identifies persistent challenges including gender segregation in the labor market, sexual harassment in the workplace, and limited access to healthcare and social services for marginalized groups such as Roma women.

Recommendations include ensuring women's equal participation in post-crisis recovery plans, raising awareness about women's rights and legal remedies, strengthening mechanisms to address gender-based violence, promoting political participation of women, and addressing disparities in healthcare access. The report also emphasizes the need for comprehensive strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion among marginalized groups, including Roma women.

It's notable that, based on my analysis, CEDAW reports have acquired more attention in the Hungarian media, than in the Slovenian. This is evident from coverage on popular news portals such as Telex, Qubit, 444, Origo, Mandiner, and 24.hu. Conversely, mainstream Slovenian media, including outlets like RTV SLO, Siol, Dnevnik, Žurnal24, and Slovenske

novice, have shown virtually no coverage of the CEDAW, with only two articles mentioning it in Dnevnik, one from 2008 and the other from 2023.

III. Legal frameworks, institutions, and policies influencing divergent gender equality outcomes

In this part, I will examine the root causes of the differences in outcomes of the previously discussed indexes between Slovenia and Hungary. My approach to understanding the divergence between these two countries involves first providing a deeper insight into the legal framework, institutions, and policies.

Legal frameworks and institutions have an impact on and mold societal norms, encompassing cultural values, and vice versa, as noted by Friedman (1975). Values and societal factors serve as a foundation for comprehending the drivers of elected political forces, which ultimately shape legislation and institutional frameworks and policies.

III.1. Constitutional dynamics

According to the classical classification of constitutional law, the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia is a rigid constitution. This characteristic is given by the more rigorous and difficult procedure for its amendment. In the past three decades, the Constitution has been amended and supplemented only eleven times, and even then (with two exceptions) on a small scale. (Uradni list, 2021)

In contrast to many Central and Eastern European countries, Hungary opted not to entirely replace its 1949 communist constitution following the events of 1989. Instead, extensive amendments were made to the existing document during that time (Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2014). However, in 2012, a significant change occurred when the constitution's name was altered. The Fundamental Law of Hungary came into effect, replacing the previous Constitution. It underwent twelve subsequent modifications in the last 12 years (Nemzeti Jogszabálytár, 2023). This stands in contrast to the situation in Slovenia, where the

scope and number of constitutional amendments are not considered high, especially compared to the frequent amendments seen in some Western European countries.

The Venice Commission has criticized Hungary's shift from Constitution to Fundamental Law, particularly emphasizing its impact on social policies (that is including those related to gender equality). In 2013, it argued, that:

The more policy issues are transferred beyond the powers of simple majority, the less significance will future elections have and the more possibilities does a two-thirds majority have of cementing its political preferences and the country's legal order[...]. Cardinal laws were adopted or amended in a rushed way, often introduced by individual members of Parliament, thus avoiding the scrutiny foreseen for governmental proposals, [...] not allowing for adequate consultation of the opposition and civil society.

III.1.1. Gender equality in Constitutional Law: a comparative analysis of Slovenia and Hungary

In Hungary, the legal framework regarding gender equality is enshrined in Article XV:

- (1) Everyone shall be equal before the law. Every human being shall have legal capacity.
- (2) Hungary shall guarantee fundamental rights to everyone without discrimination and in particular without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or any other status.
- (3) Women and men shall have equal rights.
- (4) By means of separate measures, Hungary shall help to achieve equality of opportunity and social inclusion.
- (5) By means of separate measures, Hungary shall protect families, children, women, the elderly and those living with disabilities.

Additionally, the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Article L), (1)) emphasizes the protection of traditional family structures, defining marriage as between a man and a woman therefore

reinforcing the heteronormative system with the addition of the following article to the Fundamental law in 2020:

“Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the survival of the nation. Family ties shall be based on marriage or the relationship between parents and children. The mother shall be a woman, the father shall be a man.”

Article 54 of the Fundamental Law of Hungary sets out the following in case of a special legal orders (State of national crisis, State of preventive defence, State of terrorist threat (since 2016), Unexpected attack and the State of Danger):

“(1) Under a special legal order, the exercise of fundamental rights – with the exception of the fundamental rights provided for in Articles II and III, and Article XXVIII (2) to (6) – may be suspended or may be restricted beyond the extent specified in Article I (3).”

Articles II, III and XXVIII cover fundamental aspects of human rights and legal standards within the Hungarian legal system. They include protections for human dignity and life, prohibitions against torture and trafficking, and safeguards for fair trials and legal defense.

In the case of special legal orders, the Fundamental Law allows for the emergency government decrees to suspend or restrict most fundamental rights beyond the extent permissible under ordinary circumstances and concentrate power in the hands of the Government without adequate constitutional restraints. (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2023).

Notably, except for the State of danger, special legal orders have never been introduced so far. Before 2020 there had been no special legal order that was applied nationwide, as previously the State of danger pertained only to a specific area of the country (Csink, 2021).

In the spring of 2020, due to the pandemic the Hungarian government initially declared a State of danger which lasted until May 2022. This "rule by decree" system has persisted, with the state of danger being declared again, this time with a reference to the war in Ukraine, before the expiry date of the previous one (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2023). Recently it has been extended until 7 September 2024.

A significant difference between the two countries is that the Hungarian government has been utilizing this option for a prolonged time countrywide. Most likely the cause of

declaring this special state of emergency (beyond reasonable grounds, as in the case of the pandemic) is to obtain exceptional competences. Hegedűs (2020) touches on the fact that the ruling Fidesz party has the necessary two-thirds majority to extend the state of danger indefinitely. Other Western governments declared states of emergency to combat the coronavirus epidemic as well, but Hungary's enabling act is notable as it allows government decrees to override existing laws. Although the legislation includes some control mechanisms, such as ensuring the Constitutional Court's functioning, the ruling party's influence over the court undermines its effectiveness in protecting fundamental rights. This development of granting unchecked power to the Government threatens the foundations of modern constitutional democracy (Hegedűs, 2020).

The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia guarantees the following basic rights in Article 14:

“In Slovenia everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political, or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status, disability, or any other personal circumstance.”

While provision is made for the temporary suspension or restriction of rights in exceptional circumstances, such as during war or a state of emergency in Article 16, Slovenia has exercised this option sparingly compared to Hungary, reflecting a divergence in constitutional governance approaches between the two nations.

III.2. Institutional frameworks

In Hungary, gender equality responsibilities are centralized under the Ministry of Culture and Innovation (Kulturális és Innovációs Minisztérium), which reports directly to the Prime Minister. The Department of Adoption and Women's Policy (Örökbefogadási és Nőpolitikai Főosztály) deals with adoption and various issues concerning women, and is supervised by a Deputy State Secretary for Family Policies (családokért felelős államtitkár). However, according to EIGE, there are no representative elected bodies receiving regular progress reports on gender equality efforts, and there is a lack of systematic monitoring, analysis, and training on gender equality within the national public administration (EIGE, 2022).

In Slovenia, the Equal Opportunities Division of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities (Ministrstvo za delo, družino, socialne zadeve in enake

možnosti) manages gender equality policies. Gender mainstreaming is integrated into the work of each ministry through appointed coordinators. An independent equality body, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality (Zagovornik načela enakosti), provides consultations and recommendations on gender equality policies. Additionally, the Commission for Petitions, Human Rights, and Equal Opportunities (Komisija za peticije, človekove pravice in enake možnosti) monitors and promotes gender equality within the National Assembly (Državni zbor Republike Slovenije).

Local administrations in Slovenia are obligated to promote equal opportunities and incorporate gender perspectives into their planning. A legally established advisory body, the Expert Council for Gender Equality, supports gender equality initiatives alongside civil society organizations. The Equal Opportunities Division (Sektor za enake možnosti) collaborates with various stakeholders, including the EU and civil society, to implement gender equality programs and campaigns (EIGE, 2022).

III.3. Overview of existing gender equality policies in Hungary and Slovenia

Hungary		Slovenia
Gender mainstreaming and the integration of gender equality policies in Hungary began with its accession to the European Union in 2004. In 2003, Hungary aligned with EU directives by enacting Act CXXV on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equality of Opportunities, which prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including sex. Hungary lacks specific legislation solely dedicated to gender equality. Act CXXV of 2003 establishes the principle of equal treatment, listing sex as one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination. The Fundamental Law of Hungary, effective since 2012, asserts equal rights for women and men while endorsing affirmative action to protect women. However, it also reinforces traditional gender roles by stating marriage as the union of one man and one woman, and by affirming the family as the basis of the survival of the nation, specifying that the mother shall be a woman and the father shall be a man. Gender mainstreaming initiatives in Hungary are outlined in the Action Plan 'Empowering Women in the Family and Society Action Plan 2021-2030', which provides broad objectives for the years ahead.	Legislative and policy framework	The Slovenian Constitution guarantees equal rights and prohibits sex-based discrimination. Slovenia's pursuit of EU accession (1996–2004) significantly shaped its gender equality policies to meet EU standards. Gender mainstreaming began with the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act in 2002, requiring government bodies to integrate gender equality into policymaking. The Protection against Discrimination Act (2016) further strengthened anti-discrimination measures. The adoption of the first national gender equality program in 2005 marked a significant milestone, emphasizing gender mainstreaming as a key strategy. Under the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act, a mandatory two-year action plan is required for program implementation, with regular reporting to the National Assembly. The most recent strategy, the National Programme for Equal Opportunities 2023–2030 takes a comprehensive approach, integrating specific and measurable goals for gender mainstreaming across policies and programs to achieve concrete progress in gender equality.

Governmental structures responsible for gender equality in Hungary include the Minister Responsible for Family Affairs, overseeing the Women's Policy Unit within the Department of Adoption and Women's Policy. This unit is led by a Deputy State Secretary and handles legislative proposals related to women's policy, coordinating governmental programs in healthcare, mental wellbeing, family protection, pro-family policies, and reproductive health. Additionally, the Women's Rights Thematic Working Group, comprising government officials and civil society representatives, advises decision-makers on women's rights issues. The General Directorate for Equal Treatment ensures compliance with equal treatment principles and handles complaints related to protected characteristics, including gender since 2021. There are no elected representative bodies for gender equality oversight. The Office of the Hungarian Parliament occasionally produces briefs on gender-related topics.	Structures	The Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities (MDDSZEM) oversees gender equality promotion and has broad responsibilities, including family, children, youth, and elderly protection. The Equal Opportunities Division within the MDDSZEM, established in 2012, coordinates gender equality policies, proposes programs, and provides expert support. Gender mainstreaming is coordinated through officials appointed within each ministry, as mandated by the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act. An independent body, the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, promotes equality and prevents discrimination, covering multiple grounds including gender. It conducts research, publishes reports, provides legal assistance, and participates in judicial proceedings. The Ombudsperson is responsible for protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, independent of governmental authorities. In the parliamentary realm, the Commission for Petitions, Human Rights, and Equal Opportunities within the National Assembly addresses gender equality issues. Local administrations are mandated to promote equal opportunities and may appoint local Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Civil society organizations cooperate with the government, providing input on gender strategies and laws, and participating in conferences and seminars on gender equality.
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There is an absence of regular monitoring or systematic analysis of the development of gender mainstreaming actions, gender equality mechanisms and policies. Additionally, gender mainstreaming or gender budgeting is not present in the in the national public administration.	Gender impact assessment and gender budgeting	Slovenia is in the early stages of integrating gender considerations into its policymaking processes. While gender impact assessments are being conducted systematically in only three ministries, and gender budgeting is still in its foundational phase as some ministries are beginning to allocate funds specifically for projects aimed at promoting gender equality within their budgets.
As per the Ministry, there are no gender equality training sessions arranged for government employees in Hungary, whether mandatory or voluntary.	Training and awareness-raising	In 2018, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities issued comprehensive guidelines on gender-sensitive language, aiming to promote fair and socially responsible language use and gather existing language tools and principles for employing gender-sensitive language. Gender equality training is only offered voluntarily to select public administration employees (employees of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Infrastructure).

There are no legal requirement or agreement mandating the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal - KSH) or other entities to collect and distribute gender-disaggregated data. However, the KSH website offers freely accessible gender-disaggregated data on various topics such as healthcare, living conditions, and income. Since 2001, the KSH has periodically published reports titled 'Women and Men in Hungary'. This report includes gender statistics on aspects such as health, education, employment, and crime. Apart from the HCSO, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) publishes an annual report on the Hungarian Labour Market (Munkaerőpiaci Tükör), including some gender-disaggregated data.	Gender statistics	Within the National Statistical Office (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije – SURS), there is a dedicated operational unit responsible for producing sex-disaggregated statistics, focusing on demography, living standards, the labor market, and education. The legal framework for SURS, established by the National Statistics Act, mandates the production of gender-disaggregated data. The yearly published Annual Programme of Statistical Surveys ensures gender-specific data collection across various fields. SURS publishes sex-disaggregated data for over 75% of variables. Currently, the SiStat Database on the National Statistical Office's website contains approximately 250 tables with "sex" referenced in their titles. While a dedicated webpage for gender statistics is lacking, SURS regularly disseminates gender-related analyses through press releases on International Women's Day and Men's Day, providing brief snapshots of gender dynamics in Slovenia.
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Source: EIGE data collection on Gender Mainstreaming, 2022

III.4. Policy making: how to build a more gender equal society

Dye (2005) provides a summary of the concept of policy as follows:

A policy is what the government acting on our behalf, chooses to do or not to do.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his conservative party Fidesz have had a constitutional majority in the Hungarian national parliament since 2010 and used this power to implement deep changes in the Hungarian polity and policy making. The policy reforms undertaken by the Orbán government have been formulated and implemented in a top-down fashion. In most cases, governmental initiatives or decisions precede media coverage, indicating that - as Boda and Patkós (2018) have hypothesized - the large majority of the policies which appeared intensively in the media have not been initiated by pressure groups, opposition parties or by the civil society, but represented governmental initiatives (Boda & Patkós 2018). As a

result, the level of engagement and meaningful participation of the general public, civil society, and other interest groups in Hungary remains low.

The policy-making process is largely controlled by the ruling party, leading to limited participation compared to Slovenia, where a broader range of actors are involved. This includes the three branches of government, especially the legislative and executive branches, along with politically affiliated associations. In developed countries, including Slovenia, we see a relatively high number of NGOs. However, one notable difference between the Slovenian NGO sector and those in developed countries is the comparatively low level of involvement of Slovenian organizations in political decision-making processes. This weakness in NGOs reflects the broader issue of Slovenia's interest group system, which, despite being one of the most economically and politically developed Central European countries, still lacks the political sophistication and engagement seen in advanced Western democracies (Novak and Fink-Hafner 2019).

III.5. Country-specific frameworks: a comparative analysis of gender equality in family policy

There are numerous tendencies and policies specific to individual countries or nations, often independent of expectations set by international organizations. Hungary has struggled with a declining population since the early 1980s, a challenge that previous governments have struggled to address effectively. In the mid-2010s, against the backdrop of the 2015 refugee crisis, the ruling party, Fidesz-KDNP launched an extensive pronatalist campaign aimed at reversing population decline. Emphasizing traditional family structures, these policies target native-born Hungarian couples in heterosexual marital relationships, particularly those from economically stable backgrounds, with children or those planning to have children. The incentives include generous tax reductions and grants for real estate. Hungary stands out globally for its significant investment in "family protection" spending, even as overall social spending as a proportion of GDP declines. This signifies that funding for previously universally available social benefits has been reduced, disproportionately affecting marginalized groups such as impoverished children, the unemployed, and those on minimum pensions or disability benefits. At the same time these policies have reinforced traditional gender roles by placing the burden of childcare on women without efforts to encourage shared responsibility - as seen in the rhetoric of the Prime Minister and other government officials (Fodor, 2022). Nonetheless,

the generous support for families has led to an increase in the fertility rate. However, as of 2022, the fertility rate remains higher in Slovenia compared to Hungary (see Appendix E).

Amidst ongoing discussions surrounding gender roles, demography, and childbearing trends, a report titled "Is pink education occurring in Hungary?" issued by the Hungarian State Audit Office (Állami Számvevőszék) raised concerns about the "over-representation" of women in higher education potentially leading to "demographic problems" such as challenges in finding partners and declining childbirth rates. This analysis faced criticism from various academics and NGOs for stereotyping women.

Nagy and colleagues (2016) cite Plomien when discussing the effect of paternal leave, noting that while parental leave aims to facilitate work-life balance, its impact is hindered when fathers face barriers to utilizing this benefit, limiting their involvement in family life (Plomien, 2009). Inflexible policies, such as overly short or long leave durations, pose challenges for parents, risking job loss or hindering re-entry into the labor market. In CEE countries like the Czech Republic and Hungary, where maternal-oriented leave policies predominate, women encounter difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities, often leading to labor market exit (Krizková et al., 2010; Plomien, 2009). Additionally, limited access to childcare exacerbates these challenges, reinforcing traditional gender roles (Scharle, 2007). The dominance of familism, evident in insufficient childcare and eldercare provisions across most post-socialist countries except Slovenia, underscores the need for more nuanced and inclusive policy approaches to promote gender equality and support working families in CEE contexts (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006; Szikra and Szelewa, 2010; Klenner and Hasková, 2010; Krizková et al., 2010; Plomien, 2009).

Among the former communist countries, Slovenia stands out for its relatively well-developed family policy, which aims to reconcile professional and family life. Women's participation in the labor market has been a longstanding tradition, facilitated by a widespread network of childcare services and comprehensive social security schemes. Slovenia has the highest percentage of children under 3 years enrolled in childcare in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region (Robila 2012). These policies and establishments, inherited from the Yugoslav era, have contributed to Slovenia's well-developed family policy, notably in terms of parental leave and preschool childcare, fostering the reconciliation of work and family life and promoting gender equality. However, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, austerity measures and changes in social legislation have led to reductions in welfare funding (e.g. adjustments to leave policies, including reductions in wage compensation for parental and paternity leave). These austerity measures mark a significant departure from previous policy

trajectories and reflect a broader trend of increased selectivity in post-crisis welfare state policies across Europe. Notably subsequent years have seen the introduction of certain expansionary measures, particularly from 2018 onwards (Filipovic Hrast et. al. 2020).

A significant disparity between the two countries lies in the duration of maternity, paternity, and paternal leave. In Slovenia, mothers are entitled to parental leave lasting 365 days, during which they receive 100% of their salary. Fathers also receive 15 days of fully paid paternity leave, which can be taken until the child reaches six months of age. Subsequently, they are entitled to an additional 75 days (52 working days) of unpaid paternity leave until the child's third birthday.

In Hungary, mothers are entitled to 168 days of maternity leave, starting four weeks before the due date. However, they can opt for up to three years of leave while receiving maternity benefits. During the first six months, mothers receive Pregnancy and Confinement Benefit (CSED) equivalent to 70.00% of their salary. Subsequently, they receive Child Care Fee (GYED) for the next eighteen months until the child's second birthday, and Child Care Allowance (GYES) until the child's third birthday. The amount of GYED and GYES is calculated based on the parent's income, at 70% of the daily base rate, but capped monthly at the current minimum wage. Fathers have 5 working days of paternity leave, extendable to 15 if they attend a childcare course. Since 2023, fathers are entitled to 10 days of leave, with the first 5 fully paid and the rest at 40% of the absence allowance. Parents can also take educational leave until the child is two (or three with a disability), as long as one parent uses at least one month of leave. Data shows that in Hungary, the number of children in day nurseries and kindergartens between the age 1-3 is significantly lower than in Slovenia (KSH 2022, SURS 2024).

Bettinger and colleagues (2014) found a significant positive effect on children's long-term education outcomes driven by mother's reduced labor force participation. Conversely, in a survey done by McIntosh (2006) found that there is no significant difference between children of stay-at-home parents vs. working parents' academic ability, at the same time children of stay at home mothers react less confidently in new situations, tend to "cling on" and to show shy behavior. While stay-at-home mothers felt their stress level was at a moderate level, working mothers stated their stress level was "off the charts" struggling to juggle both their home and working life.

In conclusion, national policies significantly influence outcomes, often deviating from international norms. Hungary's pronatalist campaign addresses its demographic decline but reinforces traditional gender roles and neglects marginalized groups. Slovenia's robust family

policies promote gender equality, yet both nations face challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities.

This discussion sets the stage for an exploration of criticism surrounding gender equality aims, highlighting the complexities and nuances involved in achieving equitable outcomes in family and work-life balance policies.

IV. Political dynamics influencing gender equality: beyond legal frameworks and institutional factors

IV.1. Resistance and backlash: challenges to gender equality in political contexts

Despite clear international efforts to address gender inequality, some argue that gender inequality is naturally present in societies and beneficial to both genders. This argument is often underpinned by saying that the traditional model allows women to fulfill their role as nurturer-caretaker-homemaker without the pressure of being present in the workforce. Furthermore, this statement negates the fundamental point of gender equality, which is equal access to opportunities and rights for all individuals, regardless of gender.

As Berlanga (2020) states, it is important to question what is meant by “gender equality”. The context must be taken into account, as solely examining statistics on e.g. women's participation in the labor force is insufficient. In less developed countries, women who have been typically excluded from the workforce become active workforce participants, they typically do so in “feminized” occupations. Therefore, even though they increased their share in the labor market, they are still underrepresented in occupations that ensure high income and high social position. Patriarchal gender norms in most low-income countries regard women as secondary earners and primary caregivers, crowding them into a limited number of “feminized” and precarious occupations, which actually have high costs for gender equality (Berlanga, 2020).

Moreover, political forces can exacerbate the persistence of gender inequality, as analyzed by Kantola and Lombardo (2021), who have analyzed the strategies of right wing populists in opposing gender equality in direct and indirect ways in the EP.

The manifestations of direct opposition to gender equality were also shown for example through resisting the ‘gender ideology’, which they argue negates nature, presenting gender as a biologically given and therefore indisputable (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021). By making a

distinction between ‘real problems’ and issues that only concern an insignificant minority, they frame gender equality as an insignificant question, therefore opposing any funding related to it. Indirect opposition to gender equality is partly based on Euroscepticism. Therefore, these groups most importantly criticize the EU for meddling in issues that should concern the Member States and argue that any directives given by the EU as a supranational institution invades the sovereignty of member states. They are against the EU imposing policy on member states regarding topics like matters of abortion and contraception, sexual education, violence against women, media portrayals, workplace rules. (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021).

This is relevant, because the ruling party in Hungary utilizes these arguments in its narrative as well. But according to Kováts (2022), the stance on gender within the Fidesz government in Hungary was far from uniform between 2010 and 2016. For instance, in 2011, the government funded the revision and republication of a gender mainstreaming manual, followed by signing the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention in 2014 and expressing the intention to ratify it. Anti-gender narratives had been sporadically addressed by government-related actors, but in 2017 it became part of the official government policy and decision-making.

A year and a half earlier, during the refugee crisis of 2015, the government started to develop the image of George Soros as a national enemy, claiming that he promoted large-scale migration to the EU and therefore to Hungary. The withdrawal of the accreditation of Gender Studies MA program without consultation with stakeholders is part of the same trend that includes the expulsion of the CEU (Central European University - founded by Soros) and overall reordering of the former relationship between politics and science, and the interference of the autonomy of universities and academics (Boda & Szűcs 2021).

The absence of significant anti-gender discourse and mobilization in Hungary before 2017, may be attributed primarily to a lack of structural conditions, as Kováts (2022) suggests. This could be explained by factors such as the comparatively low level of religiosity (Balogh, 2014), or the limited organizational influence of the Catholic Church in this realm, especially during a period when the Church played a pivotal role in mobilization against gender equality in other countries. Additionally, it could also be due to the fact that, as opposed to Slovenia, “in Hungary, not much has happened in terms of compliance with international human rights

organizations or EU gender mainstreaming requirements, and this may (also) be linked to the lack of a strong backlash” (Balogh 2014).

IV.2. Strength of democracy and civil society

The limited presence and influence of civil society organizations in both countries affect the development and implementation of policies, including those related to gender equality. Dividing the numbers of NGOs by the current population of the two countries, we find there are 0.012 NGOs per person in Slovenia (Center za informiranje, sodelovanje in razvoj nevladnih organizacij, 2024) and 0.002 NGOs per person in Hungary (KSH, 2020).

Despite Slovenia having a comparatively higher number of NGOs, they lack significant influence, while in Hungary, the system is designed to impede the functioning of civil organizations through restricted funding and stringent regulations. In contrast, Slovenia's liberal democratic system is more supportive of NGOs, though they still encounter challenges in exerting significant influence.

According to Fink-Hafner (1998), modern civil society has been developing quite vigorously in Slovenia, as many of the preconditions typically cited in social science literature as advantageous for democracy and civil society development are being adequately met. She lists the following factors: a favorable socio-economic situation, a beneficial social structure profile for civil society development (with the emergence of a significant middle class since the late 1980s), and the legacy of the Yugoslav regime, which provided a better framework and a more gradual transition to modern participatory democracy compared to other types of socialist political systems. Another factor that social science literature suggests to be more advantageous for democratization is parliamentarism as opposed to presidentialism (with the exception of the USA)⁵. Moreover, attitudes and beliefs favoring democracy, along with political actors promoting an active society and a decision-making process that enhances consensual democracy, further contribute to this favorable environment (Fink-Hafner 1998).

However, juxtaposed against this positive trajectory, Nagy and Polgári observe that simultaneously, the Hungarian government is increasing pressure on the civil sector, including criminalizing pro-human rights activities in the context of migration, imposing special taxes, and stigmatizing NGOs that receive foreign funding. Additionally, there is a trend of the government establishing its own 'NGOs', which undermines the human rights discourse. Furthermore, there has been a noticeable shift towards sovereigntism within the Hungarian

⁵ Hungary's political system is parliamentarism as well.

Constitutional Court compared to its previous stance, especially concerning the extent of supremacy granted to the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Despite these challenges, the Hungarian NGO sector has played a vital role in facilitating both domestic and international strategic litigation, leading to significant successes (Nagy and Polgári, 2021).

Freedom House, an NGO from the US annually assesses the degree to which a country respects and implements democratic practices. In its annual report for 2023 it states that democracy in the Central Europe to Central Asia region has been declining for 18 consecutive years (Gašperič Marolt, 2023). Slovenia overall currently has the second-highest scores in the region, but has still suffered substantial declines since 2005. Hungary experienced the largest score decline over the past 20 years among all countries, dropping from a Semi-Consolidated Democracy to a Hybrid/Transitional Regime. Based on the report methodology, Hybrid Regimes have characteristics of both autocracies and democracies, leaving their institutions in a vulnerable position. Smeltzer and Karppi (2024) bring up the example of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán obstructing efforts by the European Union to hold him accountable for violating treaty commitments on fundamental values, additionally implementing severe restrictions on NGOs.

In Slovenia, improvements are found mainly in bolstering media independence through funding models and related legislation. This is due to the new Slovenian government launching initiatives as part of its campaign to reverse the institutional damage that occurred under the former Prime Minister, Janez Janša. Janša was profiting off of weak procurement legislation. His attempts to undermine the Slovenian judicial system akin to Hungary's were unsuccessful. Despite this, the current Slovenian government's efforts to rectify the situation have their own complexities. Current Prime Minister Golob faced a series of scandals in 2023 over his unilateral style of management, as seen in the rapid and nontransparent ministerial changes (Smeltzer & Karppi, 2024)..

Meanwhile Hungary, an “Autocratizing Hybrid” is on its way to becoming a “Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regime” based on the report methodology, as key institutions, including the media and the courts have surpassed the anticipated politicization level associated with traditional definitions of hybrid regimes. They are now under the control of ruling parties and are being exploited for partisan or personal interests. Furthermore, restrictive laws, such as Act LXXXVIII of 2023 on the Protection of National Sovereignty establish power to the

Hungarian state to surveil, investigate, and report on NGOs' election-related activities, which are used to constrain the functioning of civil society groups (Smeltzer & Karppi, 2024).

This also applies to NGOs advocating for women's rights, as Juhász (2015) points out. The "war on gender" intensified in 2013, marked by a media campaign targeting human rights NGOs, particularly feminist organizations, accused of being linked to George Soros's "empire" and allegedly infiltrating the EEA/Norway Grants NGO Fund. Specifically, the Hungarian Women's Lobby and four of its member organizations (the NANE Association, the Patent Association, the Labrisz Lesbian Association, and the MONA Foundation) were targeted. In 2014, these allegations prompted a government investigation, resulting in the blacklisting of 13 NGOs by the Prime Minister's office. Moreover, all Hungarian NGOs were obligated to re-register with the courts according to new statutes to maintain their charity status. This led to the loss of charity status for many due to onerous requirements. Consequently, many activists turned to social media platforms, demonstrating the resilience of civil activism (Juhász, 2015).

IV.3. Cultural values and norms

This section is an analysis of cultural values and norms within the contexts of Hungary and Slovenia, with a specific focus on their implications for gender equality policies. It is widely acknowledged that cultural attitudes wield considerable influence over perceptions of gender equality and subsequently the policy decisions adopted by governing entities. By examining these cultural contexts, we can better understand how societal values shape attitudes towards gender roles and equality.

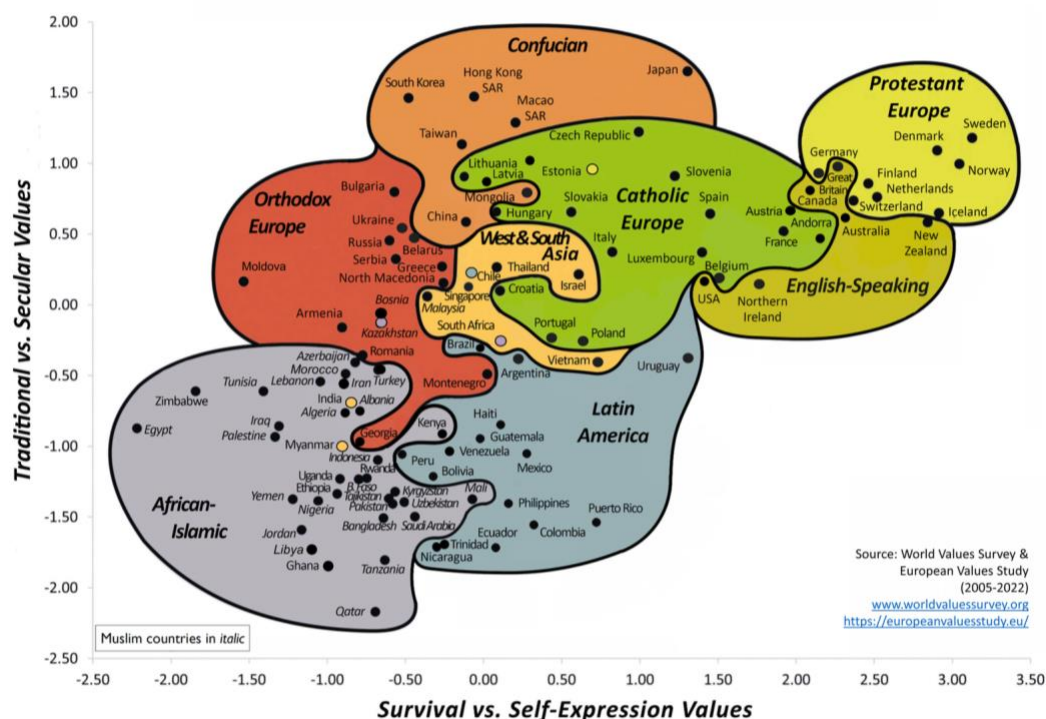
Data from the Eurobarometer survey on gender equality attitudes indicates that in Hungary, a lower percentage of people agree that equality between men and women is a fundamental right compared to Slovenia. Additionally, there is a slight difference in the percentage of people disagreeing, with the disagreement rate being higher in Hungary (see Appendix C). The disparity in gender equality perceptions between the two countries, although not drastic, suggests that Hungary may lag behind Slovenia in terms of public support for gender equality initiatives (Ipsos, 2024). Lower levels of public support can impede the political will to enact progressive gender equality policies.

This statement finds some support in the findings of the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (based on World Values Survey (WVS) database findings), where both Slovenia

and Hungary are placed in the Catholic Europe cohort, with Slovenia leaning more towards secular and self-expression values.

Figure 4

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



Note. From “The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey 7” by World Values Survey, 2023, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

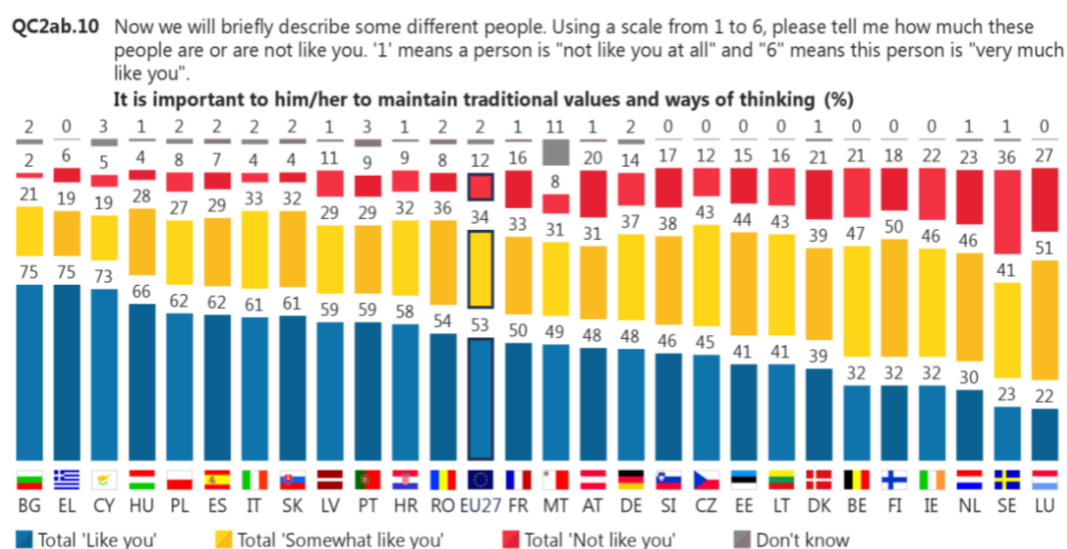
Hungary's position closer to traditional and survival values on the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map suggests a societal prioritization of traditional gender roles and norms. Societies on the traditional spectrum prioritize religion highly and therefore emphasize the interconnectedness of respect for God with homeland and family. Given the importance of family for survival in preindustrial societies, they typically reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide, and prioritize conformity over individualism. They idealize large families, with values correlating with high fertility rates, and exhibit high levels of respect for authority, patriotism, and protectionism. In contrast, secular-rational values oppose these, emphasizing diversity, individual autonomy, and liberal attitudes toward social issues (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Hungary's strong association with religion - in this case Catholicism - implies a significant influence of religious values (see Figure 5 and Appendix D), often associated with

reinforcing traditional gender roles and conservative attitudes towards gender equality issues such as divorce, abortion, and LGBTQ+ rights. Catholic teachings typically uphold and give significant importance to traditional family structures and gender norms, which may impact policy-making in Hungary. Despite the declining percentage of Christians and religious individuals in Hungary (as data from the most recent, 2022 national census shows)⁶, traditional values remain prevalent. It is important to note that this doesn't necessarily mean that the percentage of religious people is higher in Hungary, but rather that traditional values hold greater overall importance.

Figure 5

Eurobarometer Question 2ab.10



Note. From “Values and identities of EU citizens - Report.” , by Eurobarometer, 2020, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/hungary>

Examining the x-axis of the Cultural Map, we notice an even more significant disparity between the two countries. Hungarian society’s leaning towards survival values suggests a societal context shaped by existential uncertainty and constrained freedoms. The The

⁶ In the last census in 2011, the Slovenian government has did not collected religious demographic data. The Roman Catholic Church estimates its membership at 1.5 million (71 percent of the population). According to Boston University’s 2020 World Religions Database, 82 percent of the Slovenian population identifies as Christian, 4 percent as Muslim, and 13 percent as atheist or agnostic. (Source: Gina A. Zurlo. World Religion Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2024)). According to the 2022 Hungarian national census, which included an optional question on religious affiliation, of the 60 percent of the population that responded, 50 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 16 percent as Protestant, 3 percent as Lutheran, 3 percent as other and 27 percent as not belonging to a religious community.

researchers of the World Values Survey (WVS), Inglehart and Welzel suggest that in such societies, there may be a tendency to prioritize physical and economic security over progressive social policies, including those related to gender equality. This could lead to resistance or slow progress in implementing gender equality measures perceived as diverging from traditional values.

The reluctance to embrace diversity and liberal attitudes towards social issues, as indicated by the prevalence of survival values, may contribute to resistance towards gender equality policies that challenge traditional gender roles and norms. In societies where diversity is perceived as threatening, efforts to promote gender equality may face opposition or encounter slow progress (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

In contrast, countries transitioning towards self-expression or post-materialist values tend to prioritize tolerance, individual autonomy, and progressive social policies, including gender equality. Therefore, Slovenia, which may be closer to self-expression values compared to Hungary, might exhibit comparatively greater advancement in gender equality policies due to its alignment with these values. WVS sets out that the transition from survival to self-expression values typically occurs in postindustrial societies where survival is more assured. WVS maintains that self-expression or postmaterialist values prioritize tolerance, trust, subjective well-being, civic activism, environmental protection, and the women's movement. Conversely, survival values prioritize physical and economic security above all else, leading to feelings of threat toward foreigners and outgroups. This is explained by the fact that in times of existential uncertainty, diversity is seen as threatening, leading people to cling to traditional gender roles and sexual norms. WVS findings indicate that individuals' beliefs significantly influence economic development, the establishment and success of democratic institutions, the advancement of gender equality, and the effectiveness of governance within societies (WVS database. (2023); Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) also propose that the notion of gender equality, along with tolerance of outgroups, is an essential element of democracy might initially seem ethnocentric, imposing Western cultural standards on the rest of the world. However, they assert that these values are not inherently Western. In fact, some non-Western societies have historically shown more tolerance toward certain outgroups than Western publics have a few decades ago. Thus, the emphasis on gender equality and tolerance toward marginalized groups has emerged in post-

industrial societies globally through a process of intergenerational value change (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

V. Conclusion

Upon examining the gender equality indexes, a contrast becomes evident: Slovenia has made notable progress towards gender equality, whereas Hungary lags behind due to several factors.

Hungary's approach to gender equality remains constrained by its predominantly familial perspective, which tends to limit women's roles primarily to motherhood and domesticity, as reflected in its legal and policy frameworks. Moreover, Hungary lacks a deliberate institutional framework dedicated to advancing gender equality, making the adoption of gender mainstreaming initiatives difficult. Additionally, the dominance of the ruling political party in the policy-making process often disregards input from stakeholders (such as NGOs or the political opposition), further impeding progress in this area. This results in measures being taken in a haphazard manner, therefore neglecting the opportunity for social dialogue or any kind of compromise with stakeholders. In conclusion, I emphasize the need for further action in the area of gender equality in Hungary.

Regarding Slovenia, I argue that the historical cultural and political context sets a more favorable basis for achieving gender equality. Considering the Yugoslavian heritage, it's evident that efforts were made during that era to establish overarching gender equality, which was present in policies in a broader sense, than other socialist countries of the soviet bloc, even though it ultimately didn't entirely meet its promises. The legacy of its predecessor also played a role in shaping a social structure more favorable for the establishment of liberal democracy while also enabling greater civil society representation. This included the growth of a substantial middle class and the adoption of a legal framework that aligns with principles of modern participatory democracy. Yugoslavian legacy persists in shaping values regarding social issues and cultural norms in present-day Slovenia. Furthermore, Slovenia's fragmented political landscape necessitates compromise among various parties, leading to a more moderate political direction compared to Hungary's right-leaning stance. This facilitates advancing gender equality alongside a stronger willpower, broader Europeanization efforts in policies and closer alignment with international standards. Additionally, in Slovenia, gender equality is more

widely accepted as a societal norm, potentially resulting in less public discourse on the topic compared to Hungary.

In conclusion, while both countries face their unique challenges, Slovenia's historical context and commitment to European values have enabled a more proactive approach to gender equality compared to Hungary.

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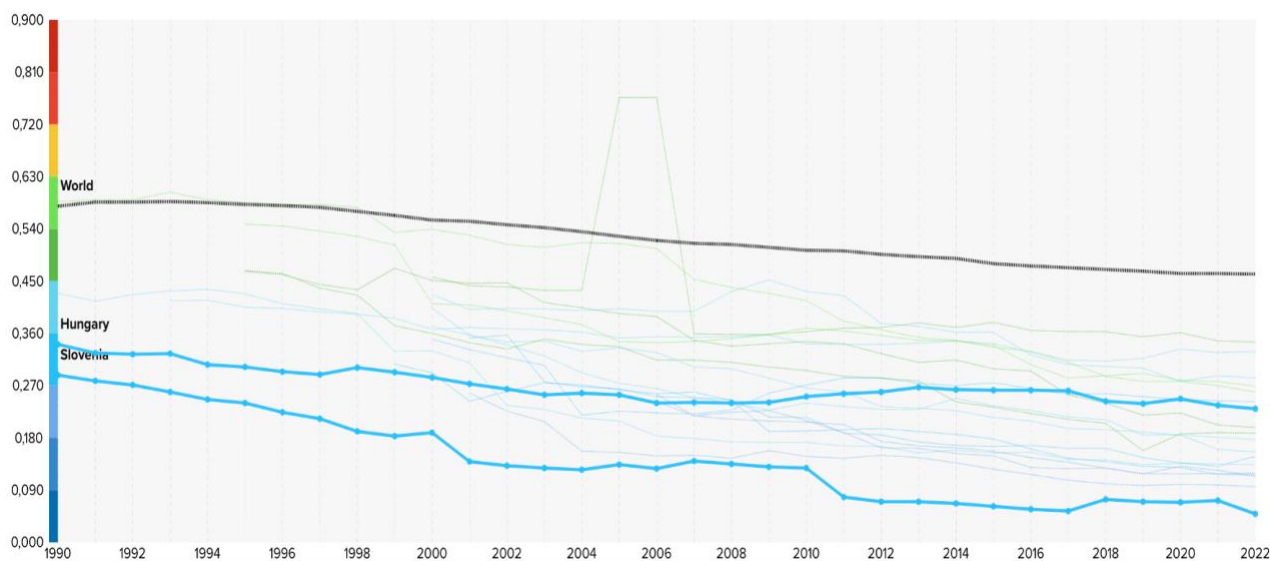
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Appendices

Appendix A

Gender Inequality Index scores

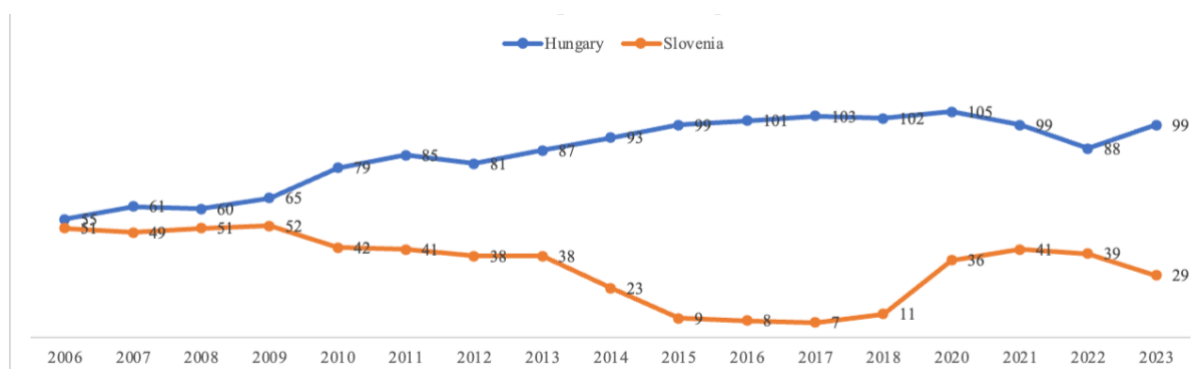


Note. From “Gender Inequality Index. Human Development Reports.” by UNDP, 2022, retrieved April 5, 2024, from <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

The lower GII values represent a better performance regarding gender equality.

Appendix B

Global Gender Gap Index rankings 2006-2023

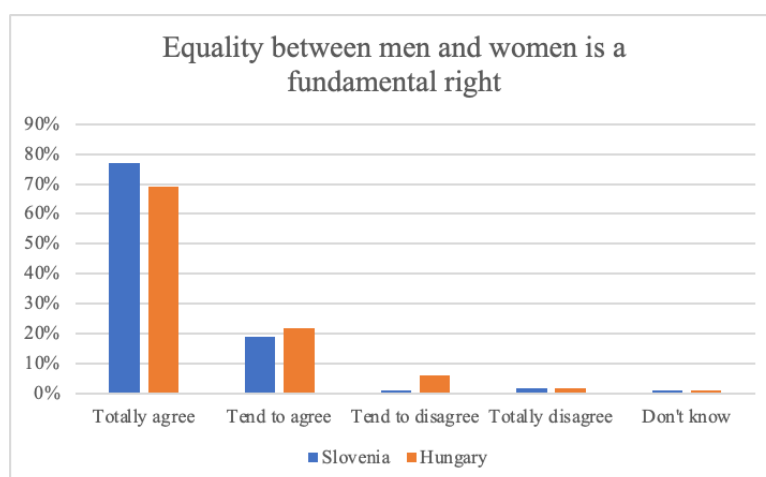


Note. Adapted from the “Global Gender Gap Report”, by the World Economic Forum, reports from the years between 2006 and 2023 <https://www.weforum.org/publications/series/global-gender-gap-report/>

Values lower on the y-axis represent a better performance regarding gender equality

Appendix C

Special Eurobarometer 428 “Gender Equality”

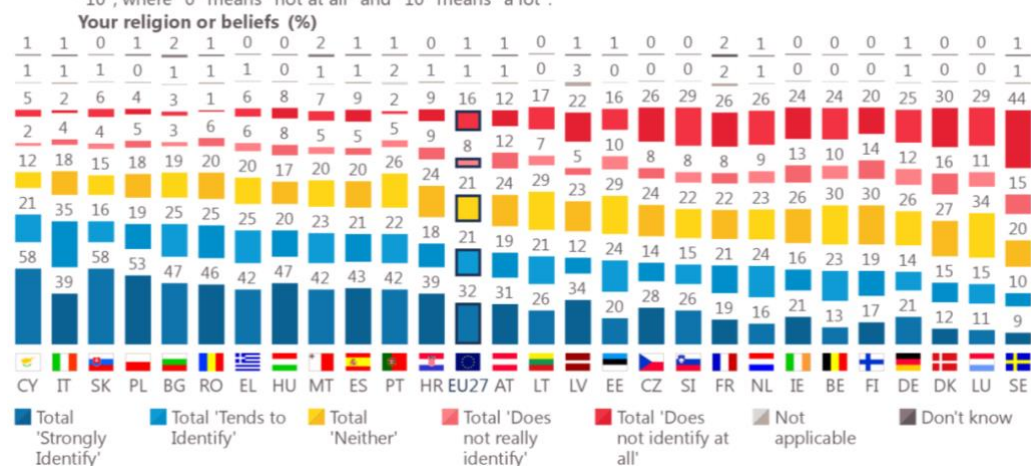


Note. Adapted from “Special Eurobarometer 428 Gender Equality”, by Eurobarometer, 2015

Appendix D

Eurobarometer Question C.4.3

QC4.3 In general, how much do you identify yourself with each of the following? Please answer using a scale from "0" to "10", where "0" means "not at all" and "10" means "a lot".



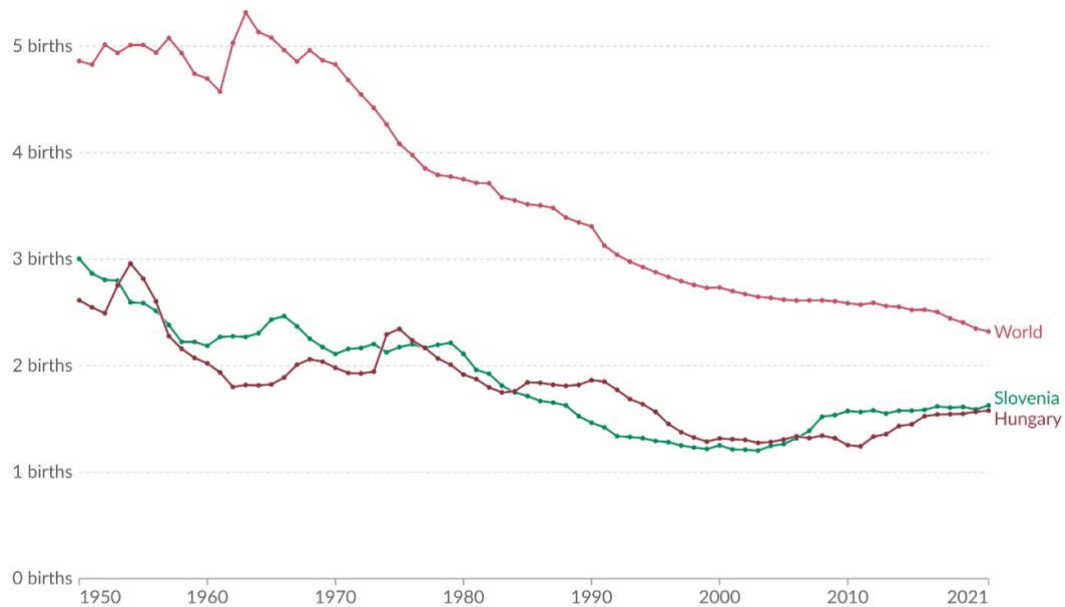
Note. From "Values and identities of EU citizens - Report.", by Eurobarometer, 2020,
<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/hungary>

Appendix E

Fertility rates 1950-2021

Fertility rate: children per woman

The fertility rate¹, expressed as the number of children per woman, is based on age-specific fertility rates in one particular year.



Data source: United Nations, World Population Prospects (2022)

OurWorldInData.org/fertility-rate | CC BY

1. **Fertility rate:** The total fertility rate is a period metric. It summarizes fertility rates across all age groups in one particular year. It is different from the actual average number of children that women have, which is measured by the "completed cohort fertility rate". For a given year, the total fertility rate represents the average number of children that would be born to a hypothetical woman if she (1) lived to the end of her childbearing years, and (2) experienced the same age-specific fertility rates throughout her whole reproductive life as the age-specific fertility rates seen in that particular year. The fertility rate should not be confused with biological fertility, which is about the ability of a person to conceive. [Read more: Fertility rate](#)

Note. From "Fertility rate: children per woman", by Our World in Data, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/fertility-rate>