

Breaking through the glass ceiling by implementing gender quotas

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Abstract

The purpose of my research paper is to analyze the gender quotas in different countries. I have written my study based on the next research question: How effective does the German gender quota work compared to other countries' quota regulations? To complete this paper, I have applied secondary and primary research methods. I also had the opportunity to collect information in the form of deep interviews. As the result of my research work it can be said that – even though Germany on this area has already belonged to the well performing countries – the implementation of the gender quota has been increasing continuously the career opportunities of the women in the business world.

Keywords: gender quota, gender diversity, leadership, sustainability

Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right, yet not everyone has it today. The social status of women around the world still remains very different. In some countries, girls do not even have access to education, while in other regions, support measures are already being put in place to help women gain access to leadership positions, however the “glass ceiling” still keeps the majority of talented women out of strategic functions. This is why the United Nations has included gender equality in its Sustainable Development Goals. They are constantly working to eliminate the causes of discrimination against women, which still limits women's rights in both family and public life. Many countries have taken measures to effectively support the advancement of women and girls at different levels through various means. Among these countries we can also find Germany.

The German women's quota has been implemented since 1 January 2016 for large companies listed on the stock exchange with an equal number of employee and employer representatives on their supervisory boards. The quota allows a higher number of qualified women to hold senior management positions. This instrument acts as a temporary regulator until inequality between women and men is eliminated and they are treated equally. The situation of women in the German labour market is influenced by a number of factors. The fragmentation of the country in the past has placed different expectations on them, which they still face today in addition to child-rearing, household management and discrimination. The quota is precisely designed to remove these barriers. Quota regulations offer a quite new field for study. Due to the early stage of this research area the number of detailed analyses is quite small. My motivation to write this paper was to provide a good overview of the current situation that could be a good base for the ones who want to study this topic in depth. My research aims to examine the effectiveness of this supportive measure compared to other nations' quota systems.

To answer my research question, I used secondary and primary research methods. I have used books, articles, studies, interviews, statistics, newspaper articles, reports and other online sources, as well as primary research in the form of in-depth interviews. I conducted 5 semi-structured interviews. I interviewed Marion Israël, who has been running a small construction company, BIM Architectes, for 15 years, about quota regulations in France and the situation of female managers in France. I also interviewed workers in Germany about the impact and perception of the German female quota. They wished to stay anonymous to protect their employers and their position at the company. Éva Zanin, Diversity and Inclusion Expert at Hungarian Telekom Nyrt. also supported my research.

Countries without quotas

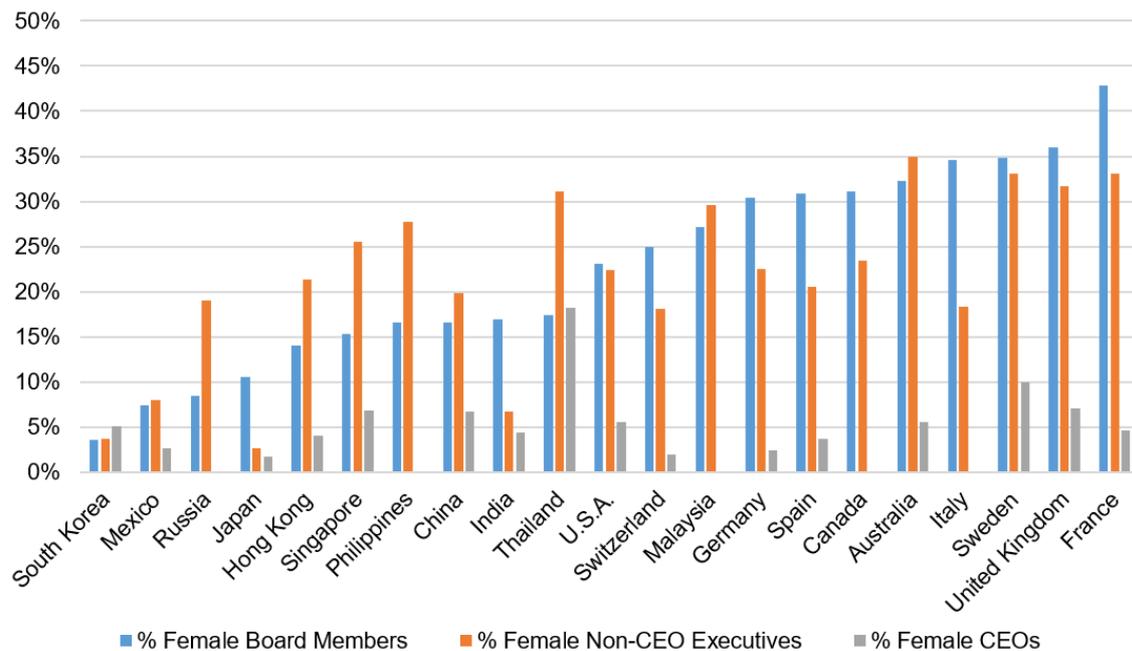
The social status of women varies from country to country. In some areas, they have not even achieved equality and have little or no say in decision-making. Consequently, the acceptance of women leaders also differ from country to country. The judgement of the importance of gender equality depends to a large extent on national culture. There are some places, where people's attitudes are sufficient to support women in achieving leadership positions, in some regions only more flexible, weaker regulations are needed, while in other areas already the idea itself is rejected altogether.

The UK has one of the labor markets with a non-binding target. There is no written law on the promotion of female directors, but with governmental support, in 2011 the Davies Review set a target of 25% for the board of directors by 2015, which was raised later to 33%. This target was to be met by 2020 (Davies

Review, 2015). In 2021, the proportion of women on supervisory boards was 38% and on boards 24% (EWOB, 2021).

In South Africa, the percentage of female directors was around 20% in 2016. A program called Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) was launched in 2003 to support black citizens. This includes a regulation on the participation rate in senior management positions: 60% of managers must be black, with 40% of this proportion going to black women. Another objective of the B-BBEE was to motivate women to engage in economic activities: to start a business, to study, they were also encouraged to develop their skills. Thanks to this opportunity partly, South Africa has the highest proportion of women in senior management or CEO positions (38.5%) (Minasyan, 2020).

Figure 1. Female Board and Management Diversity Across the Globe



Source: FactSet (2021)

The Middle East and North Africa have the lowest number of women in leadership positions. No real statistics or research can really be done in this region. However, there are efforts to increase the proportion of women in leadership, such as 30% MENA, Reach or Hawkamah. In the United Arab Emirates, a quarter of listed companies have a female board member, with 3.5% of all board seats going to women in 2021. The Commission for Gender Equality has set a target for the Emirates to move up the global gender equality rankings (Deloitte, 2022). Presumably, as the effect of the mentioned measures the participation of women in leadership positions will increase in the future.

There are certain countries, where the absence of laws and rules is probably the reason why the steps toward gender equality are hindered. Among these countries are listed Russia, South Korea, Japan, China, and the USA (d'Hoop-Azar et al., 2017).

The application of the law can certainly serve as a solution, as it forces a certain proportion of women to be able to assert themselves as managers. The effectiveness of the rules is also influenced by the views of local people on their willingness to live with the impacts. Sweden does not have a quota, yet Sweden has a high proportion of female managers. Indeed, in most Nordic countries, women hold a significant number of leadership positions. Finland is in a similar situation to Sweden. Although Norway was the first country ever to introduce a 40% quota, and thus had the highest number of female managers in 2017, there is not much difference due to the strict requirement comparing to Sweden. In the Nordic countries, women are legally facilitated to combine career and family. Sweden is perhaps the best example for this (d'Hoop-Azar et al., 2017).

In contrast to the Nordic region, women are mostly underrepresented in countries such as South Korea, where women only hold an insignificant proportion of senior positions in companies. These are hermetically sealed chevrons with hereditary positions within families. Presumably, the very shallow pool of female leaders may also be the result of tradition. There is considerable resistance to any attempt to change the composition of the board. The only exception is perhaps Samsung Electronics, which

introduced its own 5% gender quota in 2019 in order to raise the proportion of women in senior management (Kim, 2020). Only state-owned companies will be subject to a compulsory quota from 2020, requiring companies to appoint a woman board member within two years (Deloitte, 2022).

Japan was ranked 120th in the World Economic Forum's 2021 Gender Equality Report, which covers 153 countries. The Japanese government attempted to achieve 30% female participation without a quota in 2010, which was planned to be accomplished by 2020, however after considering the results (9%), it has extended the deadline (Deloitte, 2022).

Malaysia has set a target of 30% female participation in senior positions, similar to Japan. The Malaysians appear to be more successful, 24% of seats on supervisory boards were filled by women in 2021 (Deloitte, 2022).

Another category includes countries where attitudes are changing however there are no regulations yet. One such example is the United States. In 2014, the percentage of female leaders was 13.4%, rising to 20% by 2020, the next target in the national campaign is 30%. The question is whether the US will be able to maintain the upward trend without any restrictions in the future. Seeing the data for 2021, it is not impossible, as the proportion of women on boards has already risen to 23.9% (Deloitte, 2022). The idea of Every Other One also originated overseas, according to this thought women should be appointed to every new vacancy on boards (d'Hoop-Azar et al., 2017).

Canada takes a similar position to the US. The only province with a gender quota is Quebec. Surprisingly, the 50% target quota has been in force since 2011. Apart from this, there is generally no regulation in the federation on the proportion of gender representation in leadership positions. In December 2020, the federation's leadership announced the 50-30 Challenge. Any Canadian organisation or company can join this voluntary challenge. The aim of this program is to achieve full gender equality on the boards of Canadian companies and to support other disadvantaged groups such as LGBT+ people, Indigenous Canadians and people with disabilities (Deloitte, 2022).

Countries with gender quotas

In some countries there was no effort to legislate, in others just the attitude of the people is enough to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions, while in certain regions only the force of law can be used to improve female participation rate in management positions. Most of the countries that have passed the strictest laws and quotas to support women leaders can be found in Europe.

The first gender quota came into force in Norway in 2005 and affected the listed companies. In Norway, the number of female members is determined based on the number of directors running the company and the size of the board of directors. At least one of 2-3 directors must be female, and a 40% quota applies to boards with more than 9-10 members. This has resulted in a participation of women among Norwegian company directors above 40% already in 2008. If a company does not comply with the regulation, it has to face the consequences. Although the sanction is the dissolving of the company, so far no company has been punished this way (Teigen, 2015). The share of women on supervisory boards in Norway was 41% and 32% on boards of directors in 2021 (EWOB, 2021). Following Norway's example, many countries have enacted regulations and policies in support of female board members.

France is seen by many as a bastion of liberalism, so it is surprising that they have opted for a mandatory quota for women. Although French society seems to be very accepting, this is not entirely true when it comes to women leaders. A manager of a small construction company shared her experience with me about the perception of women managers in an interview. Marion Israël shared with me that every time she was expecting a child, she had to hide the fact, because her clients would immediately look for another company if they found out she was pregnant. For her, having a child and taking on a managerial role was a problem, as the maternity leave in France is a maximum of three months. As a female manager, she has experienced many times male managers making her feel inferior or simply trying to woo her. In her opinion, a quota for women was very much needed (Israël, 2022). In France, the gender quota was introduced in January 2011. By law, all listed and unlisted companies with more than 500 employees or €50 million in revenue are mandated to have at least 20% female representation in senior management (EWOB, 2021). 2014 was not only the target year, but also the time when the set figure was reached. The quota was increased to 40% in the same year, this was met by 2017 (EIGE, 2021). In case of non-compliance, companies faced two types of sanctions: the appointment of directors in breach of the law became invalid or the payment of attendance fees for the position were suspended. In 2021, France had the highest number of female members of supervisory boards (45%) and boards of directors (21%) (EWOB, 2021).

In Italy, the quota law entered into force in August 2012. It required supervisory boards of listed companies to have 1/5 representation of each sex for the next board renewal. For the second renewal of the board, this proportion must be increased to one third. If the company does not comply, CONSOB (the Italian stock exchange regulating body) will first send a warning to the company, demanding that it

comply within four months. If this is not done within the deadline, the company will be fined between €100,000 and €1,000,000. If the company still refuses to take action, this can lead to the annulment of all director appointments (Bennouri et al., 2020). In 2020, the Italian government introduced a 40% quota instead of the previous one-third quota to renew the boards of listed companies (de Mattia et al., 2020). The proportion of women on supervisory boards in Italy in 2021 was 37%, while the share of women on boards of directors was much lower at 17%. It is particularly interesting that the highest number of female board members (47%) is found in this country. In EU terms, Italy ranks second in regarding female board participation (EWOB, 2021).

In Switzerland gender quota guidelines for listed companies with more than 250 employees were enacted in January 2021, requiring 30% representation of women on boards and 20% on executive boards over the next five and ten years. The law affects 250 companies that have to report on their remuneration if they are missing the targets and what measures they are planning to take to reach them, so there are no sanctions regarding noncompliance. The overall share of women on SMI (Swiss Market Index) company supervisory boards reached the 30% quota in 2021 (Deloitte, 2022). At the time this research was conducted the effects of the gender quotas could not have been determined.

In Belgium, a gender quota was introduced in 2011 for listed and state-owned companies. These companies must have at least 33% women on their supervisory boards. Companies were given time to adapt, taking into account their size and market position. For large listed companies the lead time was 5 years, while for smaller companies it was 8 years. State-owned companies were not allowed to miss the quota deadline as they had to serve as a role model for other companies. In cases where companies failed to meet deadline set by the lawmakers, only women could be appointed as supervisory board members. In other situations, board members lose the financial and other benefits that come with the position. If the company fails to reach the target proportion of women one year after the compliance deadline, the general assembly elects a new supervisory board (Meier, 2014). By April 2019, Belgium had reached the target of 33%, with 38% of women directors on supervisory boards that year (EIGE, 2021). In 2021, Belgium had 37% of women directors on supervisory boards and 17% on boards of directors (EWOB, 2021).

In January 2018, the Austrian Parliament decided to introduce a 30% quota for women. The Austrian gender quota law applies to all companies listed on the stock exchange with more than 1,000 employees and at least 6 board members. In case of non-compliance, the seats on supervisory boards for women directors must be left vacant until the law is complied with. The proportion of women on supervisory boards has risen strikingly since the quota came into force, from only 22.4% in 2018 to 32.3% in 2021 (Deloitte, 2022). A much more modest increase was observed in Austrian company boards, where the proportion of women was 8% in 2021. Austria still met the target quota in October 2019, when 32% of supervisory board members were women (EIGE, 2021).

In Portugal, the quota law came into force in January 2018, requiring 33.3% of all state-owned companies to have a female board of directors by 2020. For publicly traded companies listed on the stock exchange, the mandatory proportion was 20%, which would have been achieved by the first elective general meeting in 2018. After that, the ratio was changed to 33.3%, which organisations would have to meet by 2020, the date of the first general meeting. If state-owned companies do not comply with the law, their supervisory boards will be repealed and the election of new board members will be suspended. This sanction is still a contentious and unresolved issue for the Portuguese governance and has not yet been implemented in any company. For publicly traded companies, a fine is imposed if non-compliance with the quota exceeds 360 days, and the company is listed on the websites of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality and the Commission for Employment and Labour Market Equality (Casaca et al., 2022). The Commission for the Securities Market also publishes a list of companies that have not met the quota deadline. Interestingly, so far no company has been listed by either commission, and the Portuguese government is investigating the case. Portugal has not met the target quota so far. In 2021, the percentage of female directors on supervisory boards was 23.3%, an increase of 6.3% compared to 2018 (Deloitte, 2022).

Greece's gender quota law, which applies to listed companies, came into force in July 2021. According to the legislation, the percentage of women on the corporate board must be 25%. In case a firm would not comply, it has to face monetary penalties (General Secretariat for Demography, Family Policy and Gender Equality, 2020). The percentage of women on the board of directors was 13.3% in 2021, compared to 9.5% in 2018 (Deloitte, 2022). At the time of conducting the research, there was not enough data to determine the effectiveness of the quota, as the legislation had only been in place for one year. In the Netherlands, the gender quota regulation came into force on 1 January 2022. According to the law, the supervisory board of companies listed on Euronext Amsterdam, the Dutch stock exchange, must have at least one third of each sex on its supervisory board. This quota applies to the appointment of all new board members, but does not apply to their re-election. The second part of the provision

relates to boards of directors. All large public companies and privately owned limited liability companies should voluntarily set a target quota to be applied to boards and senior management levels. In case of non-compliance the seats, that were supposed to be taken by the female board members, will be left vacant. Companies should report annually on the results achieved. The legislation will be evaluated by the Dutch Social and Economic Council after five years. The gender quota regulation will expire eight years after its entry into force. Less than a year has passed since the quota was introduced, so there is no data on how effective the women's quota is in the Netherlands (Government of the Netherlands, 2021). The Netherlands already had a gender quota regulation in place between 2013 and 2016, but it was not as strict as the current one. The quota at that time was 30% for larger companies. As this was not effective -partly because there were no sanctions- it was decided to reintroduce the quota with modifications (Senden & Kruisinga, 2017). In 2020, 24% of directors of listed Dutch companies were women, therefore due to under-representation the quota law was reintroduced (Kirsch, 2021). Iceland introduced boardroom gender quotas in March 2010 for not only public, but also for private limited liability companies. The law requires companies with more than 50 employees to have at least 40% of each gender on the board. Boards consisting of three members must have both sexes represented. The number of women serving on boards gradually increased in 10 years from 15,4% to 34,1% (Deloitte, 2022).

Table 1. Comparison of European gender quota laws

Country	Year of adoption	Target quota	Affected companies	Sanction
Iceland	2010	40%	Have more than 50 employees	None
Netherlands	2022*	33%	Listed companies	Empty chair
Greece	2021	25%	Listed companies	Monetary penalties
Portugal	2018	33%	State-owned /publicly traded and listed companies	Monetary penalties, listing on official websites
Austria	2018	30%	Listed companies	Empty chair
Belgium	2011	33%	State-owned/ listed companies	Board members lose financial and other benefits
Switzerland	2021	30%	Listed companies with more than 250 employees	None
Italy	2020*	40%	Listed companies	Monetary penalties
France	2014*	40%	Listed and unlisted companies with more than 500 employees/ €50 million in revenue	Suspension of attendance fees for the positions and nullity of appointments
Germany	2016	30%	Listed companies	Empty chair
Norway	2005	40%	Listed companies	Dissolving the firm

*In case of Belgium the quota was re-enacted, in other cases the target quota was raised in the given

Source: Own work (2022)
year.

Kenya is the only African country to have introduced a gender quota. Kenya has a constitution that stipulates the equal rights of women and men and also specifies that no more than two-thirds of a supervisory board can be made up of members of one sex. Although this law only applies to companies that are wholly or majority state-owned, women still account for 36% of the board. The Women on Boards Network helps to ensure that the proportion of women is maintained, as this non-profit organisation connects women who are already in leadership roles with up-and-coming women (Deloitte, 2022).

Some Asian countries have also introduced gender quota laws. One of these is India, where the law has come into force but no one has actually complied with it so far, or only a very small number of companies are following it. Companies that do not accept the inclusion of a woman in leadership positions or do not change the composition of the board in time have to pay a fine of Rs 5,000 (approximately 25,000 HUF) per day (Deloitte, 2022). Companies with more than one female director are rare. Out of 739 companies, 28 had 2, and only 2 companies had 4 female directors in 2016. There are many companies where a female board member is related to a board member, for example through family ties, and this has been found to be true in 40% of cases at that time (d'Hoop-Azar et al., 2017). Gender quotas have also been introduced in South American countries. Most of the involved companies are fully or more than 50% state-owned. These countries include Colombia and Chile, both with a 30% quota. In Chile, there was an attempt in 2014 to enact a quota modifying the supervisory board of privately owned companies, however the bill is still awaiting adoption since then. In Brazil and Peru, there have been several bills on quota regulation, but none has been adopted so far. In Argentina, certain companies are required to employ the same proportion of female managers as men. If the total number of directors is an odd number, women shall hold at least one-third of the positions (Deloitte, 2022).

The German gender quota law

In March 2015, the German Parliament finally approved the introduction of a women's quota. The law for equal participation of women and men in the private sector and public service was passed. In supervisory boards of companies with an equal representation of employer and employee representatives and listed on the stock exchange, a quota of at least 30% of women was introduced from 2016. This affected 105 German companies at the time of introduction (Thumm & Kuhn, 2020). If the proportion of women in companies does not reach the specified level, the seats reserved for female managers must be left vacant. However, companies are also obliged to report on whether they have met the required ratios (Allen&Overy, 2020). Other companies listed on a stock exchange or with a supervisory board should set the quota voluntarily, so that the proportional increase achieved would not reverse, and this should also apply to middle and senior management. This regulation covered roughly 3500 companies. A more flexible version of the women's quota was already introduced in September 2015, but was only reinforced by law in 2016. There is no legal minimum requirement or penalty for such firms, but it is a condition that they meet their own target quota within 5 years. In any case, the rate set by the target quota must not be lower than the current situation for companies. They must report when the target is reached or at the latest at the end of the 5 years. The Women's Quota Act came into force on 1 January 2016 (BDO, 2016).

In Germany, the introduction of a voluntary quota of women on boards of directors has not proved to be an effective solution over the years. It has led to very little growth compared to the mandatory quota regulation for supervisory boards. The aforementioned law on the female quota was supplemented by a minimum recommendation for the participation of women on boards of directors, which entered into force on 12 August 2021. The regulation affected the same companies as the previous one in 2016. Under the new provision, there must be at least one woman on the board if the number of members exceeds three. The previous law already made it mandatory to set a target quota at middle and senior management level. Since companies could set a zero quota, they often opted for this simpler solution. The amended law allows this only if the management of the company concerned can reason it satisfactorily. In the event of insufficient or no justification, the company will face a heavy fine. The second quota law also affects senior management levels subordinate to the board of directors, setting a quota for both the first and second level (BMFSFJ, 2021).

The gender equality strategy of Deutsche Telekom and Magyar Telekom PLC, expert interview with Eva Zanin

More and more companies are identifying with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and incorporating them into their corporate culture as a component of corporate social

responsibility. 90% of directors think sustainability is important, yet only 40% of companies are taking steps to develop a sustainability strategy. The main motivation is to meet the expectations of shareholders, customers and regulations (Owen-Burge, 2022). Today, sustainability is increasingly linked to corporate competitiveness. Several studies show that companies that work for sustainable development are more productive. Thus, sustainable development has become a prominent part of corporate strategy. In the next section, I will briefly describe the gender equality efforts of Deutsche Telekom and Magyar Telekom PLC.

Deutsche Telekom is one of the DAX-listed companies that were legally obliged to introduce a quota for women. The new regulation did not really make a big difference to the company, given it had already adopted a voluntary female quota in 2010 with the target of reaching 30% of its management. Equal opportunities in a corporate culture is about giving these positions to the most talented people, regardless of whether they are men or women. With this in mind, Deutsche Telekom PLC has increased the proportion of women on the supervisory board from 20% to 45% since 2010. With three female members of the board of directors, Deutsche Telekom PLC is also among the best performing DAX-listed companies with 37.5%. The ambitious company is aiming for 40% participation next, not only at senior but also at middle management level. The company's target was to meet the 30% quota for women outside its German parent company, which it has achieved by 2021 (Deutsche Telekom, 2022). Deutsche Telekom, in setting the guidelines, has obliged its subsidiaries to implement equal opportunities and equal treatment measures from 2001 onwards (Schön, 2002).

As part of the Deutsche Telekom Group, the Magyar Telekom Group has also adopted the parent company's diversity, equality and inclusion policy. Magyar Telekom aims to create a non-discriminatory, equal opportunities workplace. Back in 2009, they joined the UN Global Compact initiative and developed equal opportunities measures for their male and female employees. In their sustainability strategy, they have set a target of 50-50% gender representation in senior management positions and 40% female representation in the overall management team. In 2021 the proportion of female managers was 25,85% at the company group (Magyar Telekom, 2021).

Magyar Telekom PLC is one of the few companies in Hungary that employs a diversity and inclusion expert, Éva Zanin, who was involved in the creation of the white paper "Supporting the selection of women managers in large companies" and in the research of the Equal Opportunities Foundation. I interviewed Eva Zanin about the company's gender equality measures.

It is good for companies to have more female managers, because this way members of society are represented in decision-making and management according to their social representation. This is also promoted by a gender quota. According to the expert, there is no general opinion on the gender quota, whether it is good or bad, only personal views. In her eyes, gender quotas are necessary and useful, because up to the point where we cannot eliminate gender inequalities, women from disadvantaged backgrounds must be supported at an institutional level. The purpose of the quota is to counteract social inequalities. However, it is not a solution in itself, and it is important to use it consciously, because it must not be used to prioritise someone over others because of their gender or other special characteristics. It is by no means a perpetual exercise, but only a temporary stop-gap. Eva Zanin is of the opinion that in a company with quotas, career opportunities for women are clearly more favourable. On the practical application of the quota, the expert also said that there are a number of considerations in setting the target quota: the aforementioned reflection of social diversity in decision-making, the business case for equal representation of women and men in management, as it is good for the company's tolerance for change and innovation potential. The nomination committee regulations include a requirement to reflect diversity in the appointment of a board member. For senior management selection, shortlists at executive level and above must include at least 2 female candidates, as only these lists are accepted. It is also important to ensure that the female candidate is suitable and not just in a position of leadership because of the fulfillment of the quota. Also the talent management process seeks to ensure equal opportunities in the talent selection process. The use of quotas means using several tools at the same time. In talent management, for example, if only men apply for a particular training or position, it is advertised in a separate women's round. Shortlist quotas can increase recruitment time and require more flexibility in the search for new employees, but the company insists on this wherever it is professionally possible. In their succession planning and nomination processes within the company, as well as during certain organisational changes, they also strive to establish a balanced female-male leadership ratio. Telekom has produced an e-learning curriculum on unconscious bias, which is mandatory for all employees in the company as part of the company's corporate culture development package. It is essential that colleagues are aware of the company values. It aims to eliminate prejudices that influence decision-making situations. Perhaps the best practical example of this is when someone is pregnant or has a young child at home. Knowing his or her private life should

not put him or her at a disadvantage against others in a managerial choice, because it is a professional criterion (Zanin, 2022).

I believe the Telekom Group is a great example for all of the companies that are obligated to implement gender quota. By studying the gender equality strategy of Telekom we can see that meeting the gender quota law is the result of application of many parallel and conscious little steps in a long process. Both of the discussed Telekom Group members included in their corporate culture the importance of striking gender inequality and the supporting measures for a discrimination free work environment.

Summary, conclusions

Social changes in the past also affect the career prospects of people in the present. Even in the 21st century the social status of women differs from region to region. In certain countries the girls are not even allowed to go to school, in others there are rules that strike the female members of the society from having certain types of jobs, while on another part of the world there are measures to support woman leaders. We can state that the cultural background still has a great influence on the career opportunities of women. Traditions and mindsets can change only very slowly; this is perhaps the biggest challenge for women leaders. That is why we need supporting attitude. The traditional family model hinders the women and makes the work life balance impossible for them. Doing household chores and raising the children is already a „full-time job” and building career next to this workload, without having any support makes this situation even more burdensome. That is why we need supportive approach in terms of gender equality and leadership. The United Nations member states have been already making a progress in connection with gender inequality and managing to diminish it really slowly with different methods. A small number of countries did not even need regulations because the attitude of their citizens towards women was totally supportive. These places are mostly in North Europe. In other cases voluntary target quota determination and soft law seemed to be the effective solution, while in other regions gender quota laws have been entering to force because the attitude of people did not seem to change without rules. There are regional patterns in term of supportive measures. We can see that soft law and voluntary measures are mostly applied in North America and in the United Kingdom. Although the gender inequality index is the highest in Europe, the strictest gender quota regulations were born there. Gender quotas are popular among South American countries too, however the sanctions differ from the European ones. They are rather permissive and these quotas are only valid for fully or partly state owned companies. The Asian region faces the biggest challenge to modify the composition of board members, most of the countries are not willing to take steps towards gender equality at all and even if they set a quota, in case of Japan we could see it, the nation's attitude is against it.

Like other UN member states, Germany started to introduce gender equality measures in the early 2000s, starting with a voluntary gender quota. This was followed in 2015 by a quota law for supervisory boards and in 2021 by a new quota law increasing the proportion of women on boards. These were necessary as women were, and still are, under-represented in board positions. Despite this, the German workers surveyed do not feel the need for a gender quota, considering it to be discriminatory and not an appropriate solution to the problem. Germany has not yet been one of the countries where people's attitudes would have been sufficient to bring about change, or where soft law, such as voluntary quotas, could have influenced the proportion of senior managers. The gender quota applied to listed companies with supervisory boards and boards of directors. Partly perhaps due to the compliance behaviour of the nation, and also because of the sanctions, firms adapted relatively quickly to the regulations. Despite the fines, there are still some companies that have refused to change the composition of their management, but the number is relatively small. Gender reporting is now an integral part of corporate strategy in the largest companies. Partly because of the reporting requirements, and partly to meet shareholder and customer expectations, more and more companies are drawing up sustainability strategies based on the UN's development goals. In general, subsidiaries have adopted the directives of their parent companies and have adapted their corporate strategy accordingly. In order to meet the target quota, companies need to take other supporting measures.

I believe that quota regulations are not the best way to solve the problem of under-represented female leaders. They are effective and needed, but education could be another way to bring change. People's mindsets should change if gender equality is to be truly achieved in countries. We have to unite three of the sustainable development goals: quality education, gender equality and reduced inequalities. Keeping these in mind and implementing supportive measures, we could reach a long term solution. In my view, it is a good thing that provisions are being made at both state and company level to promote gender equality. I think it is important to support women in their career paths, because they are in a more difficult position than men.

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