



WOMEN IN LOGISTICS  
FORUM

# WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN LOGISTICS

## WHERE WE ARE AND WHAT COMES NEXT?

Women in Logistics Forum Report

Warsaw, December 2022



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

Every research on the equality and diversity (e.g. UN, Gartner, Fortune 500) points out one key aspect: full equality of genders in business may add trillions of dollars to the global economy and reduce poverty and exclusion to the lowest levels ever in human history. Business organizations led by women develop twice faster than the average. Companies managed by diverse teams are 22% more productive, 27% more profitable and have 39% higher customer satisfaction rate. Why then achieving gender equality in business is such a long process? Women are still subject to discrimination, prejudice and violence in their workplaces. They have also limited access to capital. Women still make less than 5% of CEOs in the S&P500 companies. In the global scale women earn ca. 77% of men's pay. The latest UN research suggests that, at the current rate of changes, we will need more than 100 years to achieve economical gender equality worldwide. Therefore, we need action and effort in order to speed up the process, as equality is crucial for building both robust business organizations and strong societies. Especially now, in the period of worldwide transformation and volatility, gender equality in leadership is becoming especially important. And the best way to achieve this goal is to mutually respect our competences, support and reinforce one another.

Excellence together!



**Beata Trochymiak**

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The debate on discrimination of women in leadership covers all economy sectors and all positions. In some industries, such as logistics and transport, the difference in the representation of genders is so huge that it defies any statistics indicating overall improvement trends (Mateu, 2017). Women are still not perceived as a group of power in the logistics sector. And it is not the only industry where new approach to leadership is needed. In our current geo-socio-political environment leading a business organization requires a completely new set of skills and competences. Although we see the growing numbers of women in leadership positions, there is still a long way ahead of us, before we achieve fully equal opportunities for women on the labor market. Supply chains are huge, complex and dynamic ecosystems, where cooperation is a crucial aspect. Women intuitively think in terms of such ecosystems. Most women in the leadership/managerial positions see their key challenge and opportunity in building an organizational culture based on cooperation (Kain, 2022). As the recent research shows, this feminine approach to the supply chain management may be visibly more effective. These are just a few facts proving the importance of feminine leadership and showing the significance of further research, as well as practical implementation of this approach.

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### Women’s leadership in logistics

- where we are and what comes next?



**62%**

women do not pursue career advancement due to lack of self-confidence or faith in success



**51%**

women resign from career advancement due to private-life commitments, such as parenthood



**41%**

women fail or have no chance of career advancement due to lack of recognition of their competences as equal to men’s competences

**Women in leadership/ managerial positions have very limited impact on the decision-making process in their organizations, unless they are CEOs or owners of these organizations!**

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the 'Women's Leadership in Logistics – where we are and what comes next?' research has been to detect and define potential concerns and issues of women's professional development as leaders and decision makers in the logistics industry. It has also aimed at identifying real barriers which impede women's career advancement. The research has been based on the women respondents' personal insight and takes into account individual career styles and paths. It enables identification of major trends in the logistic environment, in terms of approach to fairness, diversity and integration in the workplace. The research findings may help business organizations to introduce changes in their recruitment and career planning processes, which in turn may improve women's promotion opportunities and contribute to their stronger presence in the senior managerial positions. It is worth noting that some of the research results were presented in the paper

'Women's leadership in logistics and supply chain management – where we are and what comes next?', by Prof. Danuta Kisperska-Moroń and Beata Trochymiak, included in the CILT (Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, UK) publication 'Full Papers, Logistics Research Network Conference 2022, Supply Chain Innovation: People, Process, Technology (2022)'. The results were also presented by Beata Trochymiak during the international Logistics Research Network Conference 2022, at Aston University, Birmingham, in September 2022. They raised considerable interest among the international audience and triggered lively debate related to worldwide slowdown and opportunities of better utilization of women's leadership competences in the times of economic turmoil. The research will be further developed, yet even now its results have major practical implications, showing valuable opinion of female leaders on the equality of genders in logistics.

## RESPONDENTS – GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

The research was carried out in May 2022, as an online survey (including single- and multiple-choice, as well as several open questions). The survey included 99 managers – members of the Women in Logistics Forum community, bringing together more than 600 Polish female logistics experts. 79% respondents work for the logistic companies offering a full range of supply chain services (warehouse logistics, freight forwarding, transport). 16% participants are employed in the logistics departments of various

manufacturing, distribution and retail companies, while 5% of them represent the commercial property market and logistic software suppliers. 68% respondents work for large organizations (more than 250 employees), 20% for middle (51 – 250 employees), and 12% for small enterprises (fewer than 50 employees). 10% participants are CEOs or C-suite executives, 13% are senior executives, 55% are managers, and 22% are lower-level leaders.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Competences of the women leaders in logistics

Business organizations are full of highly qualified women, capable of assuming managerial and leadership roles.

Women are eager to gain new knowledge and develop their skills. Thus, their education levels and diversity very often exceed the market average.

'Women's Leadership in Logistics - where we are and what comes next?' research shows that **86% respondents regularly develop their expertise** in terms of soft skills, mainly in such areas as:

- leadership
- mentoring
- communication
- self-presentation and public speaking
- foreign languages (primarily English).

**41%** respondents regularly extend their scope of hard skills, such as change management, project management, industry know-how (e.g. freight forwarding or warehousing management trainings). **11%** has at least dual qualifications, e.g. humanistic + technical; economic + legal. Despite so high and visible potential, women's managerial and expert skills are still not utilized as extensively as they could be. According to Gartner Inc. research, the number of women in managerial positions is actually dropping. And even though in the EU women make nearly a half of the entire workforce (46.3%), in 2021 they were only 35.3% of managers, and among the largest public companies (EU-27), in 2021 women were just 20.2% of managers and 7.8% CEOs.

**86%**

**women managers see themselves as leaders, because:**

- my team develops, the employees are promoted and contribute to the financial growth of the organization;
- I am a trendsetter and a role model for my team;
- I support my people and look for new development directions for my team.

### Women's approach to career advancement

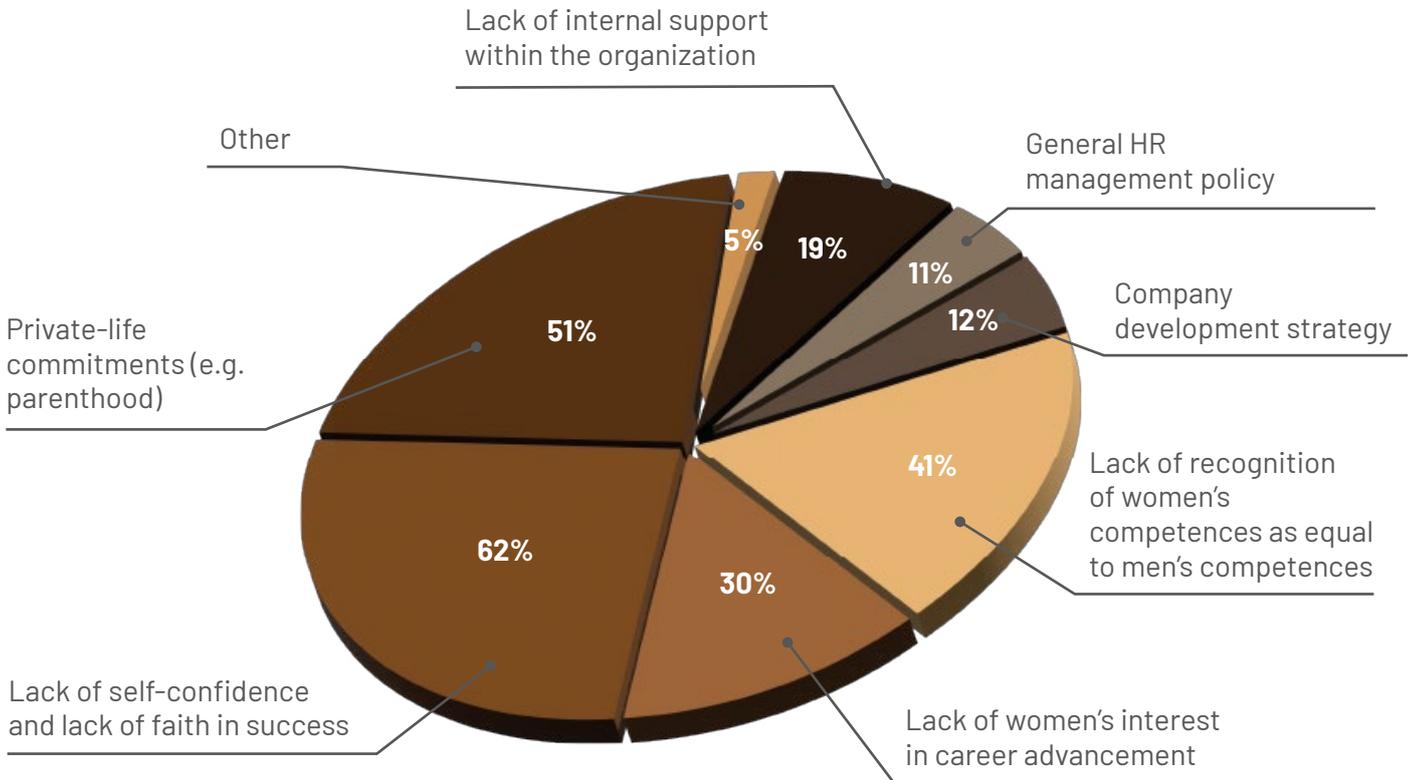
'Women's Leadership in Logistics - where we are and what comes next?' research asked the participants if they saw themselves as leaders and if they wanted to assume leadership roles. As many as 86% respondents replied firmly 'YES, I see myself as a leader.'

**Only 14%** participants replied 'NO, I don't see myself as a leader,' because:

- I feel my competences are not sufficient or my colleagues have higher competences
- I lack self-confidence
- I feel that my ideas are not accepted by my colleagues because they don't take them seriously
- I am listened to, but I don't always feel that I have a real impact.

These reasons of reluctance to take the leadership roles clearly indicate the barriers related to gender equality. Further survey results showed also that 48% participants had pursued career advancement and 70% of those were successful. The remaining 52% had not taken up this challenge, however their motives had not always been linked to the gender inequality barriers. Part of the respondents did not feel such needs, as they already serve as senior managers.

**BARIERY na ścieżce do awansu**



Graph 1: Barriers to women's career advancement

As the graph shows, the respondents identified and ranked the strongest barriers to women's promotion to senior managerial positions. These were: lack of self-confidence and lack of faith in success (62%), private-life commitments, e.g. parenthood (51%) and lack of recognition of women's competences as equal to men's competences (41%). 42% respondents see barriers within their workplace organization: organizational strategies and general HR policies (23%) or in lack of support of their organizations during internal recruitment processes (19%). Regrettably, many of these barriers, especially the personal ones, result from negative experiences on the career paths. What is most disturbing, or even shocking, is the fact that women are still confronted with the stereotype of men's superior managerial skills and women's inability to ever match them.



## TOP BARRIERS, identified by the respondents as mostly limiting women's opportunities of advancement to senior managerial positions, are:

62%

Lack of self-confidence and lack of faith in success

51%

Private-life commitments, e.g. parenthood

41%

Lack of recognition of women's competences as equal to men's competences

### Gender- and exclusion-related barriers

As many as 34% of all survey participants stated, that on their career paths they experienced the cases of inappropriate remarks and conduct in their workplaces, which they found offensive, embarrassing or unfair. Regrettably, only small percentage of women facing such remarks or behaviors reported them in their organizations as abusive. 89% respondents never reported those case, because, as 26% of them stated explicitly, 'no-one's going to do anything, anyway.' This observation has been confirmed by another survey finding – 11% respondents reported the inappropriate remarks or conduct, but their organizations did not take any investigatory or corrective actions and no changes were introduced as a result.

34%



Percentage of women managers who experienced the gender-related violence hampering their career advancement

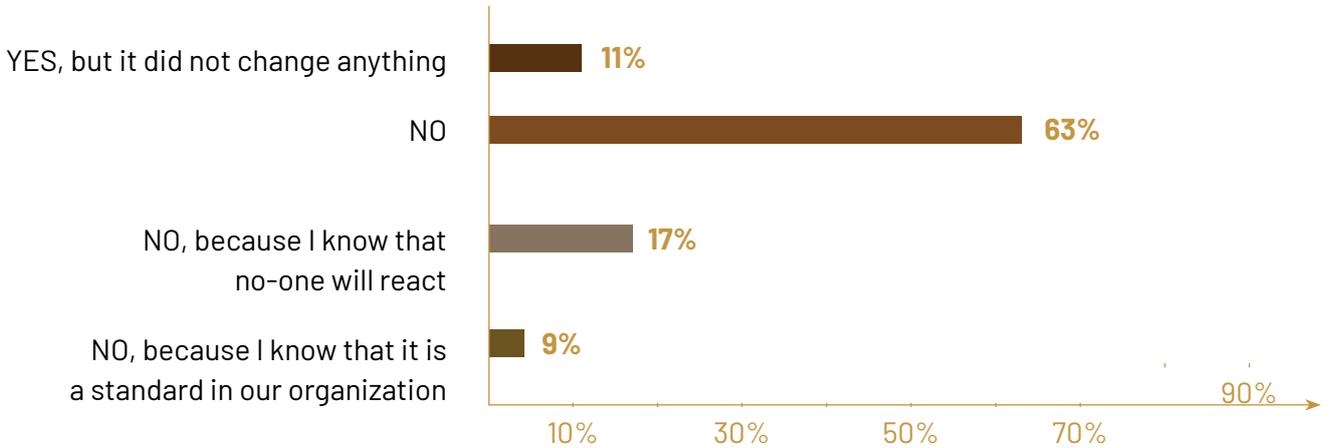
### The most frequent and repetitive behaviors mentioned by the respondents were:

pregnancy- or parenthood-related discrimination: 'remember, that you have a kid at home,' questions about the marital status and children

remarks of sexual character: 'what have you done to be where you are?' 'you put on a mini skirt and get what you want,' 'she got promoted because she wears dresses and high heels.'

gender-related discrimination: 'it's a women's job to execute what men have decided,' 'the CEO didn't approve my promotion just because I'm a woman,' 'you can't earn more than Zbyszek...,' 'if you excuse me, but that's the topic to be discussed with Mr...,' 'lowering the standards because I'm a woman,' 'not only a woman, but so young, what can you know about it?'

**If you experienced inappropriate remarks or conduct in your organization, did you report them to the management team or HR?**



Graph 2: Gender- and exclusion-related barriers

**Decision making and women’s leadership**

The ‘Women’s Leadership in Logistics – where we are and what comes next?’ research shows also that 85% respondents, being managers/ leaders, confirmed that they may influence the changes in their work environments. 95% of them want to be a part of changes leading to more diverse, integrated and fair work places. However, as the survey findings indicate, the decision-making power of women managers/ leaders is strongly limited, unless they are CEOs or owners of the organizations. Why then, if the women managers declare that they may impact the decisions in their organizations, do they not make changes to improve the situation of their women colleagues, to promote and support them? These are certainly the questions to be asked in the future surveys. The conclusion we can make now is that even when women are promoted to managerial/ leadership positions, their decision-making powers remain significantly limited. Even if women inspire the changes, the decisions about their implementation are usually made by the male board members.

Similarly, when it comes to the initiatives improving the situation of women themselves, such as development programs or promotion activities – these are also often managed by men. It is men who decide about the course of such programs, they also make key decisions. Even in such cases women can hardly influence the changes in their organizations and may develop only ‘under the boss’s eye.’



**Percentage of respondents who confirmed that they may influence the changes in their work environments**

It seems quite contradictory to the idea of equality and diversity in the workplace. Thus, a question should be asked here, why do the women, who claim to have influence on the changes within their organizations, not protest against such practices? Why do they accept such treatment, even when it weakens their actual role and position in their companies? Very frequently the gender equality or diversity programs are looked at by the business as a sort of fashion or trend, and companies introduce them to improve their reputation or build the employer brand. This way women have become a kind of marketing product, used to promote an organization, as modern, open to gender equality and diversity, and friendly for women employees. One example of such treatment may be outrageous titles appearing on different media, such as 'A woman at the helm of XXX company' meant to reinforce the company's image or attract women candidates. Why do women agree for being used in such a way? Another question should be about the pay gap, especially in the cases when women are the decision-makers in this area. Why, even in such situations, does the difference in pay between women and men on equal positions reach sometimes as much as 20% in favor of men?

Finally, we should note that in many organizations women get promoted only for the positions where their tasks are extremely difficult, with high level of failure risk.

39%



**Percentage of respondents who, even though they experienced various forms of abuse and claimed to have influence on the changes in their organizations, have never taken any decisions or actions to improve the situation**

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN LOGISTICS - WHERE WE ARE AND WHAT COMES NEXT?

In spite of the fact that in Polish economy women make 44% of managerial staff (Eurostat 2022), only less than twenty percent take highest senior positions on their organizations (as management board members). As our research shows, the biggest barriers which impede women's career advancement in logistics are their lack of confidence in their capabilities and competences, and low self-esteem, reinforced by the still present stereotypes about the gender roles and positions – refusing to recognize women's competences as equal to men's. Regrettably, women must often put much more effort than men to prove that they are capable and competent managers. One thing to be noted here is the unacceptable practice of 'testing' women and their skills by men in the workplace. Women's leadership skills should be always seen as equal to men's. Unfortunately, in the most men-dominated organizations the old stereotypes, saying that women should stay at home and stay low, still hold strong and each woman's success is taken as a man's failure. This situation is reinforced by the social perception of woman's role as the man's support in his career, 'the guardian of the family hearth,' and not a person pursuing and developing her professional career. On the other hand, part of the problem are women themselves, as they often assume to be inferior to men and, as a consequence, do not fight for their rights. In many cases women lack confidence in their skills and abilities which weakens their position, and the limited decision-making power they have in their organizations only reinforces their diffidence. The qualities defining feminine strength – like empathy – are frequently seen by men as weaknesses. In many cases it is very difficult to reconcile this high level of feminine empathy with tough masculine world.

Very often women feel also demotivated to advance in their careers. They are afraid that their manage-

ment style will differ from their male colleagues', as they often have different perspectives of the people management issues (empathy is a problem, even if it is one of the key competences in the modern leadership model). Numerous organizations are still run by the authoritarian leaders and in many cases the informal (man-to-man) relations affect professional decisions, including promotions. At the same time women emphasize lack of similar solidarity amongst themselves.

Another issue is lack of clear career paths and promotion rules in many companies, which has negative implications and leaves space for malpractices and corruption.

Women emphasize also that their fight against the centuries-old stereotypes (such as lack of recognition of women's competences as equal to men's) is a lost case, because it is extremely difficult to change old habits within a decade or even a few decades. In order to effectuate such changes, we need mental and systematic shift, both among women and men.

Inequality of genders in the senior management positions not only slows down the development of supply chains, but also leads to significant losses of the entire global economy. The main problem here is the leadership style, which may support the management of business organizations in this extremely volatile environment. Thus, we should strongly promote women's advancement to the leadership positions. It may be the best moment to fully utilize the women's leadership qualities – collaboration, empathy, compassion, effective work organization and communication skills – so valuable and significant for the new-reality leadership.

## **BANI vs. VUCA and women's role in leadership**

Since 1980s until recently leadership was defined by the VUCA concept (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous).

VUCA determined management styles in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous landscape. However, the COVID-19 pandemics led to new reality, where VUCA seems no longer sufficient to help us understand the world around. Thus, a new concept was developed – BANI (proposed by Jamais Cascio), to reflect the turmoil of present

**B** – brittle  
**A** – anxious  
**N** – nonlinear  
**I** – incomprehensible

Why is BANI so significant from the perspective of women's leadership development? We live in uncertain times, and we have to face global challenges, such as new cold war, climate catastrophe or health crisis. Old models seem to be falling apart to give space for the new ones, which still need support. BANI model describes the new world, which requires

new thinking and new approach to working through problems.

It is a model based on utilization of all competences, collaboration and mutual support. New leadership styles will have to comprise boldness, empathy and openness in order to deal with the BANI world adversities. In today's business we have to join forces to work out new competences and share our achievements. Continuous development, a strong advantage of current women leaders, will play a more important role in leadership than ever before. Present leadership means mostly resilience to pressures, boldness to pursue the impossible and ability to solve diverse problems. Being a leader in BANI world requires maturity, collaboration skills and directed development. Without women leaders BANI world cannot cope with adversities and obstacles, because the new-reality leadership encompasses the competences and qualities characteristic for the women's leadership.

**This is the time!**

**Excellence together!**



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