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DEUTSCHE INVESTITIONS- UND ENTWICKLUNGSGESELLSCHAFT MBH (DEG)  
& OESTERREICHISCHE ENTWICKLUNGSBANK AG (OEEB)

**UMKA:  
ON TRACK TO CREATE A  
GENDER-RESPONSIVE WORK  
ENVIRONMENT**



Case Study Report

THIS CASE STUDY REPORT WAS PRODUCED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF DEG'S AND OEEB'S RESEARCH STUDY ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF GENDER-LENS INVESTING. IT FORMS PART OF A SERIES OF REPORTS OF THREE EXPLORATORY CASE STUDIES THAT WERE CONDUCTED TO GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THE EFFECTS OF PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENTS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPING MARKETS, AND, IN PARTICULAR, ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP. THEIR FINDINGS ARE INFORMING DEG'S AND OEEB'S STRATEGY BUILDING IN THIS REGARD.

THE FOLLOWING REPORT WAS PREPARED BY SYSPONS GMBH.

## Syspons GmbH

Prinzenstraße 84  
10969 Berlin  
Germany

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# 1 Introduction

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021 estimates that it will take another 267.6 years to close the **global gender gap in economic participation and opportunity**<sup>2</sup>. This prognosis is based on two contrasting developments: On the one hand, the number of women in skilled professions is rising, and wage equality on average increasing. On the other hand, differences in overall income remain, and low representation of women in leadership positions persists, with women constituting less than one-third of all manager positions globally. Moreover, gender gaps in labor force participation, hiring rates, promotions and leadership roles have widened since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, delaying careers, and jeopardizing financial security of women<sup>3</sup>.

In achieving economic gender parity, increased efforts to promote **women's economic empowerment** (see box on this page) and hence gender equality are necessary. It is not only **"the right thing to do"** to ensure the fulfillment of human rights and the achievement of global human development goals; it is also **"the smart thing to do"** as gender diversity in the workplace presents an opportunity for economic growth and enhanced business performance<sup>4</sup>. Research points, inter alia, to increased benefits such as higher return on equity, employee engagement, reputation, and governance for companies with more women in top management and on boards<sup>5</sup>.

**Women's Economic Empowerment** is defined as a process "whereby women and girls experience transformation in power and agency, as well as economic advancement". "Power" can take different dimensions, ranging from individual capabilities and self-belief ("within") to economic decision-making power within households and communities ("to") to access to and control over assets ("over") to the ability to organize with others to enhance economic activities and rights ("with")<sup>1</sup>.

In this respect, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize in particular the importance of enhancing **women's full and equal participation and equal opportunities for leadership** to increase gender equality globally<sup>6</sup>: Female leaders balance representation in decision-making, have a positive impact on workplace policies, act as role models, and provide support and mentorship needed by other women to advance in their careers<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, tackling gender inequalities in leadership can help reduce related inequalities, such as the gender pay gap and gender differences in wealth and economic security<sup>8</sup>.

Consequently, the G7 Development Finance Institutions' launch of the **2X Challenge**<sup>9</sup> in 2018 has presented a major commitment to mobilizing **private sector investments** for helping women advance as entrepreneurs, business leaders, employees, and consumers in developing markets. While investing with a gender lens (see box on next page) is becoming more popular, empirical evidence on *how* private sector investment activities *actually* achieve effects on women's economic empowerment is limited. Notably, there is a need to better understand how the persistent

<sup>1</sup> Perezniето, P., Taylor, G., (2014). *A review of approaches and methods to measure economic empowerment of women and girls*. Gender & Development, 22(2), pp.233-251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2014.920976>

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, (2021). *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf);

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> UN, (2021). *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>; UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel (UNHLP). (2016). *Leave no one behind: Call to action for gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Report of the UN Secretary-General's high-level panel on women's economic empowerment*. <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2016-09-call-to-action-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1028>; Ostry, J. D., Alvarez, J., Espinoza, R. A., Papageorgiou, C. (2018). *Economic Gains from Gender Inclusion: New Mechanisms, New Evidence*. International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2018/10/09/Economic-Gains-From-Gender-Inclusion-New-Mechanisms-New-Evidence-45543>

<sup>5</sup> ILO, (2017). *Women in Business and Management: Gaining momentum in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Bureau for Employers' Activities. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_579085.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_579085.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> For more information see SDG 5.5 of the SDGs: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

<sup>7</sup> Women Deliver, (2018). *Policy Brief: Balancing the Power Equation*. Women's Leadership in Politics, Businesses, and Communities. <http://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Women-Leadership-Policy-Brief-9.23.18.pdf>; The Rockefeller Foundation. (2016). *Women in Leadership: Why it Matters*. <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Women-in-Leadership-Why-It-Matters.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> OECD, (2020). *Policies and Practices to Promote Women in Leadership Roles in the Private Sector*. <https://www.oecd.org/corporate/OECD-G20-EMPOWER-Women-Leadership.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> For more information visit: <https://www.2xchallenge.org/>

lack of women in leadership positions can be addressed, and how its potential for increasing gender equality can be realized.

**Gender-lens investing** refers to private sector investment activities that provide women in developing markets with 1) improved access to and use of capital, including entrepreneurship; 2) workplace equity, referring to fairness for women in the workforce, including in leadership positions, and ensuring support for their workplace needs; and 3) products and services that enhance their economic participation<sup>10</sup>.

Within this context, the following report presents the case of **UMKA Cardboard Mill d.o.o. (UMKA)**, a cardboard factory in Serbia that is part of the Kappa Star Group. Within the framework of DEG’s and OeEB’s research study on the transformative impact of gender-lens investing, the case of UMKA, an OeEB investment, helps exploring the factors and pre-conditions that enable women to advance in their workplaces, the relationship between women’s leadership and women’s economic empowerment, and the role that investors can play in driving gender equality within their portfolio investments. The presented findings are based on qualitative data that was collected by the study team between July and August 2021, including a document analysis, 5 interviews (with Human Resources, Corporate Social Responsibility, senior management and two interviews with women in leadership positions) and two focus groups with women who are employed at UMKA (both leadership and staff).

## 2 UMKA Background

UMKA<sup>11</sup> is a cardboard factory based in the suburbs of the Serbian capital Belgrade. Founded in 1939, it is a well-established production site of recycled cardboards. It has a longstanding tradition in the industry. Since its privatization in 2003, UMKA has been a member of KappaStar Ltd Group, consisting of five member companies. Under KappaStar Ltd Group, UMKA has experienced a rapid expansion in both production and employment. The amount of total investments has increased, including investments in 2021 and planned capacity for 2022. UMKA exports over 83% of its production to more than 35 countries throughout Europe, Asia, and North America. Its most important export markets are Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Russia<sup>12</sup>.

**Table: The number of employees at UMKA (as of June 2021)**

Number of employees	Male	Female	Total
Overall number (including management)	369	50	419
Management level	17	9	26

UMKA is operating in the traditionally male-dominated manufacturing industry, with approximately 88% of employees being men. While largely underrepresented at the factory, women are more strongly represented at the managerial level: Women occupy around 34% of all management positions (nine out of 26 positions – see table above).

<sup>10</sup> DEG, (2020). *Women at Work - Win win win: Good for Business, Good for Women & their Families, Good for Local Development*. DEG Evaluation Results. Cologne: DEG. [https://www.deginvest.de/DEG-Documents-in-English/About-us/What-is-our-impact/DEG\\_Gender-Lens-Investing-Paper\\_Final.pdf](https://www.deginvest.de/DEG-Documents-in-English/About-us/What-is-our-impact/DEG_Gender-Lens-Investing-Paper_Final.pdf); OeEB, (2020). *Gender Lens Investing – OeEB’s Position Statement and Action Plan*. Vienna: OeEB. [https://www.oe-eb.at/dam/jcr:343e7eb0-8c0c-4615-b4dc-9562d7880854/OeEB\\_GenderActionPlan.pdf](https://www.oe-eb.at/dam/jcr:343e7eb0-8c0c-4615-b4dc-9562d7880854/OeEB_GenderActionPlan.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Visit UMKA’s website for more information: <https://www.umka.rs/en>

<sup>12</sup> Kappa Star Group Ltd, (2021). *Umka Cardboard Mill*. <https://www.kappastar.com/umka-cardboard-mill/>

In the last two years, following its growth in production and employment, UMKA has taken steps towards formalizing its commitment to both its social impact externally and ensuring transparent and just processes internally. Among other initiatives, UMKA developed a “Plan of Measures to Eliminate or Mitigate Unequal Gender Representation” in 2020. The plan was adopted on the basis of **Article 13 of the Law on Gender Equality**, which requires employers with more than 50 employees to report on the current status of gender equality in the workplace and present measures to address potential inequalities. The Plan lays out UMKA’s ambitions to implement trainings that promote workplace equality and install measures to balance work and family life, especially with regards to motherhood, childcare, and family obligations. At the end of the year, UMKA reported on the defined measures and in 2021, an updated “Plan of Measures” followed. Additionally, in spring 2021, UMKA launched its first Human Resources Policy and Corporate Social Responsibility Policy. In the context of these developments towards an equal work environment, this case study explored the factors that already enable or continue to be a barrier for women to advance in their careers, have equal economic opportunities, and take up leadership positions at UMKA. The results provide guidance for UMKA and other private sector actors on their way to ensuring women’s leadership in the workplace and contribute to gender equality.

### 3 Gender Equality in the Serbian Context

UMKA’s organisational structure and culture, as well as its first efforts in promoting gender equality, are situated within the wider social, economic and political context of Serbia. The following context analysis highlights the challenges that need to be considered in creating the preconditions that enable women’s equal opportunities at UMKA/Kappa Star Group.

In the upper middle-income country Serbia, women are **underrepresented in decision-making** in social, economic, and political contexts<sup>13</sup>. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Index, Serbia was able to improve gender equality in these fields since 2014 but is still **lagging behind the EU-average**<sup>14</sup>.

In facilitating women’s economic inclusion in Serbia, the national **legal and policy framework** plays an important role. According to the World Bank’s “Women, Business and Law Index”, Serbia’s legal framework is **very progressive**, pointing to an adequate legal framework to promote gender equality<sup>15</sup>. Problematic, however, is the **lack of implementation** of national action plans and strategies as well as the preparation of new ones<sup>16</sup>. This affects, among others, women’s ability to participate in the labour market, take advantage of childcare, benefit from entrepreneurship opportunities, receive equal pay, accumulate assets, and access pensions.

In Serbia, women are the **second most discriminated group in the labor market**, with the Roma as an ethnic group irrespective of their gender being the most discriminated group<sup>17</sup>. Although Serbia has achieved **parity for enrolment** in primary, secondary, tertiary education<sup>18</sup>, and the gender gap in labor market participation has narrowed since 2008, the female employment rate as of 2020 remains low (42.1%). The overall gender pay gap in Serbia amounts to 16%. Key challenges for women’s economic empowerment constitute discrimination and structural barriers, such as gendered division of (un)paid labor: Women in Serbia take on most of the unpaid care work, twice as much as men<sup>19</sup>. 96.3% of unemployed women in Serbia, compared to only 3.7% of men, say they are

<sup>13</sup> UN Women, (2021). *Where we are*. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/serbia>

<sup>14</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), (2018). *Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia in 2016*: 55.8 compared to EU-28 66.2.. <https://eige.europa.eu/serbia>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, (2021). *Women, Business and the Law*. The overall score for Serbia 93.8 (100 being full equality). <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>

<sup>16</sup> UN Women, (2021). *Where we are*. The Republic of Serbia has endorsed its Strategy for Gender Equality for the period 2016–2020 with a National Action Plan for the period 2016–2018 (NAP). However, this plan lacks implementation, and the expired plan has not been replaced yet. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/serbia>

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, (2016). *Serbia 2016 Report*.

[https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key\\_documents/2016/20161109\\_report\\_serbia.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_serbia.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> World Economic Forum, (2020). *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, (2021). *Labour Force Survey*. <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/PdfE/G20215671.pdf>

not seeking employment because they take care of children or of adult persons with disabilities<sup>20</sup>. In addition, unpaid care work inhibits women in the labor market to take on additional responsibilities or pursue further training.<sup>21</sup>

These barriers to women's economic opportunities as well as discriminatory gender norms and work environment contribute to **gendered segregation of the labor market**. Women are overrepresented in the care economy and low productivity sectors, e.g. service and sales. In contrast, they are underrepresented in IT, management, and technical professions<sup>22</sup>. As highlighted by the underrepresentation of women, the challenge of segregation also affects UMKA as a company in the technical and manufacturing field. Any firm seeking to promote women's career advancement, such as UMKA, must consider these factors restricting women's personal<sup>23</sup> and economic decision-making in private and work contexts.

Economic opportunities for women, e.g. entrepreneurship opportunities, are further limited regarding access to **productive and financial resources**. There are only 31% female managers and only 18% female land holders<sup>24</sup>. Further restrictions to women's economic empowerment pose **gender-based violence and discrimination**. 50% of women in Serbia have experienced domestic violence, and sexual harassment continues to restrict women's freedom in public and private spheres. Women of **vulnerable groups**, such as Roma, rural women, forced migrants, minorities, women with disabilities etc. are especially at risk of violence<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, creating safe work environments are one precondition that the private sector needs to provide to enable women to take on and advance in their careers<sup>26</sup>.

## 4 UMKA's Case: Promoting Women's Leadership in a Male-dominated Industry

UMKA's journey to creating equality in the workplace provides important insights into factors that limit and enable women's economic empowerment in male-dominated industries. It shows that female role models in leadership positions attract and motivate new female employees. It further reveals that enshrining anti-discrimination in Human Resource policies and processes is a crucial basis for equal workplace opportunities. Building upon these, the case of UMKA demonstrates that implicit gendered stereotypes need to be addressed to overcome structural barriers for women's career advancement. Ensuring leadership buy-in and addressing the societal gender-norms that are reproduced in the company structures are identified as two major opportunities for further advancing women's leadership and gender equality.

### 4.1 Role Models and Support Networks

According to interviewed UMKA employees, female role models constitute a key driver of women's leadership at UMKA. With a relatively **large percentage of female leaders** (34% of managerial positions are held by women), UMKA's share of women in leadership is slightly above the Serbian average. Women in the company report that female leaders act both as role models and support figures for them. They considered their female leadership a powerful sign in a male-dominated field. Seeing women in leadership **empowered other women** to join the company and to see themselves growing and advancing professionally within the field.

*"Having female leaders gives us a sense that this would be possible for us."*

Focus Group Participant

<sup>20</sup> Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia, (2021). *Labour Force Survey*. <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/PdfE/G20215671.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> UN Women, (2021). *Where we are*. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/serbia/economic-empowerment>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> OECD, (2019). *Social Institutions & Gender Index*. Index measures discrimination against women in social institutions (0% (no discrimination) to 100% (very high discrimination)). Serbia scores 20%. It covers four dimensions: discrimination in the family (33%), restricted physical integrity (7%), restricted access to productive and financial resources (20%) and civil liberties (18%). <https://www.genderindex.org/ranking/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Share of male managers (69%) and share of agricultural land holders (male) (82%).

<sup>25</sup> UN Women, (2021). *Where we are*. <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/serbia>

<sup>26</sup> OECD, (2019). *Social Institutions & Gender Index*. Percentage of women in the total number of persons not feeling safe walking alone at night (73%). <https://www.genderindex.org/ranking/>

*"I am so grateful to my female colleagues, who supported me at the start. I was lucky to have this support. Because otherwise I would not stay here, when people [...] doubted me."*

Focus Group Participant

Additionally, many female employees report that having **supportive female colleagues and bosses** was very crucial for their well-being at the company, especially in the beginning. When starting a new position, many female employees said that they felt that they **needed to prove** themselves and were doubted, especially by male colleagues. Female leaders are perceived as being better able to understand and respond to such situations. In addition, they are perceived as more considerate of the needs of their female employees, especially regarding difficulties of combining a challenging job with the demands of family and other aspects of their personal lives. Consequently, gender diversity in leadership attracts and motivates a broader talent pool to traditionally male-dominated sectors. It further ensures representation of different needs and perspectives at UMKA.

## 4.2 Overcoming Biases for Equal Work Opportunities

Female employees at UMKA report that regardless of gender, the **quality of work is the basis of hiring and promotion processes**. This is also supported by UMKA's Human Resource policy. UMKA is considered to perform "above average" by female employees when it comes to providing women with opportunities to grow and lead. **Women's leadership is generally accepted** and the fact that many internal divisions at UMKA are women-led is something female employees are proud of.

*"Women have a good position at UMKA, there are women in stronger positions, and I see recognition of women here."*

Focus Group Participant

Yet, the case of UMKA also shows that next to putting appropriate policies in place, societal **gender biases and stereotypes** need to be explicitly addressed in order to effectively and sustainably overcome subconscious forms of discrimination. Women in positions of power and those working in male-dominated sectors report that they are sometimes **not taken seriously** or **do not get the same respect as men**. This limits opportunities for women's career advancement. At the least, this puts women under higher performance pressure and creates an unwelcoming work environment. At the worst, it restricts their access to certain positions, as they are not considered for leading positions in male-dominated sectors.

For instance, the **gendered sectoral segregation** is linked to such biases: The organizational structure of UMKA reflects a rather traditional division of sectors into male- and female-dominated sectors (an exception being the

*„It would be great to have a strategy to bring women into those sectors, where there are none."*

Focus Group Participant

purchasing sector). This is often justified on the basis societal gender norms. The technical sectors, due to the physically strenuous work and the rather demanding work environments, which is expected in such industries, is considered unappealing to or inappropriate for women by some employees". Similarly, the male-dominated sales sector involves frequent travel. This is perceived as unattractive for women who have families. These a priori exclusion of women from male-dominated sectors is criticized by some female employees as it limits the possibilities for them to develop professionally in

fields that are traditionally occupied by men. Addressing (often subconscious) gendered stereotypes can therefore not only **create a more empowering work environment** for women but also help overcome sectoral segregation at UMKA.



Another opportunity for advancing female leadership at UMKA lies in addressing the (again, often subconscious) biases toward women who have, or are perceived of being likely to have a **family**. Some female employees who were interviewed within the framework of this study still considered taking **time off work for parental leave** as an inhibitor to women’s career advancement at UMKA. In Serbia, most of the unpaid care work, including childcare is done by women (see chapter 3). Even though UMKA provides job security for its employees that take parental leave, younger women, according to some interviewees of this study, fear that they are not considered for career advancement due to a possibility of them taking parental leave. Moreover, women who already have a family are said to sometimes feel disadvantaged regarding promotions to leadership positions, because they “lost” years of career development due to maternity leave. Actively countering gender biases in different sectors and a clear positioning of the company towards a family friendly work environment consequently entails a major opportunity to further advance equal workplace opportunities at UMKA.

*“If the employer would send a strong message to the younger women, that their job will wait for them if they start a family, that would be very supportive. I always tried to communicate this to the women in my team, because I knew how important that was for me.”*

Woman in Leadership at UMKA

### 4.3 Gender-responsive Structures and Systems

In its recent development, UMKA demonstrates that in order to promote equality in the workplace, adopting and implementing gender-responsive structures and systems are crucial. As mentioned above, through the **Plan of**

*“There are no cases [at UMKA], where that employees at the same job, i.e., with the same job description, tasks and level of responsibility, have different contracted net earnings.”*

Report on the Implementation of the Plan of Measures for 2020

#### **Measures to Eliminate or Mitigate Unequal Gender Representation**

UMKA adheres to its legal obligations. The plan stipulates trainings for men (to counter gender bias and sexist stereotypes) and women (to develop skills for male-dominated sectors), as well as measures that support women with families in achieving work-life balance. The company has a **legal obligation** to report once a year on the progress made on the plan of measures as well as gender equality in the workplace overall. The report for 2020 established that UMKA ensures **same salaries for same positions**, regardless of gender. Next to the plan of measures, UMKA’s policies include the provision of parental leave, in accordance with legal requirements, and **job security when returning from parental leave**. At UMKA, this affects almost exclusively female employees, as men rarely take parental leave. As an

additional benefit, UMKA offers **free yearly preventative health checks for women**, a measure widely welcomed by the female employees,

The above structures and systems create an important basis to ensure gender equality at UMKA. To move forward on establishing women’s leadership and gender equality at UMKA a **consistent implementation and communication of these measures** is needed to unfold the intended effects in the future. For example, the foreseen trainings on gender bias as well as measures on the harmonization of work and family life, easier realization of rights and responsibilities regarding care work, are still outstanding. Female employees emphasized that both of these measures would be particularly powerful to address persisting barriers to women’s advancement at UMKA. In comparison, the yearly preventative health check is very much appreciated but not considered an effective means to enhance women’s leadership. Additionally, most interviewees were not aware of the Plan of Measures or of some protective measures that UMKA provides, such as job security after parental leave. Consequently, not only consistent implementation but also proactive communication on gender-responsive structures and systems can further advance UMKA’s efforts to improve gender equality in its workplace.

*“[The preventative health check] is a nice gesture, from the point of view of promoting health of women and raising awareness about this, but it is not a measure for improving the situation women or bring more equality in the workplace.”*

Focus Group Participant

## 4.4 Leadership Buy-in

*“Such a thing needs to be started from the top down! Human Resources can suggest things but if there is no established support, and no policies of how we do the work that come from top down, it is not possible. It would be like battling with the windmills.”*

Female Employee in Leadership at UMKA

Across the company, female employees at UMKA identified a **strong commitment from the leadership** as a central opportunity to accelerate women’s economic empowerment and leadership. Leadership figures, male and female, who champion the implementation of anti-discrimination and gender equality measures enable a stronger company-wide ownership. This may entail open communication, internally and externally, on existing measures on gender equality. Further, assigning resources and personnel (e.g. focal points/champions) to implement and promote measures on women’s leadership could further enhance equality initiatives from the top. In the long term, female employees are convinced, the buy-in from the top is crucial to manifest gender equality as part of the company’s core values.

Formalizing structures and systems for gender equality and fostering an empowering work culture should therefore go hand-in-hand with a strong leadership buy-in.

## 4.5 Role and Support of Investors

Overall, the developments at UMKA over the last few years underline the influence that investors can have on creating social and developmental impacts, including women’s leadership and gender equality. UMKA’s investors have previously played a crucial role in **inspiring and formalizing commitments** on, among others, their Corporate Social Responsibility Policy. The investors provided additional external incentives to formalize rights and values that were important to UMKA internally. In addition, the technical support in terms of the much-needed know-how was equally valuable and much appreciated by the company.

*“Some of the policies that we have, for example the HR and CSR policies, have been developed at the initiative of our investors. Their encouragement helped us articulate our central values. Many things have been started on their suggestion. [...] We see this as a good initiative, and not as pressure. We develop with their support.”*

Female Employee at UMKA

When it comes to gender equality and women’s leadership, too, similar support, by setting **minimum standards, providing technical assistance as well as role models**, can provide important guidance for UMKA, according to its employees. For example, introducing indicators on women’s leadership and gender equality can help UMKA regularly monitor and report on gender equality progress. In addition, providing guidance and expertise in the formalisation of efforts for promoting women’s leadership, supporting the development of concrete strategies, policies, action plans and monitoring mechanisms, as well as offering training for staff members and leaders have been identified as helpful within UMKA’s context. Finally, investors can act as role models themselves or showcase good practices from other context to demonstrate the economic, social and developmental effects of women’s leadership and gender equality.

## 5 Paving the Way for Women's Leadership in a Male-dominated Industry

Based on lessons learned from the UMKA case study, the following recommendations serve as guidance for facilitating women's leadership in the private sector, especially in male-dominated industries.



### Leadership Commitment

- ✓ **Collect information:** Collect data on gender equality and equal opportunity needs of men and women.
- ✓ **Commit:** Company leadership commits to gender equality and women's leadership (e.g., commitment to empowerment principles), including company action plan.
- ✓ **Develop:** Develop a participatory action plan on gender equality, including clear targets, monitoring and responsibilities.
- ✓ **Communicate:** Identify channels for effective communication of the company's commitment to the outside. Internally, communicate the commitment, its relevance, and the resulting action plan.
- ✓ **Invest:** Ensure that time and resources are available to implement measures and that employees can participate in them.



### Training & Development

- ✓ **Educate:** Provide gender bias training for hiring and promotion processes to the Human Resource department and team leaders. Promote and raise awareness on leadership styles that do not comply with male-dominated norms and standards.
- ✓ **Attract:** Develop a strategy to attract women to male-dominated sectors (e.g., sales). Ensure that working conditions are attractive (and get feedback on this from women).
- ✓ **Reach out:** Set up intern and training programs targeting women for male-dominated sectors (e.g., in cooperation with universities and training institutions).
- ✓ **Train:** Offer career development opportunities for women, including options for rotation and leadership.
- ✓ **Promote:** Develop a pipeline of female employees with leadership potential.



### Well-being, Safety & Work Environment

- ✓ **Sensitize:** Raise awareness among staff and leaders for challenges of women at UMKA, structural barriers based on stereotypes and care responsibilities, provide room for self-reflection.
- ✓ **Back:** Institutionalize company commitment to safe work environments and equal opportunities (e.g., through antiharassment/discrimination policy) and create pathways to report and reflect on experiences, including professional support.
- ✓ **Showcase:** Identify gender champions among male and female leaders who openly commit. Campaign and showcase good practices of women's leadership and equality.
- ✓ **Increase family-friendliness:** Enable and encourage part-time options, parental leave. Provide and communicate job security when returning from parental leave. Provide support services (mentorship, child-care support) for returning parents.

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OUR CONTACT

**UMKA Cardboard Mill**

13 October Street No. 1  
11260 Umka, Belgrade  
Serbia

P: +381 11 36 02 699  
E: [umka@umka.rs](mailto:umka@umka.rs)  
<https://www.umka.rs/en/>



**Deutsche Investitions- und  
Entwicklungsgesellschaft GmbH (DEG)**

Kaemmergasse 22  
50676 Cologne  
Germany

P: +49 221 4986 1998  
E: [impact@deginvest.de](mailto:impact@deginvest.de)  
<https://www.deginvest.de/International-financing/DEG/>



**Oesterreichische Entwicklungsbank AG (OeEB)**

Strauchgasse 3  
1010 Vienna  
Austria

P: +43 1 533 1200 2961  
E: [kristin.duchateau@oe-eb.at](mailto:kristin.duchateau@oe-eb.at)  
<https://www.oe-eb.at/en/>

