

# Women and Men in Logistics: Perceptions, Practices and Projections

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*Logistics is most often associated with the most visible jobs, the performance of which was or still is physically demanding or exhausting (driving long distances, reloading of goods, etc.). That is why these jobs, and even the entire field of logistics, are often associated with the male workforce that most often performs them. However, with the evolution of logistics and its scientific study, a more comprehensive overview of the field, including the role and importance of the female workforce for the implementation of logistics processes, is reached. Despite this, there is still a significant gap between the wishes, perceptions, and projections of gender equality of educated logisticians about the existing practice. This paper discusses the state of gender equality and the roles of men and women in logistics from the perspective of the future and existing workforce.*

**Key Words:** *logistics, gender equality, workforce, women, men*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality, the position and role of women and men in logistics are subject to different interpretations and perceptions, as well as logistics itself. Those interpretations are variable through space and time, depend on scientific, cultural, political-ideological, sociological, and psychological factors, and are defined from different angles. One of the angles of observation is the one from the student desks, which is very important for several reasons. First of all, male and female students as future engineers represent the work potential of logistics. In this sense, their views on the structure and equality of the sexes reflect not only different perceptions of this topic by the young generations but also the outlines of future relations between the sexes, their position, and perspectives in the companies where they will be employed [1]. On the other

side, young people and their attitudes, as always and in all areas, largely reflect collective consciousness, social circumstances and relationships, etc. and partly through opposition, partly through adoption, they also indicate the viewpoints of people from their environment (family, neighbors, friends, teachers, etc.). Finally, by researching the student population, insight is gained about the completeness of their understanding of logistics itself, the areas and jobs that belong to it, its role, goals, etc.

Another important angle of observation of this issue belongs to those who are employed in logistics and who represent not only observers and commentators but also direct participants and creators of gender relations in companies. Their views testify to different perceptions of the current state of gender equality and the role of women and men in logistics, different practices in companies and their sectors, as well as different projections of the future, that is, perspectives of gender equality in logistics.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the role and (in)equality of the sexes in transport and logistics in different regions [2]-[4]. Andre [5] compared the career status and attitudes of men and women in

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logistics. Larson [6] and Kovács & Tatham [7] investigated the influence of sex/gender, gender characteristics, and gender inequality on logistics performance. Also, this impact on performance was analyzed within certain areas of logistics, such as humanitarian logistics [8]-[10]. Research on women in logistics, i.e. opportunities and perspectives [11], [12], visibility, obstacles and problems they face [13], [14], the role of their gender and personal characteristics and leadership in the function of the company success [15]-[18], support measures [19], [20], the importance of their association and synergistic action [14], [20], their role in research work in the field of logistics [21], etc. is particularly significant and actualized in recent decades. The state of gender equality and the role of women in logistics from the perspective of the student population have been analyzed in a small number of studies [22], [23], which are mostly outdated considering the social trends and changes that have occurred in the meantime. Nevertheless, there is renewed interest in the student perspective and the role of education in issues of gender equality and the presence of women in logistics [1], [16], [24].

This paper analyzes the views of the future and current workforce, both male and female, on some issues of gender equality and the role of women and men in logistics. The paper aims to analyze the perceptions of logistics by different social groups important for it, existing practices, the roles of men and women in it but also the perspective and projection of the future state. The contribution of the paper about earlier research is the analysis of the perception and integrity of logistics and the jobs that belong to it in light of the role of the sexes and gender equality. Also, the implementation and comparison of the research results of two groups of respondents, the student group and the group of employees in logistics, is of particular importance, because they point to the differences between desires and perceptions, on the one side, and practice, on the other side, as well as changes from the aspect of the role of gender in logistics that occur or may occur in the future.

## 2. CONDUCTED RESEARCH

Research, that is, surveying two groups of respondents was conducted, on the issues of positions, roles, and perspectives of women and men in logistics. In the first survey, students of logistics at the Faculty of Transport and Traffic Engineering of the University of Belgrade were surveyed (below: student survey). 215 respondents participated in the survey, of which 72 were male (33%) and 143 were female (67%). The respondents are students in the second (26%), third (29%), and fourth or extended year (45%) of bachelor studies.

In another survey, the results of which are partially presented [14], women and men employed in logistics (below: employee survey) in companies in the Republic of Serbia were surveyed. 175 respondents participated in the survey, of which 81 were men (46%) and 94 were women (54%). The largest number of female respondents are employed in logistics companies (39%) and the logistics sector of trading companies (34%), and the situation is similar with male respondents, 41% of whom each work in logistics and trading companies. Other respondents are employed in industrial companies, state institutions, governments, and companies that perform other service activities (insurance, etc.).

## 3. MEN AND WOMEN IN LOGISTICS

One of the goals of the students' research was to determine their motives for dealing with logistics, i.e. the values and benefits they expect from studies and employment in the field. Respondents had to evaluate the influence of seven factors on the choice of studying logistics: personal interest in the field, favorable employment opportunity, profitability of the profession - satisfactory earnings, possibility of personal development, satisfactory status and respect of the profession in society, recommendations of other people, coincidence/complexity of circumstances) (ratings given in Table 1). The analysis of the answers revealed that there is a significant correlation, but also certain differences between the female and male groups of the surveyed students. Although economic factors, especially the possibility of employment, have the greatest importance for both groups of students, there are differences in the intensity of the influence of this factor. The employment factor has a very big influence on 45% of female and 24% of male students. However, there is a higher share of male students who stated that the influence of this factor is great (41%) than female students (30%). In order to make the assessments of the importance of individual factors clearer, the so-called influence coefficient  $\alpha$  which is calculated for each factor  $j$  according to the simple formula (1):

$$\alpha_j = \sum_{i=0}^4 p_i * n_i, \quad j = 1, \dots, 7 \quad (1)$$

where  $p_i$  represents the percentage of respondents who gave answer  $i$  about the total number of respondents, and  $n_i$  is the numerical rating corresponding to answer  $i$  (Table 1).

Table 1. Answers and corresponding numerical ratings

i	Answers	Numerical ratings
0	It had no impact	$n_0 = 0$
1	It had very little impact	$n_1 = 1$
2	It had little impact	$n_2 = 2$
3	It had a significant impact	$n_3 = 3$
4	It had a very significant impact	$n_4 = 4$

The coefficients of the influence of factors on the choice of logistics studies by female and male students are shown in Figure 1.

For women, the possibility of personal development is the second most important factor for the choice of study, while for men it is the fourth. Such attitudes were also confirmed by the structure of the answers to the question in the student survey about the

contribution of education and employment of women in the field of logistics to their additional emancipation, independence, development and success.

Although more than half of all surveyed students believe that this contribution is great, the share of female student who have this attitude (67%) is significantly higher than the share of men who share this opinion (20%).

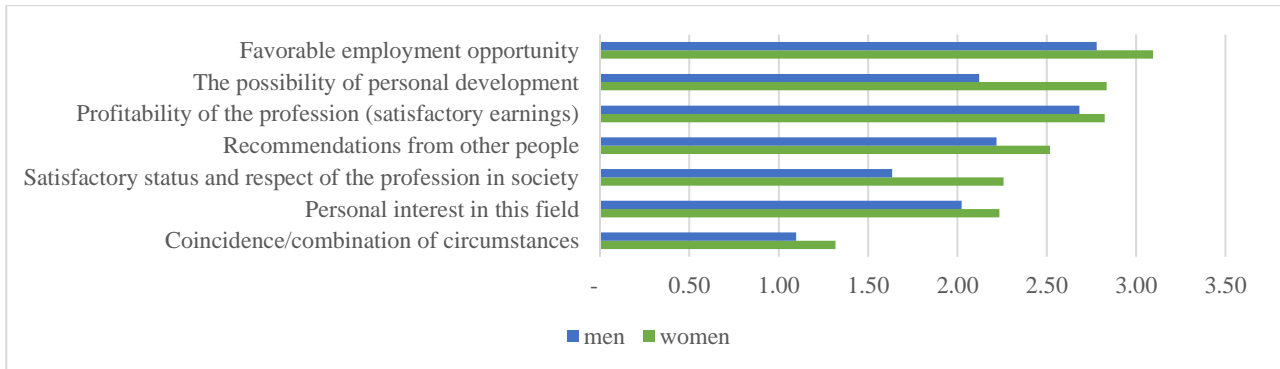


Figure 1 - The influence of certain factors on the choice of logistics studies

Apart from the factor of personal development, the factor of status and respect in society is somewhat more important for women than for men. It is another confirmation that a significant number of women expect something more from logistics than just economic provision of existence. Moreover, this indicates that logistics, apart from the well-known, basic functions in planning, organization, management, performing, and control of flows of various goods, materials and freights, can also have a significant social function.

Perhaps the factors of personal development and respect in society, which are more important for women than for men when choosing a study program, influenced women's greater determination to work in logistics. Namely, the research showed that 86% of female and 61% of male students want to work in the field of logistics.

However, the perception of current practices in companies by employees is somewhat different [14]. About a third of men and a fifth of women employed in logistics believe that women are over 40% of employees in their company or its logistics sector, but the rest believe that their number is smaller. 55% of female and 47% of male respondents employed in logistics believe that less than 30% of full-time employees are women. This is also confirmed by official statistics for the areas of Europe and Central Asia, according to which women are only 23% of employees in the transport, storage and communications sectors [25].

There are significant correlations in the structure of the responses of female and male students in the ranking of jobs according to the degree of interest, but

also some differences. Given that efforts are being made to increase the representation of women at all and even the highest hierarchical decision-making levels in logistics, it is encouraging that the majority of female students (58%) want to be at the top of corporate structures. Nevertheless, it is indicative that the share of men who expressed the same desire is still higher (68%). There are different approaches to how such and similar collective attitudes can be interpreted. Based on one of the approaches, it can be said that part of the respondents, especially male respondents, understand that women are represented in certain positions and jobs to the extent that they want or deserve it. On the trail of the idea of emphasizing individual in relation to gender characteristics, this attitude may be correct to a certain extent. Namely, it is certain that among both men and women, some do not have the desire and/or potential to be in certain positions for various internal reasons (great responsibility and stress, complex management of a large system and number of people, etc.).

However, the complete transfer of responsibility for the position of women to them and their decisiveness by the part of men is not completely objective. Namely, it is assumed that men, as a gender group that has long been dominant in this and other areas, want to consciously or unconsciously maintain this state of affairs, justifying it with the view that women themselves are largely responsible for it. The opinion of some women that they have complete responsibility could be partially correct, but, on the other side, in the language of psychology, it could also be said that it is a kind of internalization, i.e. the

unconscious transfer of dominant collective beliefs and cultural relations to personal understandings. In other words, in this case, some women in logistics want what they are expected to want, so they are not decisive enough in their desires and intentions to be at the highest hierarchical decision-making levels. Finally, it is possible that, although more successful during logistics studies [16] and aware that their pretensions to the highest positions would be fully justified and legitimate, some of them consider that the struggle for them would be too challenging in conditions of male dominance. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that the percentage difference is not drastic, it can be said that it is a significant, but not a dramatic,

indicator of gender inequality in the views of the student population.

On the other side, the results of the employee survey indicate that male dominance exists at all or almost all hierarchical decision-making levels in logistics (Figure 2) [14]. The exception is the 2nd decision-making level (jobs of clerks, analysts, administration, etc.), where, according to 21% of women and 28% of men, women are more than half of the employees. It is indicative that men's evaluations are somewhat more favorable, which indicates a tendency for women and men to perceive or want to represent women's participation differently, especially at higher hierarchical decision-making levels [14].

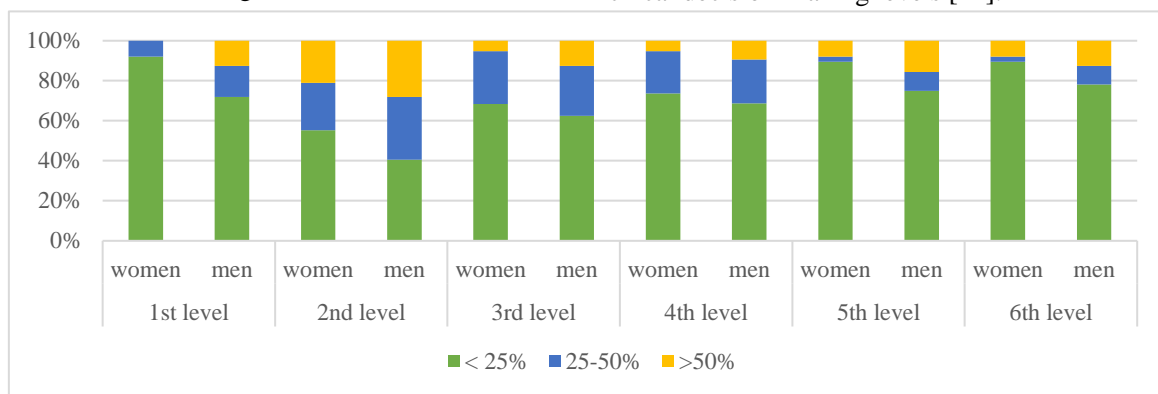


Figure 2 - Participation of women by decision-making levels according to the assessment of women and men employed in logistics

The students' preferences were also examined in terms of the types of jobs in logistics that they want to do. Significant correlations were observed in the attitudes of male and female respondents. Both of them are most interested in managing certain sectors (transport, storage, etc.), and least interested in training and education of personnel. To a slightly greater extent than male students, female students want to deal with the planning and design of logistics systems and processes, while men are slightly more inclined to work in the field, which some of the respondents may have perceived as more physically demanding and, as such, more suitable for men, which is affected the structure of the answer.

Also, a slightly higher percentage of male students declared that they would like to work in analytics, while women are somewhat more inclined to manage departments within the sector. Bearing in mind the previously presented assessments of employees about the participation of women and men at the second and higher levels of decision-making, it can be concluded that such wishes of students indicate potential changes in the future, in the direction of increasing the number of men in analytics, and the number of women in management positions. The way to these changes is individual improvement [17], encouraging the

development of traits and skills that are traditionally usually attributed to the opposite sex: analyticalness, patience, etc. in men, and determination and organizational skills in women [16].

#### 4. PERCEPTION OF LOGISTICS IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER EQUALITY

Over 70% of the surveyed students believe that the statement that logistics is more of a "male" than a "female" profession is not true, while 19% of students believe that it is completely or partially true. However, there are significant differences between the responses of male and female students (Figure 3).

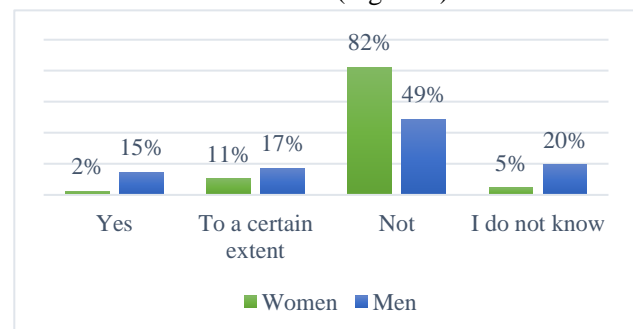


Figure 3 - Student assessments of the accuracy of the statement that logistics is "more male than a female profession"

This statement is rejected as incorrect by slightly less than half of male and over 80% of female students. Despite the dominant attitude among male students that women in logistics studies are equally or more successful than men (90%), almost a third (32%) believe that logistics is more of a „male“ than a „female“ profession. Taking into account the structure of male students' answers to these two questions, it is certain that some men believe that women can be successful in logistics, but not in all of its jobs, but only in those that they consider „feminine“.

The previous conclusion is supported by the answers to the question about the greater suitability of certain jobs in logistics for one gender. Over half of all surveyed students believe that a large number of jobs are more suitable for men, and 25% of them think that a large number of jobs are more suitable for women (Figure 4).

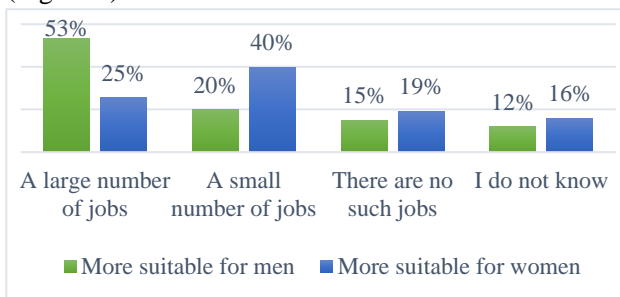


Figure 4 - Student assessments of the suitability of jobs in logistics for men and women

There are certain differences in the assessments of male and female students about the suitability of jobs in logistics for a certain gender (Figure 5).

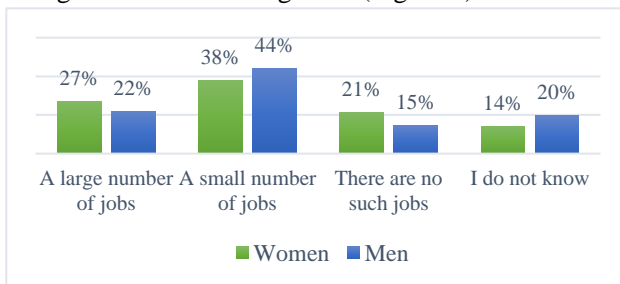


Figure 5 - Student assessments of the suitability of jobs in logistics for women

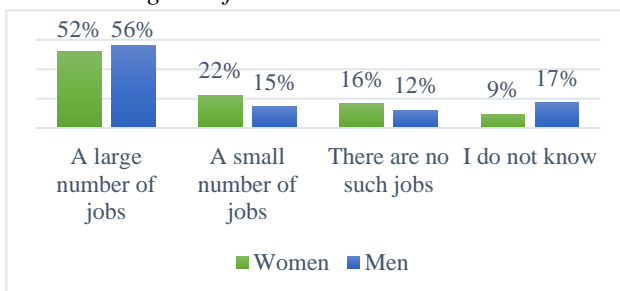


Figure 6 - Student assessments of the suitability of jobs in logistics for men

A larger part of female students than male students believe that the number of jobs more suitable for women is large, but there is also a larger part of female students who think that such jobs do not exist. Regarding the number of jobs more suitable for men, the opinion of the sexes is similar, but there is a slightly higher percentage of men who think that the number of such jobs is large (Figure 6).

The students also expressed their opinions about specific jobs in logistics that they consider more suitable for men and women. Almost a quarter of all surveyed students believe that there are no jobs more suitable for men, and around 38% of students believe that there are no jobs more suitable for women. However, a significantly larger number of students consider certain jobs more suitable for men (mainly those that do not require higher education, such as forklift operator, driver of heavy goods vehicles, driver of delivery vehicles, etc.). Moreover, this is the dominant opinion of both sexes, but not in the same percentage. Thus, 73% of male and 63% of female students consider the job of forklift operator more suitable for men. 40% of female students believe that there are no jobs more suitable for women, but more than a third believe that the jobs of human resources specialist in logistics, logistics analyst, and certain positions at higher hierarchical levels (director of the supply chain, director of logistics, manager of quality in logistics, etc.) are more suitable for women. On the other side, male students also associate women with human resources and analytics, but also with cleaning and maintenance jobs, which do not require higher education. In addition, a significant part of men believe that there are no jobs in logistics that are more suitable for women. Unfortunately, one male student used the opportunity to comment on the position and perspective of women in logistics to reduce them to a workforce that should only deal with the work of cleaners. Such attitudes certainly represent a bad example and an obstacle not only to achieving gender equality but also to a healthy relationship between the male and female workforce and their mutual respect. Fortunately, such attitudes are isolated and rare. The association of cleaning and maintenance jobs with women, which is expressed in a significant percentage, is not necessarily destructive for gender equality, just as the attitudes that the positions of forklift operator, commission agent, and driver are more suitable for men are not necessarily destructive. However, the negative example mentioned warns and admonishes that it is necessary to draw attention to gender equality so that such attitudes do not become more widespread.

The described structure of the answers shows that the opinion about logistics as a „male profession“ is primarily based on operative, physical jobs, which are

traditionally more often or always performed by men, at lower hierarchical levels. On the other side, jobs in logistics that are predominantly associated with women are rare, and even they are not visible enough for everyone. The answer to the question: „Why do some people consider logistics a „male“ profession?“ could be: the entire profession is identified with the part of the jobs it includes, and those jobs, on the other side, are identified with the workforce that most often performs them (Figure 7).

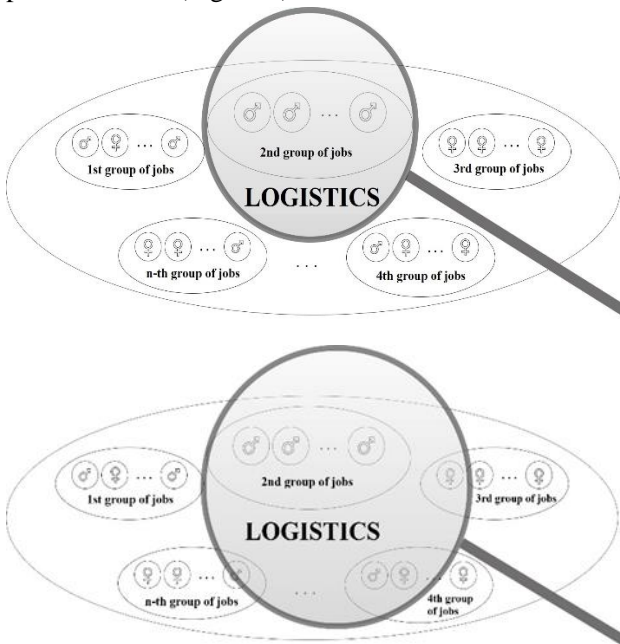


Figure 7 - Partial perception of logistics

As stated, the reason for this is not only the number of jobs that are more often performed by men but also the greater visibility of both jobs and their effects. In other words, the complaints of hard-working housewives that „in the house you can't see anything that has been done, only what hasn't been done“, are probably to some extent current in large, economic logistics systems as well. Finally, despite such complaints, the importance and presence of women in logistics is also manifested in the household, which represents a significant logistics system [26]-[29].

The wider community, which is not sufficiently informed about logistics and related jobs, but also a very small part of students in lower years of studies, who still do not have a complete perception of logistics, are more visible jobs that do not require a higher education, such as the jobs of drivers, transshipment workers or receiving goods, which are usually performed by men. In logistics centers, as places of concentration and refraction of logistics flows, the most spatially intensive and visually striking activities are receiving/shipping vehicles and goods, transshipment, order picking, etc, which in a large number of companies are still mostly performed by men. Finally,

the flows of people, goods, materials and freights represent the central element of logistics, and to a certain extent it is expected that their performing and executors have a special importance in the understanding of logistics. In this sense, even the most common symbols that represent logistics (pallet, forklift, truck, crane, etc.) are precisely entities, technological elements that are connected to operations performed mostly by men. But logistics includes all operations that precede these flows, follow them or are performed after them, as well as the personnel who perform them. Women are also an indispensable part of that staff. By educating and better informing the wider community about logistics, all areas, subsystems, processes, activities, jobs, and their importance, there would be an affirmation and wider recognition of positions that are significant but currently less noticeable, and thus a change in the image of the structure workforce in logistics.

In addition to the above, in the short and medium term, there is another approach to increase the visibility of women in logistics, namely through their presence in jobs that are traditionally considered male. Namely, with the digitalization and automation of work, the development of modern technological solutions, logistics jobs that were once considered the most physically demanding, are becoming easier, so they can be performed by physically weaker women. Moreover, in the context of the development of Industry 4.0 and 5.0 technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, etc. the question arises: will men and women participate in such jobs at all? As a result of this development, it is certain that the context in which the struggle for gender equality is being waged is also changing significantly. If there is a need for competition or proving between sexes, it certainly is not and should not be in the field of physical strength. In the foreground are other qualities and skills, which represents an opportunity and a challenge for both men and women.

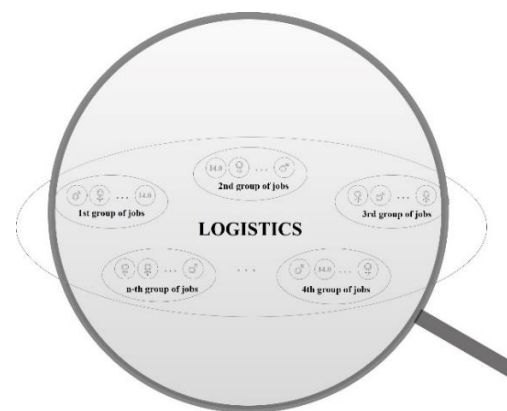


Figure 8 - Comprehensive perception of logistics

The task of the entire society, including logisticians, is to ensure that in the future there is no

competition between genders, but that there is only personal, constructive competition and that equal conditions are created for everyone. This will make it possible to use the individual virtues and potentials of both men and women in the best way, to the benefit and satisfaction of both, as well as logistics. In these conditions, a comprehensive perception of logistics should be built (Figure 8).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Conducted research shows that the majority of the student population, which represents the work potential of logistics, has a mature and healthy attitude towards the role, relationship and equality of genders in logistics, but that, although sporadic and isolated, there are also different opinions, which is a warning. In logistics practice, there are certain problems of gender equality, but also progress and efforts to make the situation more favorable. In the achievement of this goal, in addition to raising awareness, the active and responsible role of both men and women, the current accelerated technological development can also help, because with greater digitization, automation and the employment of robots instead of people, many issues of inequality would be solved..

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## REZIME

### ŽENE I MUŠKARCI U LOGISTICI: PERCEPCIJE, PRAKSE I PROJEKCIJE

*Logistika se najčešće vezuje za najvidljivije poslove, čije je obavljanje bilo ili je još uvek fizički zahtevno ili iscrpljujuće (vožnja na dugim relacijama, pretovar robe i sl). Zbog toga se i ovi poslovi, pa i čitava oblast logistike neretko vezuju za mušku radnu snagu koja ih najčešće obavlja. Ipak, evolucijom logistike i njenog naučnog izučavanja, dolazi se do sveobuhvatnijeg sagledavanja oblasti, pa i uloge i značaja ženske radne snage za realizaciju logističkih procesa. Uprkos tome, i dalje postoji značajan raskorak između želja, percepcija i projekcija rodne ravnopravnosti školovanih logističara u odnosu na postojeću praksu. U ovom radu razmatrano je stanje rodne ravnopravnosti i uloge muškaraca i žena u logistici iz perspektive buduće i postojeće radne snage.*

**Ključne reči:** *logistika, rodna ravnopravnost, radna snaga, žene, muškarci*