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Employee Welfare in the Western Balkans Retail Sector: How to Improve It through Socio-organizational Variables

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In recent years the countries of the Western Balkans region have been facing an exodus of labour, which represents a complex social problem. Given the fact that the largest number of employees is engaged in the service industry, especially in the retail sector where 10% of all working population is employed, it is necessary to define the indicators which impede employee welfare and to recommend a set of measures for their minimization. In this regard, this paper aims to identify variables which impact employee welfare in the retail sector of the Western Balkans with a particular retrospect to the differences between SMEs and retail chains. Empirical research has been conducted on a sample of 325 employees of retail companies. Correlation between employee welfare and socio-organizational variables, such as job contentment, social support, monthly salary, work environment, promotion opportunity, the use of modern technology, business culture, job rotation and job security have been tested. The results of the research have shown a significant correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee welfare. Differences are especially prominent between SMEs and retail chains. Based on the obtained results, a set of measures and procedures which competent institutions and employment policymakers should undertake to neutralize those differences has been proposed. Suggestions for future research are provided.

Key words: employee welfare, socio-organizational variables, job contentment, work conditions, retail, Western Balkans.

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INTRODUCTION

A growing number of academic research in economics, management and social policy emphasizes the importance of employee welfare in attaining better productivity and higher profitability of the companies in which they are employed (Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019; Reta, 2019). A strong positive correlation is particularly emphasised between employee welfare in a workplace and commitment to work, motivation for work and readiness for the execution of tasks (Sánchez-Sellero and Sánchez-Sellero, 2017; Aristovnik and Jaklič, 2013). As research shows, it is crucial for business success of a company to utilize employee potential, which is only possible if they are fully committed to the job, satisfied with the job and their position (Gunawan and Gunawan, 2019). Most authors believe that achieving employee welfare in a workplace should be a priority of the company's management and a key link to accomplishing its business success (Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019; Reta, 2019; Gunawan and Gunawan, 2019). On the other hand, employees cite the absence of welfare as the most common reason for changing their current job (Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019; Vydrová, 2018). If their expectations regarding their salary and benefits, promotion opportunities, job rotation and job security are not met, employees become demotivated, uninterested and they start looking for other job opportunities (Merchaoui, 2018; Riaz and Ramay, 2010).

Employees are undoubtedly key stakeholders who ensure organizational efficiency, so every company must play a significant role in providing not only monetary, but also social services to its employees (Rao et al., 2015). Employee welfare is interpreted by the authors in several ways, as job satisfaction (Gunawan and Gunawan, 2019; Aristovnik and Jaklič, 2013), social responsibility towards employees (Rao et al., 2015), employee commitment to workplace and company (Riaz and Ramay, 2010), common organizational values (Tsai, 2011), satisfaction with benefits - bonuses, salaries, promotions (Gunawan and Gunawan, 2019; Sessler, 2019; Riaz and Ramay, 2010), job security (Merchaoui, 2018; Riaz and Ramay, 2010), etc. Basically, employee welfare is defined as satisfaction with socio-organizational variables in the workplace. The importance of socio-organizational variables for employee welfare was first set and developed by Pujol-Cols and Dabos (2019), Karunarathne and Samarasinghe (2019), Maximilian et al., (2019), Dierdorff and Morgeson (2013), Riaz and Ramay (2010). Socio-organizational variables, which are an integral part of employee welfare, include: 1) *job contentment* - a positive emotional reaction to performing a certain job; 2) *social support* - special needs of employees, such as health issues, personal emergency, personal or family issues, etc.; 3) *monthly salary* - the amount of pay and other benefits belonging to employees; 4) *work environment* - working atmosphere, conditions of work itself, working hours, etc.; 5) *promotion opportunities* - openness and management's support for the career development of each employee; 6) *the use of modern technology* - technical equipment required by a specific workplace such as modern IT platforms and equipment; 7) *business culture* - employee affiliation with the organization or degree in which they share common organizational values and standards; 8) *job rotation* - a degree of possibility for changing a workplace within the company and 9) *job security* - legal safety and protection of employees in the workplace in the form of full-time contracts, compensation in case of a layoff, etc..

In order to determine the level of employee welfare as precisely as possible, it is necessary to define the significance of each socio-organizational variable for em-

ployees in a particular workplace. In this way, critical places will be defined, i.e., variables that need to be further developed and optimized in order to raise the level of overall well-being and employee satisfaction. In recent years, employee welfare research has been particularly important for transition countries where the labour shortage is being recorded along with increasing migration of population and employees towards more developed economies (Antić and Vuksanović, 2019).

The Western Balkans countries have not remained immune to such tendencies and are characterized by the exodus of labour. Data from 2018 show that around 135,000 people left the Western Balkans region in search for better work conditions and employment (Croatia 39,515, Serbia 35,000, B&H 4,259, Albania 32,532, Northern Macedonia 20,562 and Montenegro 4,000). An additional problem is that the majority of these people are aged 20 to 40 which is the working-age population (Statistical Yearbook of CRO/SRB/B&H/ALB/MNG/MCD, 2018). In terms of employment, most of the employees in the region of Western Balkans work in the service industry, with the highest percentage being employed in the trading sector, that is, retail (around 10%). This makes retailing a prioritized economic activity, given the fact that retailing accounts for around 11% of total GDP in the analyzed countries; while the number of registered retailers is between 35% and 40% of the total number of registered legal entities. Since retailing is one of the main drivers of regional economic development, there is a need for a thorough analysis of employee welfare and socio-organizational variables in this sector. At the same time, such a comparison of the Western Balkan countries is a good scientific contribution to the field of retail socio-demographic research because it fills in the research gap in the field.

Having in mind the stated aspects, *the aim of this paper* is to identify socio-organizational variables which affect employee welfare in the Western Balkans retail sector with particular attention to differences between SMEs and retail chains. Unlike psychological factors and the role that employee personality models play in their job contentment (Judge et al., 2008), socio-organizational variables are tangible, easier to define, control and optimize through a set of measures and procedures which can be taken by competent institutions and retail companies themselves. This reflects *practical importance of this paper* which will enable competent institutions, employment policymakers and management of retail companies to take appropriate actions based on the presented results in order to support the positive and minimize the negative effects of socio-organizational variables.

This paper consists of the following five sections. *Theoretical Background* summarizes the most important theoretical views regarding the importance of employee welfare. Based on the literature review, the most important socio-organizational variables, which determine employee welfare in the retail sector, have been defined. The research aim, hypotheses, method, sample and procedure are presented in the *Methodology* section. The *Research Results* section summarizes the obtained data and test results of formulated hypotheses. In the *Discussion* section, a comparison of the obtained results and results from related studies has been made, and a set of measures and procedures for improving employee welfare in the retail sector of the Western Balkans is proposed. *Conclusion* consolidates the most important results of the conducted research, points out the identified shortcomings and provides suggestions for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Employee welfare is a key social and organizational issue that every company and every sector of the economy, as well as the entire society and the state, strives to address in order to ensure that employees are satisfied with their job and motivated to work (Van Loo et al., 2015). As a concept, employee welfare has evolved from employee satisfaction and motivation, through a sense of loyalty and identification with an organization, acceptance of common organizational values, culture and commitment to work, to satisfaction with benefits, sense of security and provision of social services to employees (Bhavani, 2019; Rao et al., 2015; Aristovnik and Jaklič, 2013; Riaz and Ramay, 2010). In other words, various variables directly or indirectly contribute to employee welfare in the workplace. Berman and Evans (2013) differentiate organizational and psychological factors, Shanafelt and Noseworthy (2017) emphasise workload, control and flexibility, Riaz and Ramay (2010) consider work commitment, benefits, social support, equal reward system and psychological contentment of workers to be crucial, Dierdorff and Morgeson (2013) emphasise social variables related to organizational and social integrity of employees, Pujol-Cols and Lazzaro-Salazar (2018) introduce psycho-social variables, Judge, Klinger, Simon and Yang (2008) are focused on the role which employee personality plays in their attitudes and behaviour in the workplace, etc. Some variables, such as personality, psychophysical and mental states are difficult to influence, while on the other hand, organizational variables are dependent on management style, the economic power of a company, market potential, and level of development of the region, characteristics of the economic sector, etc. (Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019; Pujol-Cols & Lazzaro-Salazar, 2018). Re-

cent studies (Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019; Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019) combine all the above factors of employee welfare under the term socio-organizational variables that include social and organizational benefits that employees receive in the workplace. Based on such a concept, employee welfare is interpreted as the satisfaction that the employee experiences in the workplace, which is encouraged by certain socio-organizational variables, i.e., job satisfaction, social support, salary, work environment, the possibility of promotion, the use of modern technology, job rotation, business culture and job security (Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019; Bhavani, 2019; Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019; Maximilian et al., 2019).

The employees who are satisfied with socio-organizational variables show motivation, a will for promotion and continuous improvement, readiness to put an extra effort into everyday work activities and they constitute the human capital of the company (Maximilian et al., 2019). As such, they are the ones who do not display a tendency to migrate, who are productive and who contribute to business results and profitability.

Numerous studies confirmed a direct correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee welfare and their commitment to work. In recent years, a few papers in professional literature have been published indicating the existence of a strong positive relationship between employee welfare based on socio-organizational variables and business performance of a company (Gunawan and Gunawan, 2019). The importance of employee welfare is especially emphasised in the service sector where direct contact between employees and customers or clients occurs (e.g. retail, banking, tourism, etc.) At the same time, the studies do not diminish the importance of the opposite correlation. As a result of inadequate work conditions and poor employee

welfare, the market experiences serious labour fluctuations, a decrease in productivity and profitability of companies, migrations to developed market economies which entails major macroeconomic and social problems, such as population drain, increasing unemployment, inflation, an increase of prices, etc. (Sessler, 2019; Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019; Vydrová, 2018).

Accordingly, the Western Balkans region is characterized today by massive population migration to developed countries of Central, Western and Northern Europe. Migrations, especially those of young people and working-age population, are primarily motivated by economic factors, as well as socio-organizational variables which shape working conditions. Employees expect that by changing their workplace they will acquire new knowledge and skills, better promotion opportunities, a higher standard of living, better health care, compliance with employee rights and legal security (Antić and Vuksanović, 2019). It is necessary to point out that competent institutions and management of a company cannot control all the variables which have an impact on migration potential, however, by utilizing their activities and taking adequate measures they can influence the reduction of employee dissatisfaction regarding socio-organizational variables. In that context, an upward trend of the number of studies which deal with the stated issues is noticeable, however, only a few studies are dedicated to employee welfare in the retail sector. Considering that retail is one of the most dynamic economic activities in the region with the largest number of employees in the service sector and ever-growing need for the new workforce, there is a necessity to define precisely the impact and correlation of each socio-organizational variable and employee welfare.

In addition, big differences between SMEs and retail chains are emphasised in the Western Balkans market. The tendency of internationalization and the arrival of retail chains are changing the image and structure of the Western Balkans market using consolidation of the existing retail formats, with continued decrease in the number of SMEs, that is, small and independent retailers (Lovreta et al., 2019; Končar et al., 2018). According to official data from 2014 to 2018, a total of 110,000 employees in the SMEs retail sector of the Western Balkans region have left their jobs (Statistical Yearbook of CRO/SRB/B&H/ALB/MNG/MCD, 2019). Therefore, special attention is given to defining differences in work conditions and employee welfare between SMEs and retail chains. Having in mind the indicated aspects, defining the importance of socio-organizational variables on employee welfare in the retail sector of Western Balkans is significant for taking adequate measures for minimizing negative effects, improving work conditions and thereby reducing the potential of migrations.

METHODOLOGY

Aim and hypotheses

The research aims to define the impact of socio-organizational variables on employee welfare and to determine the degree of their interconnectedness. Particular emphasis in the research is on identifying differences in the correlation of socio-organizational variables with employee welfare depending on the size of the business entity (SMEs vs. retail chains) and a country of the Western Balkans region (CRO, SRB, B&H, MNG, MCD). The set research aim is operationalized through three basic and several supporting hypotheses.

The literature reveals the different influence of socio-organizational variables on employee welfare. Therefore, the first basic hypothesis H_1 is designed to deter-

mine which socio-organizational variables are directly correlated with employee welfare in the retail sector of the Western Balkans region. Based on the defined socio-organizational variables in the research by Pujol-Cols and Dabos (2019), Karunarathne and Samarasinghe (2019), Maximilian et al., (2019), Dierdorff and Morgeson (2013), Riaz and Ramay (2010), the first research Hypothesis H_1 reads: There is a statistically significant correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee welfare in the retail sector of the Western Balkans. To confirm the basic research hypothesis, it should be backed up by the following supporting hypotheses which define the significance of each socio-organizational variable.

Aristovnik and Jaklič (2013), as well as Riaz and Ramay (2010) find that job satisfaction or a positive emotional reaction to doing a particular job contributes to welfare. The strength of this correlation is defined by the first auxiliary hypothesis H_{1a} - there is a statistically significant correlation between job contentment and employee welfare.

The existence of a correlation between specific social needs of employees (e.g. health issues, personal emergencies, personal or family issues) and employee welfare (Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019) is tested by the second auxiliary hypothesis H_{1b} - there is a statistically significant correlation between social support and employee welfare.

The importance of salaries, bonuses, awards and other employee benefits on welfare were defined by Riaz and Ramay (2010). The examination of this correlation is performed by using the third auxiliary hypothesis H_{1c} - there is a statistically significant correlation between the amount of monthly salary and employee welfare.

Bhavani (2019) analyzed the impact of the work environment on employee welfare. The importance of a good work environment for maximizing the level of welfare and thus personal growth and development of employees has been identified. In this context, the following hypothesis determines the correlation between the working atmosphere, working conditions and working hours on employee welfare. H_{1d} - there is a statistically significant correlation between the work environment and employee welfare.

Szabo-Balint (2019) and Bhaskar and Mishra (2014) define the importance of employee promotion for job satisfaction and employee welfare. In this regard, the fifth auxiliary hypothesis tests the importance of openness and support of company management to the career development of each employee on employee welfare. H_{1e} - there is a statistically significant correlation between promotion opportunities and employee welfare.

Research shows that for certain jobs, the use of modern technology, smart devices, IT equipment, etc. is essential (Vojvodić, 2019; Bhaskar and Mishra, 2014). The next auxiliary hypothesis determines the real significance of the use of modern technical equipment required by a certain job on employee welfare. H_{1f} – there is a statistically significant correlation between the use of modern technology and employee welfare.

The seventh auxiliary hypothesis tests the intensity of the correlation between employee welfare and the degree to which employees share common organizational values, i.e., the commitment of employees to the organization. This correlation was partially confirmed in the studies of Li et al. (2015) and Tsai (2011). H_{1g} - there is a statistically significant correlation between business culture and employee welfare.

The importance of the possibility of job rotation or change of job within the company on employee welfare was first pointed out by Karunarathne and Samarasinghe (2019). It is necessary to define the intensity of that correlation through the following hypothesis. H_{1h} - there is a statistically significant correlation between job rotation and employee welfare.

A large number of academic studies such as Pujol-Cols and Dabos (2019), Patro (2017) Riaz and Ramay (2010) emphasize the direct correlation between job security and employee welfare. Under the job security variable, they imply legal safety and protection of employees in the workplace in the form of full-time contracts, compensation in case of a layoff, etc. The intensity of this correlation is examined by the last auxiliary hypothesis. H_{1i} - there is a statistically significant correlation between job security and employee welfare.

Some research (Tešić, 2020; Končar and Marić, 2015) show that in the service sector, the business culture, employee behaviour and management's attitude towards employees differ depending on the size of the company. For the retail sector, a comparison between SMEs (up to 250 employees) and retail chains (over 250 employees) is characteristic. In this context, the second basic hypothesis H_2 is designed to determine whether differences in the impact of socio-organizational variables on employee welfare depend on the size of retail firms. H_2: There is a statistically significant difference in the correlation between the socio-organizational variables and employee welfare in SMEs and retail chains.

Having in mind that the research is focused on the region of the Western Balkans, which consists of several independent national markets, it is necessary to determine whether the correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee wel-fare differs from country to country. The 2015 Končar and Marić survey confirms such results. In this regard, the last basic hypothesis H_3 is designed to determine whether these differences are random or statistically significant. H_3: There is a statistically significant difference in correlation between the socio-organizational variables and employee welfare among the countries of the Western Balkans region.

The defined hypotheses are important so that, based on the established differences, competent institutions and the management of retail companies can direct its measures and incentives to the strengthening of socio-institutional variables, especially in SMEs and retail chains, that is, in each of the analyzed countries.

Variables and research sample

Following the hypotheses, the research included several independent and one dependent variable. Belonging of a company to one of the selected countries in the region (CRO, SRB, B&H, MNG, MCD) was chosen as the first independent grouping variable. The research was conducted in selected countries of the Western Balkans due to good institutional cooperation with these markets. The second independent grouping variable is the size of the retail company (SMEs vs. retail chains). Assessment of respondents' satisfaction with socio-organizational variables such as job contentment, social support, monthly salary, work environment, promotion opportunities, the use of modern technology, business culture, job rotation and job security, represents an independent variable of the interval type of measurement. The dependent variable in the research is employee welfare.

The research included a total of 325 respondents who work in SMEs and retail chains in the Western Balkans region. The survey was conducted among admin-

istrative and sales staff (salespersons and cashiers). The reason for choosing this structure of respondents lies in the fact that some SMEs, especially small independent retailers (up to 5 employees), do not have a clearly defined redistribution of work in the organizational structure. In such sales formats, one employee is often in charge of several different business operations (e.g., sales, receipt of goods, administration, etc.).

The number of respondents in both sample groups is equal: 171 respondents, that is, 52.6% are employed in SMEs, while 154 respondents, that is, 47.4% are employed in retail chains. Respondents work in 5 countries (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia). The structure of respondents is also equally distributed among countries (Table 1).

Research procedure

The research was conducted in the period from August to October 2019. The respondents are employees of retail companies which perform their business activity in the region of Western Balkans. These are: 1) the largest retail chains according to a report from Delloite audit company (2019), such as Agrokor d.d. (Mercator, Idea, Konzum, etc.), Delhaize, Lidl, Spar, Metro AG, etc. 2) the largest national retailers such as Univerexport, DIS, Voli, Roda,

etc., and 3) small and independent retailers which according to the European standards belong to SMEs group (up to 250 employees with a turnover of up to €50 million).

The research was conducted electronically based on a questionnaire which consisted of 10 subscales of the questionnaire of socio-organizational variables with employees' contentment, their commitment to work and welfare. The questionnaire was created based on a combination of questionnaires and indicators used by Pujol-Cols and Dabos (2019), Karunarathne and Samarasinghe (2019), Riaz and Ramay (2010). Each of the subscales contains three standard Likert-type items (1- completely disagree, 5- strongly agree). These items seek to more closely operationalize the variables and are defined for this research based on the research by Pujol-Cols and Dabos from 2019. The respondents were asked to rank their satisfaction with the variables offered, that is, how they rate the impact of the given variables on welfare in the workplace in the retail companies in which they work. *Job contentment* is defined as a sense of purposefulness of work performed, fulfilment of work tasks and positive emotional reaction to performing a certain job. S*ocial support* was measured as a response that a company has on special needs of employees, such as health issues, personal emergency and family issues. *The monthly salary* was defined as satisfaction with the

Table 1
Research sample

WB Country	Number	Structure (%)	Size of company	Number	Structure (%)
Croatia	66	20.3		171	52.6
Serbia	76	23.4		154	47.4
B&H	54	16.6	SMEs Retail chains		
Montenegro	63	19.4			
Northern Macedonia	66	20.3			

Source: author's calculations.

amount of pay and other benefits belonging to employees. *The work environment* was defined through conditions of work itself, working hours and working atmosphere. *Promotion opportunities* contain attitudes about openness, possibilities and management support for each employee's career development. *The use of modern technology* was defined as an access to technical equipment required by a specific workplace and opportunity to use modern technology to improve work. *The business culture* was measured as a degree in which they share common organizational values, aims and standards. *Job rotation* was defined as the degree of openness, possibilities and management support for changing a workplace within the company. *Job security* was measured through satisfaction with legal safety and protection of employees in the workplace in the form of full-time contracts, compensation in case of a layoff and legal protection. Finally, *welfare* was defined as life, career and personal satisfaction.

Precise data on the reliability of the selected scales are shown in Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis (columns 6 and 7) show the manner of scattering. The Cronbach's alpha value (column 8) presents the reliability of the selected scales. Since the values of Cronbach's alpha for all variables are above 0.70, this indicates acceptable reliability of all scales.

Statistical analysis and method

The obtained data were grouped and analyzed based on SPSS20 statistical data processing package. To better understand the respondents' satisfaction with various socio-organizational variables, the method of descriptive statistics was applied. Pearson's correlation test was used to test the hypotheses and the association of socio-organizational variables with employee welfare. The existence of quantitative differences in employee welfare assessment between the observed independent grouping variables was tested based on One-way analysis of variance and T-test, whereas discriminative analysis was applied for the description of the structure of differences between analyzed groups.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Understanding the importance of socio-organizational variables for working conditions and employee welfare requires the use of descriptive statistics which displays the average rank, that is, average values (M) of the respondents' summed responses and the average deviations (SD) of the responses received, as well as reliability coefficients for chosen scales by each variable - Skewness, Kurtosis and Cronbach's alpha (Table 2).

The above table shows that the respondents in the retail sector of the Western Balkans region have rated the business culture variable (M=3.31) with the highest satisfaction and the least differences in their responses (SD=0.91). At the next level, there is job contentment or commitment to the job (M=3.16), as well as satisfaction with promotion opportunity (M=3.05). In general, the employees are satisfied with these socio-organizational variables, which in addition to social support (M=3.01), significantly contribute to employee welfare. On the other hand, respondents exhibit great dissatisfaction with the work environment (M=2.45), and job security (M=2.66). When it comes to the working environment variable, the biggest problem to employee welfare represents the inappropriate working atmosphere and tough work conditions which manifest themselves in unpaid overwork hours, shift work, work during weekends and holidays, etc. The most important problem with the job security variable is the unresolved legal status of employees

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for respondents' responses to individual items

Socio-organizational variables	Min.	Max.	Mean (M)	SD	Skew.	Kurt.	Cronbach's alpha
Job contentment	1.00	5.00	3.16	1.24	-0.159	-1.150	0.741
Social support	1.00	5.00	3.01	1.16	-0.018	-1.128	0.892
Monthly salary	1.00	5.00	2.98	1.18	0.352	-0.994	0.781
Work environment	1.00	5.00	2.45	1.24	-0.217	-1.284	0.774
Promotion opportunities	1.00	5.00	3.05	1.37	-0.302	-1.259	0.871
Use of modern technology	1.00	5.00	2.88	1.60	0.057	-1.649	0.892
Business culture	1.00	5.00	3.31	.912	-0.319	-0.454	0.715
Job rotation	1.00	5.00	2.95	1.36	0.182	-1.254	0.802
Job security	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.52	0.311	-1.401	0.857
Employee welfare	1.00	5.00	2.94	0.95	0.114	-1.765	0.818

Source: author's calculations.

in terms of the increasing number of fixed-term contracts, especially in SMEs. A large discrepancy in the responses is noticeable in the use of modern technology variable (M=2.88; SD=1.60) which speaks in favour of the existence of substantial differences in enterprises themselves within the retail sector, where the workplace is either completely digitalized and equipped with modern technologies (e.g. Internet of Things) or they completely rely on manual labour. Respondents show a moderate level of satisfaction with regards to changing jobs and tasks within the company (M=2.95) and the amount of monthly salary (M=2.98).

The first research hypothesis H_1 and the sub-hypotheses H_{1a} - H_{1i} examining the correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee welfare in the workplace were tested by Pearson's correlation test. Results obtained in the research are presented in Table 3.

The presented results indicate that there is a high, statistically significant and positive correlation between individual socio-organizational variables and employee welfare. This means that with the increase of each socio-organizational variable, employee welfare rises, that is, with the increase in employee satisfaction with the analyzed socio-organizational variables, employee welfare is ensured, and conversely, dissatisfaction with the variables results in poor employee welfare. The research particularly highlighted the fact that employees show a very low ranking of the job security variable (M=2.66) and of the amount of monthly salary (M=2.8), that is, they are dissatisfied with their current legal protection, job security and the amount of salary, while at the same time, these variables show a very high correlation with employee welfare (r=0.781; p<0.001; r=0.773; p<0.001). This implies that each increase in job security and the amount of monthly salary would correlate with a significant increase in employee welfare. This is especially a characteristic feature of transition countries, where the amount of salary and being employed on full-time contracts represent the main motivation in the workplace (Končar & Marić, 2015). A significant correlation is present with the use of modern technology (r=0.695) and job contentment (r=0.609), with the ascertainment that the use of modern technology is significantly lower in SMEs, unlike retail chains that have integrated digital and modern IT systems in their business processes.

Table 3

Correlation of socio-organizational variables and employee welfare

Employee welfare	Job contentment	Social support	Monthly salary	Work environment	Promotion opportunities	Use of modern technology	Business culture	Job rotation	Job security
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.609**	0.429**	0.773**	0.627**	0.634**	0.695**	0.603**	0.426**	0.781**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Number	325	325	325	325	325	325	325	325	325

** Significant at 1%.

Median correlations with employee welfare are represented in socio-organizational variables concerning promotion opportunities (r=0.634), work environment (r=0.627) and business culture (r=0.603), while the least correlations are represented in social support (r=0.429) and job rotation (r=0.426). Since the existence of a significant statistical correlation for each socio-organizational variant with employee wellbeing was determined, it can be concluded that the first research hypothesis H_1, as well as all sub-hypotheses H_{1a} - $H_{1i,}$ are accepted. The conclusion is that there is a statistically significant correlation in the positive direction between all socio-organizational variables and employee welfare in the Western Balkans retail sector.

In testing the second research hypothesis H_2, the T-test for independent grouping variables first tested whether there was a quantitative difference in the satisfaction assessment of employee welfare between SMEs and retail chains, and then how the socio-organizational variables were related to employee welfare between groups, which makes a qualitative difference. The results of the T-test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups (t=-69.578; p<0.001). Significantly higher rankings were recorded by respondents in retail chains compared to SMEs employees. In other words, they show greater satisfaction with existing work conditions

and their position in the workplace than the employees in small and independent retail stores. Given the fact that there are discrepancies in employee welfare assessment in terms of the size of the company, the difference in the correlation between socio-organizational factors and employee welfare between the observed groups was examined by Pearson's correlation. The correlation results are shown in Table 4.

The test results show that for both groups of companies there are statistically significant differences in the correlation between socio-organizational variables and employee welfare. There are similar correlations between the work environment and social support variables in SMEs and retail chains, while business culture satisfaction is higher for respondents working at SMEs. The largest differences in correlation are present in terms of job rotation (r=0.122; p>0.05 vs. r=0.351; p<0.01), job security (r=0.160; p>0.05 vs. r=0.388; p<0.01), promotion opportunities (r=0.056; p>0.05 vs. r=0.195; p<0.05) and the use of modern technology (r=0.158; p>0.05 vs. r=0.302; p<0.01), which are ranked exceptionally low by SMEs employees. Such data show that employees in SMEs are not satisfied with their legal status, as well as possibilities to change job tasks and to rotate positions within their companies. In addition, they have limited opportunities for promotion, as well as the usage of modern

Table 4
Correlation of socio-organizational variables and employee welfare by the size of a company

Employee welfare	Job contentment	Social support	Monthly salary	Work environment	Promotion opportunities	Use of modern technology	Business culture	Job rotation	Job security
SMEs									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.002**	0.228**	0.371**	0.328**	0.056	0.158	0.623**	0.122	0.160
Significance	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.531	0.054	0.000	0.143	0.054
Number	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171	171
Retail chains									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.026*	0.198*	0.457**	0.340**	0.195*	0.302**	0.378*	0.351**	0.388**
Significance	0.006	0.024	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.000	0.015	0.000	0.000
Number	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154

** Significant at 1%; * Significant at 5%

technology and equipment. In terms of monthly salary, employees in retail chains show slightly greater satisfaction, while respondents from SMEs are more committed and satisfied with their jobs. Based on the results obtained in this way, it can be derived that the second hypothesis H_2 is accepted and that there is a statistically significant difference in the correlation of socio-organizational factors with employee welfare between SMEs and retail chains in the Western Balkans region. The results obtained have a significant sociological, organizational and managerial implication, as they show variables that respondents are least satisfied with, and at the same time show which variables have the highest correlation with employee welfare. The variables such as job rotation, job security, promotion opportunities and the use of modern technology should be optimized, especially in SMEs, in order to ensure full employee welfare in the retail sector of Western Balkans.

To further confirm the structure of differences between groups of enterprises, a discriminative analysis was also applied. The independent grouping variable was company size: SMEs and retail chains.

Dependent variables are nine socio-organizational variables by which employee welfare was assessed. The analysis obtained one discriminative function, which is statistically significant, Hi square is 945.44, while significance is less than 0.001. The structure of the discriminative equation is given in Table 5.

Table 5
Structure of discriminative equation

Socio-organizational variables	Function
	1
Job security	0.378
Job rotation	0.346
Promotion opportunities	0.341
Use of modern technologies	0.324
Business culture	0.277
Monthly salary	0.188
Work environment	0.185
Job contentment	0.162
Social support	0.121

Source: author's calculations.

In the above table, it is noticeable that all socio-organizational variables in the workplace positively saturate the discriminative function. That is, each of the var-

iables contributes to and somewhat differentiates SMEs from retail chains. The function is saturated the most with variables above the limit of 0.3, that is, job security (0.378), job rotation (0.346), promotion opportunities (0.341) and use of modern technology (0.324). Other variables related to this function that distinguishes SMEs from retail chains are positive, but low. This confirms that the two groups primarily differ in job security, job rotation, promotion opportunities and the use of modern technology. Looking at group centroids, it can be concluded that statistically more significant scores are achieved by employees who are employed in retail chains compared to SMEs. This indicates that respondents working in retail chains are more satisfied with socio-organizational variables.

The third research hypothesis examines whether there is a difference in the correlation of socio-organizational factors and employee welfare among the Western Balkan countries. As in the previous case, initially, through the One-way analysis of variance test, the quantitative difference in the rating of employee welfare of respondents from different countries was tested. The applied analysis showed that there were statistically significant differences between the Western Balkan countries (F (270.4) = 11.72; p<0.001). Schefe's post hoc test shows that there is a difference between respondents from Northern Macedonia who have the lowest satisfaction compared to employees from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The highest satisfaction with employee welfare is shown by respondents from Croatia. The correlation for all socio-organizational variables was examined by a series of Pearson correlations, separately for each analyzed country. The correlations are presented in the following table (Table 5).

Based on the results presented in Table 6, it can be seen that almost all correlation coefficients are significant in all the analyzed Western Balkan countries. Although some differences in individual socio-organizational variables have been observed, that is, some correlations are of lower intensity, no significant differences between the countries can be derived. This leads to the conclusion that in the employee satisfaction assessment of employee welfare itself, there is a difference between the countries. However, regarding correlation or the way the socio-organizational variables influence the employee welfare, the market of the Western Balkans can be viewed as unified. Based on the findings obtained, it is concluded that the third hypothesis H_3 is rejected and that there is no statistically significant difference in the correlation between socio-organizational factors and employee welfare in the retail sector among the countries of the Western Balkans region.

DISCUSSION

The conducted research and the obtained results have shown that the socio-organizational variables shape and ensure the welfare of workers significantly. Tests conducted in the Western Balkans retail sector indicate a strong positive correlation between employee welfare and job contentment, social support, monthly salary, work environment, promotion opportunities, the use of modern technology, business culture, job rotation and job security which confirmed the results from previous studies that emphasize the strong correlation between different variables and employee satisfaction with job and work conditions (Pujol-Cols and Dabos, 2019; Karunarathne and Samarasinghe, 2019; Dierdorff and Morgeson, 2013; Riaz and Ramay, 2010). The research also found differences in employee welfare satisfaction between the countries of the Western Balkans, but not the existence of differences in the way in which socio-organizational variables

Table 5

Correlation of socio-organizational variables and employee welfare by analyzed countries

Employee welfare	Job contentment	Social support	Monthly salary	Work environment	Promotion opportunities	Use of modern technology	Business culture	Job rotation	Job security
Croatia									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.724**	0.405**	0.705**	0.293*	0.796**	0.834**	0.794**	0.586**	0.766**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.028	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Number	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
Serbia									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.652**	0.267**	0.874**	0.713**	0.756**	0.803**	0.386**	0.851**	0.704**
Significance	0.000	0.004	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.004	0.000	0.000
Number	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76	76
Bosnia and Herzegovina									
Correlation coefficient(r)	0.772**	0.391**	0.873**	0.849**	0.841**	0.772**	0.857**	0.593**	0.667**
Significance	0.000	0.001	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.001
Number	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54	54
Montenegro									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.376**	0.867**	0.842**	0.509**	0.581**	0.818**	0.386**	0.415**	0.864**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Number	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Northern Macedonia									
Correlation coefficient (r)	0.876**	0.347**	0.540**	0.699**	0.471**	0.660**	0.744**	0.507**	0.720**
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.002	0.000
Number	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

** Significant at 1%.

shape the welfare of employees. In other words, the socio-organizational variables affect employee welfare in every Balkan country identically. This result confirms the results of previous studies that view the Western Balkans market in economic, sociological and demographic terms as one whole (Končar and Marić, 2015). This is especially important concerning labour migration, where there is a need to undertake measures to ensure better work conditions, job contentment and employee welfare in individual countries, with harmonization of regulations at the level of the entire region.

The originality of the paper is reflected in the fact that the difference in the correlation of socio-organizational factors with employee welfare depends on the size of the business entity, that is, there is a difference between SMEs and retail chains. This difference is especially emphasized in job security, job rotation, promotion opportunities, and the use of modern technology variables, which is characterized by a very high correlation with employee welfare, while at the same time by poor assessment of employee satisfaction with these variables, primarily in SMEs. A specific problem

within the analysed SMEs with up to 250 employees, and especially with small independent retailers (up to 5 employees), is the ability to change jobs, which is almost impossible and over time leads to employee demotivation. This is followed by the problems of promotion and job security in these companies. Significant dissatisfaction can be seen in the readiness of the management of SMEs, which are often the owners of retail facilities, to invest significant financial resources in the implementation of modern technology that facilitates and accelerates the work of employees, such as IT equipment, RFID tags, Internet of Things, etc. The following graph shows a comparison of the ranks of SMEs and retail chains employees (Figure 1).

Statistically higher ranks are recorded by respondents working in retail chains. This means that employees who are employed in retail chains, unlike SMEs employees, are more satisfied and achieve more welfare in the workplace. As indicated earlier, the biggest differences between the average ratings of employees are reflected in job security, job rotation, promotion op-

portunities and the use of modern technology. Those are exactly the variables that the competent institutions, the employment policymakers, as well as the management of retail companies themselves have to focus on in order to ensure greater satisfaction in the SMEs group.

In this context, the following set of measures should be undertaken by the competent institutions and employment policymakers: 1) introduce subsidies and financial incentives for hiring new workers, primarily for micro SMEs; 2) introduce tax incentives and incentives for employment of the most vulnerable categories of the population (young people, persons with disabilities, etc.); 3) harmonize national legislation with EU legislation, and in particular with the European Union Directive 2017/C165/01 on working time (e.g. define precisely the working hours of retail stores, ban work on Sundays, reduce working hours, etc.); 4) certain employee benefits for night work, overtime work, working during holidays, etc. should be regulated by law 5) guarantee the security and health care of workers; 6) completely change the way in

Figure 1

Comparison of the ranks of socio-organizational variables between SMEs and retail chains
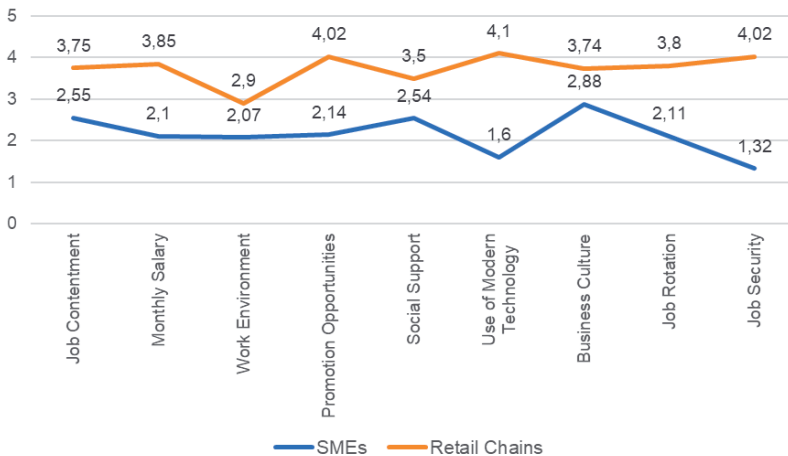
which employment is taxed by reducing the contribution rate for pension and disability insurance; 7) strengthen the legal protection of employees in terms of defining precisely the rights of workers and how workers with a fixed-time employment contract become full-time employees for an indefinite period of time; 8) increase the average cost of labour in the retail sector through the use of government subsidies, membership in EU funds, etc.

On the other hand, the management of retail companies itself has a responsibility and must take a whole range of measures such as 1) organizing education and training for employees; 2) promotion of a transparent reward system; 3) introduction of digitalization of business operations and processes with the support of national and EU funds; 4) clear standardization of all business activities; 5) precise job classification; 6) implementation of programs of professional practice and volunteer work for future workers; 7) increase the profitability of retail facilities through greater engagement, expertise and commitment of employees; 8) easier intra-company migration for employees; 9) guidance and care for workers' careers, etc.

Such a wide range of measures and incentives taken by the competent institutions, as well as the companies themselves, provides better working, living and promotion conditions, enables the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, a higher standard of living, better health care as well as a better and cleaner environment and respect for the rights of the individual, thereby ensuring overall employee welfare, thus partly eliminating or minimizing the reasons for labour migration from the Western Balkans region.

CONCLUSION

A key reason for employee welfare research comes from the fact that it is one of the most pressing issues that is gaining increasing attention in economic and sociological research. A satisfied and motivated worker is considered to be the human capital of a business that generates and creates profit. Given the large labour migration that has hit the Western Balkans in recent years, it is necessary to analyze the work conditions and employee welfare in all sectors of the economy, and especially in retail as the most extensive service activity measured by the number of employees.

The study confirmed the hypothesis that all socio-organizational variables have a statistically significant correlation with employee welfare. This means that the increase in satisfaction with any of the variables directly reflects the increase of employee welfare. The differences in correlation are particularly emphasized in the size of retail companies (up to 250 and over 250 employees), where employees in SMEs rank their satisfaction with job security, job rotation, promotion opportunity and the use of modern technology variables lower. Dissatisfaction with these indicators is especially evident in small-sized independent retailers, which have from one or two to five employees. In such economic entities, employees have almost no opportunity to change jobs, be promoted, get educated and use modern technology. There is no clearly defined organizational structure, redistribution of work tasks and responsibilities, and often the only decision-making model is the subjective assessment of the owner, which altogether directly jeopardizes employees' welfare.

Based on the results obtained, a whole set of measures, incentives and activities are proposed, which the competent institutions, employment policymakers and companies

themselves have to undertake in order to strengthen the socio-organizational variables, provide employee welfare and thus reduce the potential for labour migration to developed market economies.

The shortcomings of the research are reflected in testing being limited to employee welfare and to the Western Balkans retail sector. However, the objective reason for choosing such a sample structure is the author's familiarity with the way the retail sector operates in the Western Balkans region, his knowledge of the national and regional laws and regulations, as well as the availability of respondents. Also, the pre-offered socio-organizational variables in the questionnaire may be a disadvantage, which might have led to simplified conclusions. There are some other limitations of the research that need to be considered. Firstly, the sample used for this research included administrative and sales personnel. Instead, future research should perhaps focus on comparing the results obtained from the research of lower and higher levels of management employed by sectoral positions (e.g., merchandisers, logisticians, warehouse staff, etc.). Secondly, although this study considered a large number of socio-organizational variables, it can be argued that some other factors which affect employee welfare should be taken into account, such as job attractiveness, the emotional state of the individual, the subjective level of expectations in the workplace, susceptibility to burn-out, etc.

Future research should be directed towards comparing the results obtained from the retail sector with those of other services and/or production sectors, as well as towards extending the sample of research to the CEE region or EU countries. It is necessary to integrate a large number of sub-categories of socio-organizational variables into the research and to include employee demographic variables such as gender, age,

marital status, etc. This would complement the scientific and professional analysis of the importance of employee welfare.

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Sažetak

DOBROBIT ZAPOSLENIKA U SEKTORU MALOPRODAJE ZAPADNOG BALKANA: KAKO JE POBOLJŠATI KROZ SOCIO-ORGANIZACIJSKE VARIJABLE

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Posljednjih godina zemlje Zapadnog Balkana suočavaju se s egzodusom radne snage, što je složen socijalni problem. S obzirom da se većina zaposlenika bavi uslužnom djelatnošću, a posebno maloprodajnim sektorom, gdje radi oko 10% radno sposobnog stanovništva, potrebno je definirati pokazatelje koji otežavaju dobrobit zaposlenika i predložiti skup mjera za njihovo smanjivanje. S tim u vezi, cilj rada je identificiranje varijabli koje utječu na dobrobit zaposlenika u maloprodajnom sektoru Zapadnog Balkana, s posebnim naglaskom na razlike između malih i srednjih poduzeća i maloprodajnih lanaca. Empirijska studija provedena je na uzorku od 325 zaposlenika u trgovačkim poduzećima. Ispitana je povezanost između varijabli dobrobiti zaposlenika i socijalno-organizacijskih varijabli kao što su zadovoljstvo poslom, iznos mjesečne zarade, radno okruženje, mogućnost napredovanja, socijalna podrška, upotreba moderne tehnologije, poslovna kultura, rotacija posla i sigurnost posla. Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su značajnu povezanost socijalno-organizacijskih varijabli s dobrobiti zaposlenika. Razlike su posebno naglašene između malih i srednjih poduzeća i maloprodajnih lanaca. Na temelju dobivenih rezultata predložen je niz mjera i postupaka koje relevantne institucije i tvorci politike zapošljavanja moraju poduzeti kako bi se neutralizirale različitosti. U radu su izneseni prijedlozi budućih istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: dobrobit zaposlenika, socio-organizacijske varijable, zadovoljstvo poslom, uvjeti rada, maloprodaja, Zapadni Balkan.