

GENDER INEQUITY IN AN EUROPEAN UNION FLOODED WITH IMMIGRANTS

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Abstract. Gender inequality is a phenomenon that everyone denies on a declarative level, but which we all know exists. When we talk about gender discrimination, the females are the most affected, although in the European Union there are laws that offer equal opportunities to women and men. In an ever-changing landscape for Europe, it should not be forgotten that immigrants are subject to the same trends as the local population, but non-European women can negatively impact the statistics on efforts to mitigate this discrimination. This paper aims to analyse the phenomenon of gender inequality in the labour market. We consider analysing indicators such as: employment rate, salary level, type of employment (part-time / full-time), retention at work, number of worked hours, as well as ease of finding a job. This analyse is focused on the European Union, for the years 2015–2022. We are expecting a decreasing trend, but combined with the necessity to re-skill human resources for the jobs of the future.

Keywords: gender inequality, work force, employment, education, pay gap, labour market, immigrants.

JEL Classification: I38, J83, E24, J24, 015.

1. Introduction

Gender inequality is a social problem, dating back to ancient times, and is reflected in different treatments based on gender differences. This phenomenon is common on all continents and in all countries, but some communities are trying to alleviate these social disadvantages.

One of the most crucial challenges the European Union is facing today is the integration of non-European immigrants. The statistics show that the major flow of immigrants that Europe has to absorb comes from Africa (23%). In order to identify the best ways of integrating these people into European routines, foster countries need to understand the cultural heritage with which these people are loaded. According to UNICEF website, Africa is the geographical area where women experience the most serious violations of basic rights. In this part of the world, such discriminatory behaviour is considered normal because it is society that imposes this lifestyle based on religious principles and tribal traditions. From an early age, boys and girls are oriented towards developing specific skills. Boys

are taught how to work, survive and be independent within the community. Girls are taught household chores, they do not have the option of going to school, and family and children are their only responsibilities. Given that these immigrants have chosen to leave their countries of origin for reasons such as poverty and lack of opportunities, they will not be leaving Europe anytime soon, but on the contrary, many of them bring their extended family members with them. For sustainable action in the process of reducing gender discrimination that the European Community promotes, immigrants of African origin must understand and follow European principles. As measures, African women should take professional and language courses, become independent so that the jobs they try to get in Europe do not exploit their disadvantaged status.

For the European area, the phenomenon of gender inequalities is treated like an elephant in a room: we know it is there, but we act as if it does not exist. In 2021, the gender pay gap was about 12.7% (European Commission, 2021b). Although the trend is downward, the improvements are minimal and have taken decades to happen.

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We must understand that this phenomenon does not have an exclusively social impact on the European lifestyle, but also has an important economic impact. According to the opinion from 2023 of the World Economic Forum, the price we pay for tolerating gender discriminations is approximately 12 trillion \$ in global domestic production (GDP).

The European Community needs active policies to minimise this gender discrimination so that the situation of women improves economically, socially and politically. Without such unified integration packages, the risk of social exclusion is significant.

The aim of the research is to achieve two objectives:

- contextualizing gender gap phenomena and labour market crisis at the European level;
- creating a quantitative analysis based on relevant economic indicators such as: the educational level, the employment rate, the pay gap proportions or the work contract type.

To meet the first objective, the paper focuses on creating a descriptive panel of the severity of gender inequality in the European Union under the pressure of the labour market crisis coupled with economic difficulties and an upward trend in the number of non-EU immigrants. Throughout the paper, the risk of social exclusion of vulnerable groups will be highlighted and the importance of intensifying measures to reduce discrimination will be emphasized. The impact of the presence and encouragement of discrimination will be analysed using historical facts. Also in this part, it will provide strategies to minimise gender gaps for better integration in the labour market. The quantitative analysis underlines the negative impact of discrimination across Europe.

In order to provide a serious research, this paper is organized into 5 sections: the introduction, the literature review, the methodological approach, results and discussions regarding the quantitative analyses, and the conclusions section. The conclusion section presents the results of the two analyses, discusses the limitations of the research and outlines new research areas that can be developed in the future.

2. Literature review

Gender disparity is a long-standing and dangerous phenomenon that negatively impacts all sectors of a society. Even though the trend is steadily decreasing in the European Union, it still exists. In order to fully understand all the consequences of a failed management of the situation, the competent authorities of the European community can take the example of Africa: there the role of women was established long ago by religious traditions and is maintained by tribal society.

This paper examines the socio-economic aspects of gender segregation, such as access to education, educational and professional trajectories, labour market integration and working conditions.

Discussing an old situation, over time many economists and humanistic studies experts have investigated the problem of gender inequality, the causes that determine it, analysed the effects and wondered why it does not disappear being an anomaly for the new society of people who demand equality in all spheres of life.

Galbraith is an American economist who has devoted much of his time to researching inequality of all kinds. He starts from the assumption that inequality between women and men is universal (Galbraith, 2016) and has discovered the bias of women towards certain categories of professions, health and education. Thus, these jobs have become more feminised, lower paid, and the social status offered has suffered image prejudice. He also noted the correlation between the feminisation of a certain category of work, the passage of time and the erosion of the significance of a profession. He argues that there is an inversely correlation between women's tendency towards specific occupations and their economic importance.

To understand a phenomenon of today we have to look into the past. In the mid-1950s in the United States, women who chose to build a career were considered to ignore their status as housewives. From the historical literature, can extract the causes of discrimination against women:

- lower educational rates;
- lower workforce participation;
- legal discrimination;
- the appearance of “feminine” jobs;
- cultural stereotypes (women should be homemakers, women are less intelligent, women can not hold the power, women should raise children).

The strongest social demonstrations for reforming the status of women in society have taken place in the United States since the 1970s. The years have proven the value of women and their skills, but have not changed a biological truth: women become mothers. Many surveys in several countries have shown that the proportion of people who say women should have a full-time job when they become mothers is much lower than those who say the opposite.

Kleven et al. (2019) in their study “*Children and gender inequality: evidence from Denmark*” have demonstrated

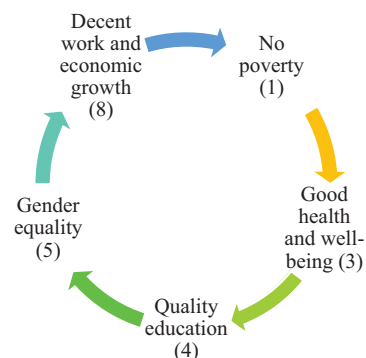


Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals related with gender discrimination (source: authors' own research based on United Nation web-site)

that when a child is born in a couple, the income of the partners decreases. Interestingly, while the man's income drops minimally, the woman's income collapses.

The gender inequality is a major problem around the world. In 2015, the United Nations developed an action plan, *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, with 17 goals for a better world.

Figure 1 shows 5 of the 17 United Nations goals, but they are related to discrimination. Gender equality is the goal no. 5, but improving this indicator can lead to achieving the most important objective: no poverty by 2030. They emphasized the foundational role of gender equality for a sustainable, prosperous and peaceful world.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) comes up with a new perspective for modern societies: current social problems occur predominantly in societies that allow discrepancies and inequalities to exist. The authors argue that in order to discourage unhealthy social habits, a community should experience a paradigm shift from selfish consumerism to communication and cooperation to improve the lives of rich and poor equally.

Aksoy et al. (2021) discovered a direct causal relationship between the advance of technology and robotization and the wage gap between woman and man. Their research strategy concluded that a 10% increase in robotization adds 1.8% of the gender pay gap. This happens because men who have average or above average qualifications benefit from the advantages of robotization by increasing their own labor productivity, while the same robotization occupies the jobs that required a lower qualification intended for women.

UNICEF focuses its efforts on fighting poverty and discrimination in the most disadvantaged parts of the world. In 2021, they have launched The Gender Action Plan (2022–2025): an agenda consisting in several programs based on previous studies, providing a series of recommendations that are being implemented. UNICEF proposes this plan as a shift in institutionalized strategy and integration of existing policies, practices and measurement mechanisms.

The World Economic Forum (2006) have created, in 2023, *The Global Gender Gap Report* and its purpose is to record gender differences. The benchmarks of this index are:

- economic participation and opportunity;
- educational attainment;
- health and survival;
- political empowerment.

It is important to mention that this report is the only one in the world that offers a visibility of data from 2006, without interruption, until today. This makes it an important tool in attempts to map the phenomenon of gender disparity as a whole or just parts of it.

The legislative framework in the European Union guarantees the same rights and educational opportunities for both boys and girls. However, the European Parliamentary Research Service (2015) study highlights the different trajectories between girls and boys based

on PISA results. Thus, although girls had better overall results than boys, boys manage to succeed in the long term due to their natural proclivity towards science and technology.

“*Equal pay for equal value*” is the concept underpinning the efforts of the European Union to regulate the labour rights in relation to the gender pay gap. At a declaratory level, the European Union has offered the same rights and freedoms to women and men since 1957, when this principle was stipulated in the European Treaties (art. 157 TFEU). In 2022, the European Commission has concluded that the countries with the largest gender gaps are to be found in Western European countries and that these are offset by marginal income distribution effects. The European Parliament (2023) is keeping a close eye on how EU Member States are trying to improve inequality between men and women. The wage gender pay gap creates the illusion that there is no income discrimination between the sexes, and the process of getting equal pay is often hindered and abandoned.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) have created in 2020 “The migrant pay gap: Understanding wage differences between migrants and nationals” report hoping to raise an alarm about the way immigrants are managed. Many migrant workers are in casual or poorly paid jobs, and concerns about violations of the principle of equal pay between migrant and native workers for work of equal value are genuine and growing. A possible crisis risks widening labor market disparities and inequalities between migrants and locals, for example in terms of access to jobs, types of work, working conditions or opportunities for skills development, which could in turn increase the pay gap between migrants and nationals, making life even more difficult for them. A large number of immigrants, especially women, work in essential fields and contribute significantly to the well-being of the community, particularly in the care and agricultural fields. However, research evidence shows that pay gaps are extremely high in these sectors. In some high-income countries, immigrant care workers earn more than a fifth less than local care workers, despite their efforts and relentless dedication and contributions to a sector that is at the heart of the humanity and prosperity of our societies.

Without a doubt, the process of women's empowerment is one of the greatest economic and social challenges of all time (OECD, 2024).

It is impossible to debate the challenges of the European labour market without mentioning the growing number of immigrants of non-EU origin. The European Commission (2021a) expressed concern about the integration of these citizens and launched a plan, “*The action plan on integration and inclusion for the period 2021–2027*”. This plan outlines the directions of action for a unified integration and is based on: equal opportunities, access on health and social services, education

and trainings. Notwithstanding the economic slowdown, overall growth in 2023 was a bit better than anticipated and labor markets showed surprising strength. On the back of strong employment growth, both the unemployment rate and the jobs deficit fell below pre-pandemic levels. The global jobs shortfall also improved in 2023 but, at nearly 435 million, remained high. In addition, in 2023, labor market participation rates largely rebounded from their pandemic minima, especially among low- and high-middle-income countries, albeit with large differences across labor market groups, which contributed to labor market mismatches, in particular in advanced societies (ILO, 2024).

CEDEFOP's report (2018) outlines the global labor market challenges in terms of labor supply and demand with a focus on the level of training that will be needed to secure a job in the future, by 2030. The analysis points to a growing need to integrate technology in as many fields of activity as possible, where communication and knowledge offer more autonomy at the price of physical or routine tasks.

The ultimate goal for the near future period is to achieve "a gender equal Europe". The *Gender Equality strategy 2020–2025* brings together the legislative framework with proposals for measures to ensure improvements in the phenomenon of discrimination against women. The most important actions target the labour market because the gender gap has widened there: women are socially and culturally forced to accept lower paid jobs, and positions that require a high degree of independence and leadership are allocated mostly to men.

3. Methodology

This is divided in two different parts: a qualitative analysis of specific literature, literature review, and a qualitative analysis based on the newest statistic data. Because this paper is focused on a comparative analysis between men and women and their integration on the local European labour market, I consider a mixed method review to be the most adequate methodological approach.

The qualitative analysis is centred on a substantial literature review, investigating academic work and official documents from public authorities and organizations. The last step of this analysis is to present the current image of the European Union labour market. Additionally, another detailed qualitative analysis is focused on the gender gap phenomenon. The research base is based on different academic resources from: JSTOR, Science Direct, Web of Science and different reports from the European Commission, International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Economic Forum.

The quantitative analysis represents the parallel presentation of specific macroeconomic indicators for two categories: men and women. It is crucial to mention the time period for the study: 2014–2022. This period was chosen to capture two major moments that required a paradigm shifts: 2014 when happened *The Refugee Crisis* and 2020: the year when *The Health Crisis* occurred

caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis is based on the transparency and consistency of the statistical data in order to issue objective opinions.

4. Results and discussions

We could only talk about a perfect world if gender inequalities were non-existent. Gender equality is the ideal social situation in which all individuals have the same rights, opportunities and privileges, regardless of gender.

Considering the entire history, women had to fight for equality. Even today, the proportion of women who own land is lower than the proportion of men who own land. Women are still paid less than men for doing the same work. Women have limited access to education and there is still the practice of underage marriage without consent. Knowing all this, it is understandable why the subject of gender equality has become a top priority for the United Nations. By minimizing this phenomenon, we are building a more sustainable world. Achieving gender equality is the responsibility of the local, national and International authorities and of all of us, as part of a community.

In order to understand the pressure that the phenomenon of gender discrimination causes on society as a whole, we must refer to the macroeconomic reality of the European Union. We are in the midst of a structural transformation that is having the greatest impact on the labour market in the European Union, which has not yet recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic. The year 2024 started with financial and economic difficulties for every European country: rising inflation, declining purchasing power of individuals, declining economic growth. The labour market is facing challenges from different sectors. The labour market has to integrate an increasing number of immigrants into a labour market where skill requirements have changed due to new trends in digitalisation and automation. Under these conditions, even European citizens, with higher education and continuous learning processes, have to make extra efforts to be considered indispensable human resources in the short term. All these transformations are accompanied by the process of transition to a green and digitised economy which is causing changes in social perception.

Half of the planet's population is made up of women: we can use this ratio as a benefit or turn it into a cost. Women have the ability to literally change the world. Women's integration into the labour market not only contributes to economic growth, but their skill set includes a wider variety of soft skills compared to men. Thus, work productivity is higher, diversity is encouraged, and decision-making is improved by women's more creative vision.

Figure 2 shows the pillars of gender gap analysis.

In the process of tackling gender differences, the International Institute for Management Development (2024) offers possible methods that can be implemented at company level to make companies a safe space for

women and men to work. A reform to minimize gender discrimination should include policies such as: development and mentorship programs, transparency, equal pay, flexible work agreements, addressing unconscious bias and zero tolerance for discrimination policy.

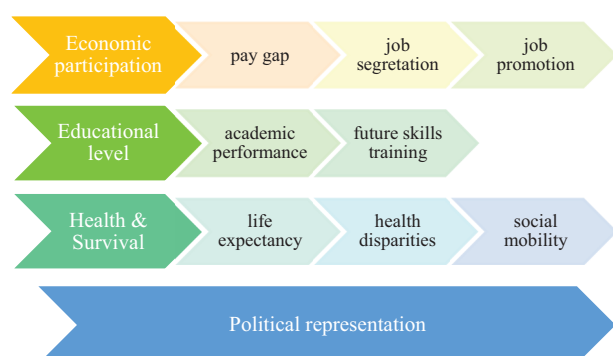


Figure 2. Pillars of gender gap (source: author's own research)

This paper focuses on documenting the phenomenon of gender inequality by analyzing the latest statistical data regarding labour market integration (pillar 1. Economic participation) and educational attainment (pillar 2. Educational level).

4.1. Economic participation

Mainstream wage gap theory illustrates negative discrimination against women who earn less than men for similar tasks. According to Eurostat data, the pay gap was 12.7% in 2022a. In reality, this means that women earn 13% less per hour than men.

In the 2022 labor market, 80% of the available male human resource took a job, while the employment ratio of women was 69.3%, the percentage difference being 10.7%.

According with the Eurostat calculation methodology, the gender pay gap is calculated as the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male and female employees as % of male gross earnings.

Figure 3 shows the extremes: Estonia recorded the largest pay gap (20.5%) and Luxembourg is at the opposite pole with -0.2% , so women are favoured, to a small extent, compared to men.

Using the same figure, it is worth noting the inability to create clusters: countries in similar regions recorded significant percentage differences between them. For example, from the Baltic countries category, the percentage point difference between Estonia (20.5%) and Latvia (14.6%) is 5.9 percentage points, and Lithuania ranked best of all, with 12%. Looking at the Nordic countries with the highest living standards, Sweden had the lowest wage gap (11.2%), while Finland had the highest of the three countries (16.5%). Denmark had 14.2%.

The same situation of alignment between similar countries is observed for the former communist countries: Romania has the lowest value of all (3.6%) and the second value at European level, Poland recorded 4.5%, Bulgaria 12.2%, Hungary 17.3%.

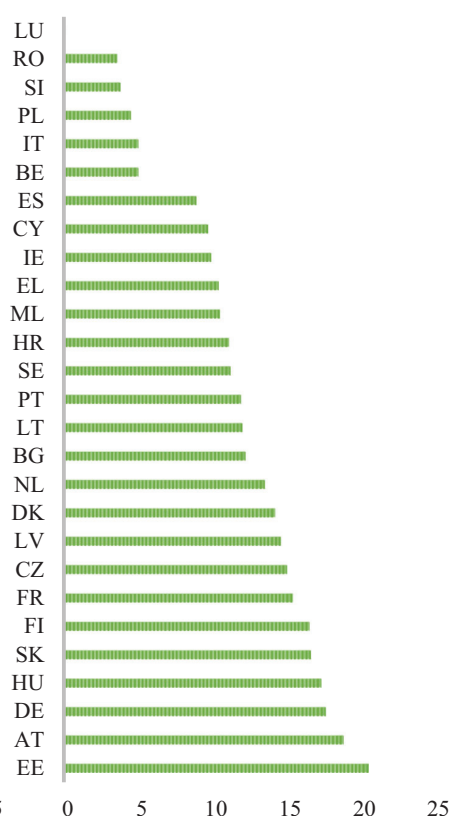


Figure 3. Gender pay gap across European Union (source: authors' own research based on Eurostat data base, 2022a)

Table 1. The gender pay gap by economic activity (%) across the European Union (source: author's own research based on Eurostat data base, 2022b)

Country	Food sector	Science and technical activities	Financial and insurance activities	IT&C
Belgium	2.5	4.7	6.9	11
Bulgaria	9.6	13.6	30.2	19.9
Czechia	6.8	21.7	37.9	28.6
Denmark	4.8	16.7	15.2	15.8
Germany	8.7	26.6	26.9	22.4
Estonia	16.5	18.2	33.3	25.6
Ireland	:	:	:	:
Greece	:	:	:	:
Spain	5.3	16.8	12	6.6
France	7	20.9	30.6	14.4
Croatia	14	15.6	23.5	14.1
Italy	8	24	23.3	15
Cyprus	15.3	29	22.1	16.7
Latvia	19.5	28.3	28.9	34
Lithuania	13.2	16.6	31.8	28.4
Luxembourg	14.3	20.9	19.4	14.8
Hungary	10.0	21.2	34.8	26.3
Malta	8.1	22.3	24.1	17
Netherlands	11.8	18.1	23.4	14.6
Austria	4.9	25.2	27.1	19.2

End of Table 1

Country	Food sector	Science and technical activities	Financial and insurance activities	IT&C
Poland	12.8	17.7	27.6	24.8
Portugal	12.3	16.6	20.3	16.6
Romania	4.2	-1.5	29.7	20.1
Slovenia	5.1	15.8	24.2	20.6
Slovakia	10.6	14.0	29.9	26.3
Finland	9.1	13.6	26.3	11.2
Sweden	7.2	11.9	23.5	12.2

The participation of woman on the labour market is often conditionate by the segregation of available jobs. Job segregation is defined as the disproportionate allocation of human resources between men and women. Thus, women are steered into lower paid jobs that do not require substantial training, as they are repetitive and routine activities. Sectors where women are, historically, more represented include: food, cleaning and clerical work.

Based on Table 1, several trends can be observed:

- four economic sectors have been chosen where the phenomenon of disproportionate wages is at its extremes: the food sector shows the smallest discrepancies, being also the sector where the number of women employed is higher than that of men. Conversely, the financial sector shows the most gender discrimination (Czech Republic – 37.9%).
- apart from the food sector, the other three sectors are made up of areas with high potential for future economic growth. The presence of large pay discrepancies underscore another way in which employers manifest discriminatory practices: job promotion.
- Romania is the only country that recorded a positive discrimination for females in science and technology (-1.5%) and this is explained by a lack of human resources. However, Romania ranks 8th in Europe with the highest wage gap for the financial sector (29.7%). This trend can be attributed to the lack of representation of women in managerial or administrative positions.
- the IT and technology sector also shows large discrepancies in wages, with the highest proportions in Latvia (34%), Czechia (28.6%), Lithuania (28.4%), Hungary (26.3%) and Estonia (25.6%). The other countries also show notable gaps, except for Spain (6.6%) and Belgium (11%).
- Ireland and Greece are the only countries that have not reported data for this indicator, but this does not mean that there is no gender discrimination there, only that they do not have the necessary tools or interest in measuring the phenomenon.

4.2. Educational level

Education is the brain of a healthy society. An educated population makes essential contributions to economic

growth, improving all sectors from health to technology. On a personal level, investing in education and knowledge enhances cognitive and non-cognitive skills, gives people growth prospects and improves productivity. On the social level, education substantially reduces the risk of social exclusion, prepares human resources for integration into the labour market and for confronting difficult situations.

In the European Union, the right and access to education is virtually equally distributed for the whole population. However, statistical data shows a gender inequality because women are susceptible to low-paid jobs, prolonged unemployment and a higher risk of social exclusion.

Figure 4 shows the educational attainment of European citizens, in 2021, and should be interpreted as follows:

- Level 0–2: no education, primary and lower secondary education;
- Level 3–4: upper secondary education and post – secondary education;
- Level 5–8: tertiary education (academic degree).

The higher educational attainment of women should also be correlated with PISA test results showing differences between girls and boys in reading, mathematics and science. Thus girls are more successful in reading and boys in mathematics and science studies show no relevant differences.

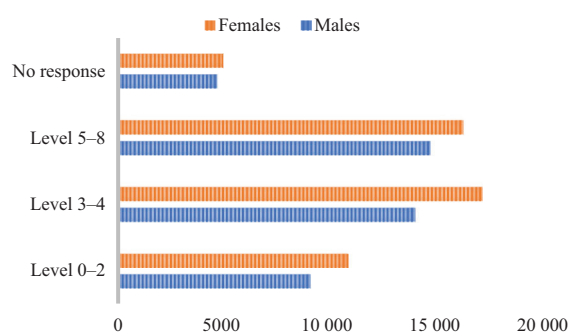


Figure 4. Educational attainment level in European Union (source: author's own research based on Eurostat data base, 2022c)

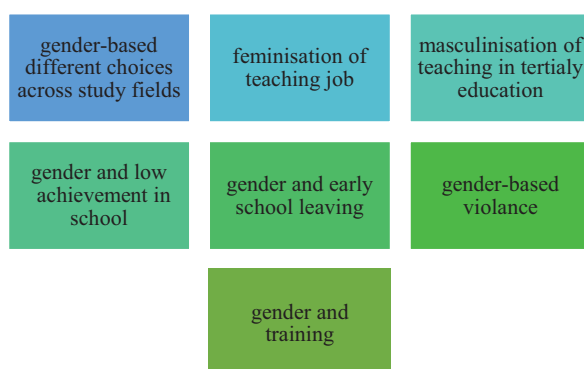


Figure 5. Factors that exacerbate gender inequality (source: author's own research based on European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017)

This tendency of girls towards the humanities also guides them when choosing higher education and professions. This creates stereotypes in the act of education and, in the long term, leads to the feminisation of certain professions, reducing the pay scale for them, thus decreasing the prestige of the field. For example, the feminisation of education may lead to a change in the pay scale, with men switching to other fields and the quality of education decreasing.

The quality of education is an important factor fighting to reduce gender discrimination. Figure 5 brings together a number of stereotypes identified during the educational journey. These social biases cause labour market segregation based on educational choices, limit the diversity of career options for women, and ultimately force women to choose lower value and lower paid careers.

5. Conclusions

For all countries belonging to the civilized world, the gender inequity, although it exists, it does not make sense on any level. Minimizing the role of women, the quality of life is getting worse. Accepting and not doing anything to improve the situation, we are accepting, as well, to let millions of woman, men and children to live in poverty, without the change to live is a fair world, with the same human rights. The society expects women to fulfil certain roles and have certain social behaviour, everything based on traditions, beliefs and religion. The society is shaping the gender norms.

This research paper is focused on contextualizing the phenomenon of gender discrimination on the labour market for the European Union. Even if the European countries are developed countries, they must comply with common rule and action plans. Even following this legislation constraints, gender discrimination is not a minor situation. The pay gap between men and woman is 12% in 2022, women have more economic and social difficulties compared to men. The good news is that the trend is decreasing.

Discussing about labour market integration, we can observe a similar educational and professional pathway men and women. This is happening until the age between 25 and 35 years when women decide to get married and having children. In parallel, during this period, men experience career growth and advance in the job hierarchy.

Because the entire European Union is facing a labour market crisis and has to deal with many economic difficulties, we can find, investigate and exploit new research areas that can improve our knowledge about the human resources, the future of work, the future new crisis. From this starting point, we can identify new correlations that need a long term tracking in order to understand a phenomenon or a behaviour. For example, we can establish correlation between gender pay gap and poverty rate, between gender pay gap and educational level, between gender pay gap and natality and so on.

Researching for this paper, we are able to consider to types of limitations:

- the quality of statistical data: we have identified certain European countries that do not have all the necessary tools to quantify some social and/or economic events (employment rate, educational level, types of contract, worked hours).
- inability to have a unified view of the phenomenon for the entire European Union. In order to fully understand the consequences of gender differences, we should start analyse each country, field by field, and for each age group.

This paper is important considering at least two perspectives. Firstly, like any other social phenomenon, gender inequity can worsen the situation for the vulnerable people, the women in our case. Promoting the good quality of life and high living standards, a such discriminatory behaviour should be unacceptable to the European countries. Secondly, the European community is facing a labour market crisis and we should find efficient ways, as soon as possible, to integrate men and women on a changing labour market who is accommodating new trends like: the green economy transition, digitalisation and automation. Women have to work, they need to work, their skills are, at least, as valuable as men's and an equal pay for the same is mandatory. The European authorities must take the appropriate measures to ensure that the employers offer the same opportunities, responsibilities and pay for women and men in their companies. The equal respect of human rights is a must, not an option.

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