

GENDER GAPS IN THE LABOR MARKET IN EU MEMBER STATES. EVOLUTIONS AND DIRECTIONS

Nicoleta MIHĂILĂ

Scientific researcher III, PhD, Center for Financial and
Monetary Research "Victor Slăvescu", Romanian Academy, ROMANIA
E-mail: nicoleta.mihaila@icfm.ro
ORCID: 0009-0009-4791-8656

Abstract: *The aim of the paper is to present a comparative analysis of gender inequalities in the labor market in the EU member states, namely the employment rate of women and men in the labor market, the time allocated to unpaid domestic work and the wage differences, as well as the directions/perspectives pursued by these states to improve these gaps. In this sense, we use a methodology of both descriptive and empirical type, by referring to bibliographic resources from the specialized literature, as well as statistical data provided by the relevant institutions (Eurostat, European Institute for Gender Equality, World Economic Forum).*

Keywords: *Labor market, gender pay gap, gender employment gap, time allocated to domestic work, legislative regulations (labor and fiscal measures).*

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1. Introduction

Promoting equality between women and men is a task of the European Union in all its activities, as provided for in the Treaties; gender equality is a core value, a fundamental right and a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights [1]. It is a value that represents us and, at the same time, an essential condition for an innovative, competitive and prosperous European economy. Gender equality creates jobs and generates increased productivity, a potential that must be harnessed at a time when we are preparing for the transition to a green economy and the digital transition and when we have to face demographic challenges.

According to the Draft Council Conclusions on the Joint Employment Report 2025 [2], in 2023 the EU employment rate reached 75,3% (up by 0,7 percentage points compared to 2022, 80,4% for men and 70,2% for women), and the EU unemployment rate reached a level of 6,1% (down by 0,1 percentage points compared to 2022, 5,8% for men and 6,4% for women). It should be noted that around 90% of the employment growth in 2023 resulted from an expansion of the employment force, including a further reduction of the gender gap in employment to 10,2 percentage points.

It should be noted that labour and skills shortages have increased significantly in most Member States over the last decade and that, despite a moderate decrease in 2024, they remain a major obstacle to productivity and economic growth. It is also necessary to consider significant improvements in working conditions in certain sectors, given the current situation on the labour market of underrepresented groups, namely women, older workers, young people, people with disabilities, low-skilled people and third-country nationals, and that significant regional disparities persist within Member States.

In the paper, we realize a comparative analysis of gender inequalities on the labour market in EU Member States in the post-pandemic period, namely the employment rate of women and men on the labour market, the time allocated to unpaid domestic work and the

wage gap, as well as the directions/perspectives pursued by these states to improve these gaps. In this sense, we use a methodology of both descriptive and empirical type, by using bibliographic resources from the specialized literature, as well as statistical data provided by relevant institutions (Eurostat, European Institute for Gender Equality).

2. Methodology

As mentioned above, in this paper, we use an empirical and descriptive methodology to analyze gender inequalities at the European Union level. The indicators we consider are the employment rate of women and men on the labour market (employment rates age 20–64), the time allocated to unpaid domestic work and the wage gap (remuneration between women and men) and we also take into consideration some factors that influence this gap, for example the relevance of having children, which seems to be important in the tendency of women to work part-time.

The statistical data used in the paper (empirical analysis) aimed to determine some developments and comparative situations regarding gender inequalities on the labor market during the period 2014-2023 at the level of the European Union. More precisely, the employment rates and the highlighting of the year 2023 were taken from the EU Gender Equality Report, for the period 2014-2023, respectively from the latest report prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality, The Gender Equality Index 2024. Eurostat is the main source of data regarding the gender pay gap during the period 2022-2023; as for the reference period, we considered the years 2014-2023, with an emphasis on the last years, 2022-2023, in order to highlight the dynamics of the analyzed indicators.

3. Analysis of gender inequalities in the labor market

According to the EU Gender Equality Report [3], the year 2024 showed encouraging economic trends for gender equality. The latest available data, for 2023, showed that female employment in the EU exceeded the 70% threshold for the first time, a development that occurred on the background of an overall increase in the EU employment rate to 75,3%. In addition, while the growth rate for women was lower than in the previous two years, it outpaced growth for men, resulting in the lowest employment gender gap in the last decade of 10,2 pp (-0,5 pp from 2023). This development is in line with a long-term trend since 2009, although with marked differences between countries.

According to the report, in all Member States, employment rates are higher for men than for women. As a general pattern, the lower the female employment rate in a country, the wider the gender gap. In 2023, the male employment rate was 80,4% in the EU, while for women it was 70,2%, resulting in a gender employment gap of 10,2 pp.

Gender gaps in employment vary greatly across countries and regions in the EU. As part of its commitment to promoting inclusive employment, the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights set the target of achieving an overall increase in employment in the EU to 78% by 2030, which seems achievable, given that in 2023, the EU employment rate for people aged 20-64 was 75,3%.

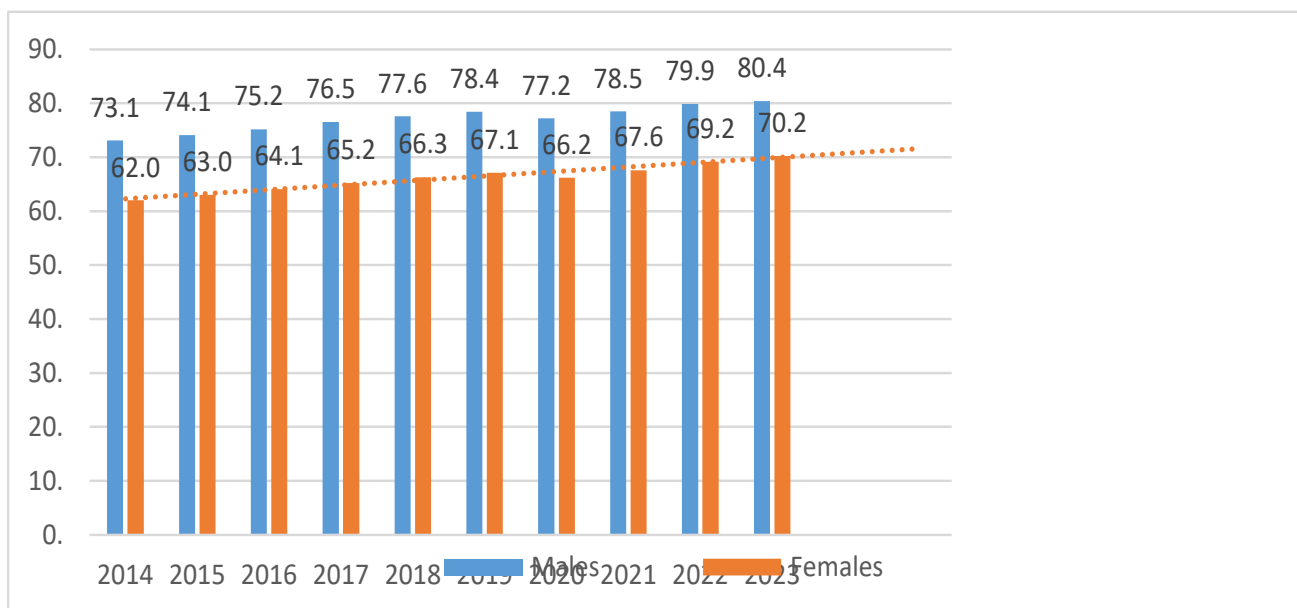


Figure 1. Employment rates age 20–64 by sex in 2014-2023

Source: European Commission, <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality>

As a result, in 2023, seven EU Member States (Spain, Poland, the Czech Republic, Malta, Romania, Italy and Greece) had employment gaps wider than the gap for the EU as a whole. In Italy, Greece and Romania, female employment rates were particularly low, below 60% (56,5%, 57,6% and 59,1% respectively), compared to those for men (76,0%, 77,4% and 78,2% respectively).

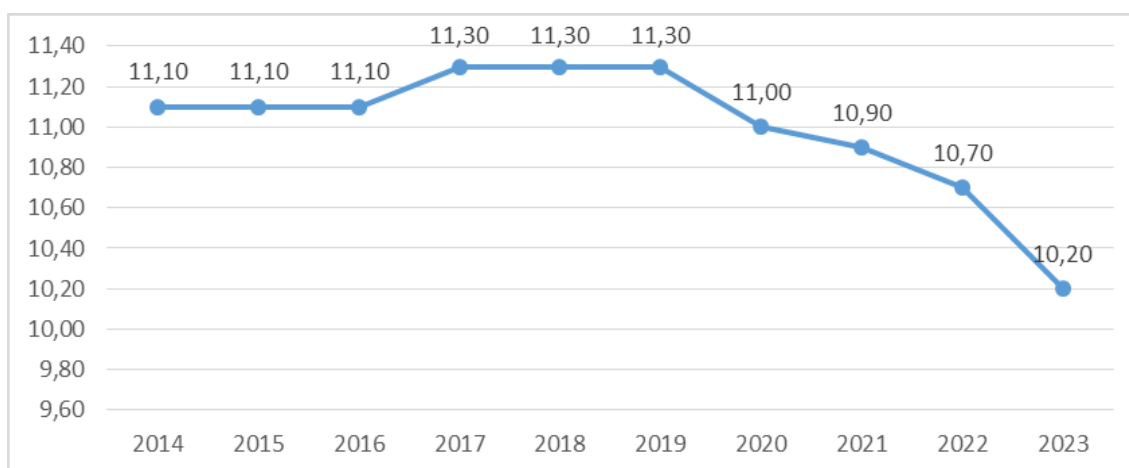


Figure 2. Gender employment gap in EU in the period 2014- 2023

Source: European Commission, <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality>

We observe an increasing trend in women's employment in the years 2014- 2024, compared to a decreasing trend for men. The most significant increase is recorded in 2022, + 1,6 pp compared to the previous year, for women's employment. As for the gap (Figure

2), it decreases in the mentioned period, the reduction starting from 2019, and in 2023 it registered a decrease of 0,5 pp.

The narrowing of the gender employment gap in most countries since 2010 reflects an increase in overall employment rates, with male employment growing less than that of women. In Malta, employment for women has increased by over 32 pp in 13 years, although the gender employment gap remains high. This change has been supported by policy measures to attract more women to the labour market, such as tax and national insurance exemptions for years of childcare, training programmes, free childcare and free school transport.

There are *significant differences in the gender employment gap* between EU regions and these are persistent over time, as shown by the data of the EIGE report, Gender Equality Index 2024 [4]. In the less developed regions of the EU, the gender gap in employment in 2022 (16 pp) was about double that in the more developed (8 pp) and transition regions (9 pp). The gap was much higher in the southern Member States (15 pp) than in the north-western (7 pp) and eastern ones (12 pp). It was more than 20 pp in all regions of Greece, southern Italy and eastern regions of Romania. The employment rate of women increased compared to that of men in the more developed and transition regions between 2013 and 2022, as well as in the north-western Member States. By contrast, it decreased in the less developed regions and in the southern countries, where employment rates are lower and high-quality and affordable childcare is lacking.

The gender employment gap varies widely by age group: among young people aged 15-24, the gap continues to be the smallest, at 4,3 pp in 2023. In some countries, it was even negative, meaning that the employment rate was higher among young women than among young men (Ireland, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland and Estonia). It is worth noting, however, that there are marked differences between countries in the employment rate of women in this age group, ranging from 76,2% in the Netherlands to 13,7% in Romania.

For people aged 20-24, it increases to 6,3 pp and reaches 12,1 pp for *the 55-64 age group*, with large differences between countries. This is driven by the increase in the average working life expectancy for men in the EU: with 39,0 years of expected working life expectancy for men and 34,7 years for women, the gender gap was 4,3 years in 2023, largely due to a higher share of informal care responsibilities, which affected women more than men.

At the same time, the gender gap in the effective retirement age has narrowed substantially over the past decade, with the effective retirement age increasing in most countries between 2014 and 2023 for both sexes. Overall, the effective retirement age for women increased more than for men in 18 countries (BE, CY, CZ, DK, EE, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, RO, SE, SI, SK). Seven countries have lower retirement ages for women than for men (AT, BG, CZ, HR, PL, RO, SK).

These gender differences are even greater for people with children; in 2023, at EU level, the employment rate for women aged 25-54 with children was 74,9%, compared to 91,9% for men with children. The gender employment gap thus reached 17,0 pp among those with children, while it stood at 4 pp among those without children.

The gender gap in employment is also larger in full-time equivalent (FTE) employment, as the share of part-time work is much higher among women than men (27,9% compared to 7,7% in 2023). The gender gap in part-time employment has remained stable in recent years (20,6 pp in 2021 and 20,2 pp in 2022). In 2023, the largest gender gaps in part-time employment were recorded in the Netherlands (42,3 pp), Austria (41,8 pp), Germany (36,9 pp) and Belgium (27,4 pp).

Regarding *the incidence of part-time work*, in 2023, 17,1% of employed people in the EU were part-time workers. In 2023, the growth rate of part-time employment (+2,0%) exceeded that of full-time employment (+0,8%) for the first time in a decade. However, the overall share of part-time work is gradually decreasing.

The reasons reported by part-time workers aged 25-64 for arranging their working time show which factors influenced this choice: for women, caring for disabled adults or children is the most relevant (29,5% of part-time women versus 8,2% of part-time men); for men, they cannot find a full-time job (18,1% of women versus 27,5% of men).

The relevance of having children appears to be a factor in the tendency to work part-time depending on the number of children of *people aged 25-54*: almost a third (31,8%) of employed women with children in the EU worked part-time in 2023, compared to 5,0% of men, with the highest shares in Austria (69,2%), the Netherlands (69,2%), the Netherlands (69,2%), the Netherlands (47,9%). This share is higher than among women without children at all educational levels. Similar to what happens for full-time work, the situation is the opposite for men: the share of part-time men with children was lower than the share of those without children for all educational levels. In most countries, the impact of parenthood is reflected in both women's employment rate and the share of part-time employment among women – Germany, Austria and Italy combining a high impact on both employment rate and working hours.

Therefore, in most countries, *having children has an impact on women's employment rates and their propensity to work part-time compared to men*.

In addition, national tax systems can discourage the labour market participation of second earners, who are predominantly women. For example, joint taxation reduces the incentives of second earners to work or extend their working hours (for example, by moving from part-time to full-time work). In 2023, the largest “inactivity traps” were observed in Lithuania, Slovenia, Denmark, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany.

Most EU countries have developed specific strategies or projects to encourage equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, allowing women to participate in employment on a more equal basis compared to men, as salaried employees or as entrepreneurs.

The availability of flexible working arrangements can encourage such increased participation of women with care responsibilities, as it allows them to better combine private and professional life. During the pandemic, flexible working measures were implemented to prevent mass unemployment, with many employers continuing these practices to some extent. Also, to enable parents and people with care responsibilities to better balance their work and family life and to encourage a better sharing of care responsibilities, paid paternity leave, enhanced parental leave, carers' leave and the extension of the right to request flexible working arrangements were introduced.

4. Inequalities regarding remuneration between women and men

We refer to the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women, expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of men; the difference varies significantly across EU countries, according to Eurostat [5]. Specifically, in 2023, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 12,0% lower than men's in the European Union (EU), and the gender pay gap ranged by 20,0 pp, from -0,9% in Luxembourg to 19,0% in Latvia (Figure 3).

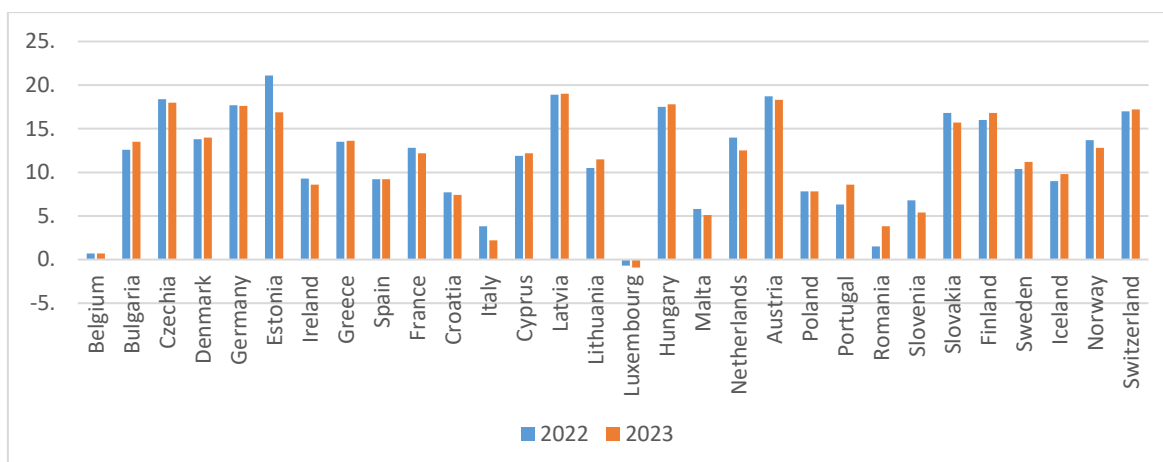


Figure 3. Gender pay gap in EU in 2022 and 2023

source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics

If we consider *the perspective of part-time or full-time employment* (Figure 4), in 2023 the gender pay gap for part-time workers varied from -6,0% in Bulgaria to 27,3% in Slovenia. A negative gender pay gap means that, on average, women's gross hourly earnings are higher than those of men. This is often due to a selection bias, especially when the employment rate is lower for women than for men: women entering the labour market may have comparatively higher levels of skills and education than men. For full-time workers, the pay gap also varied widely across EU countries, from -8,1% in Belgium to 20,7% in Latvia.

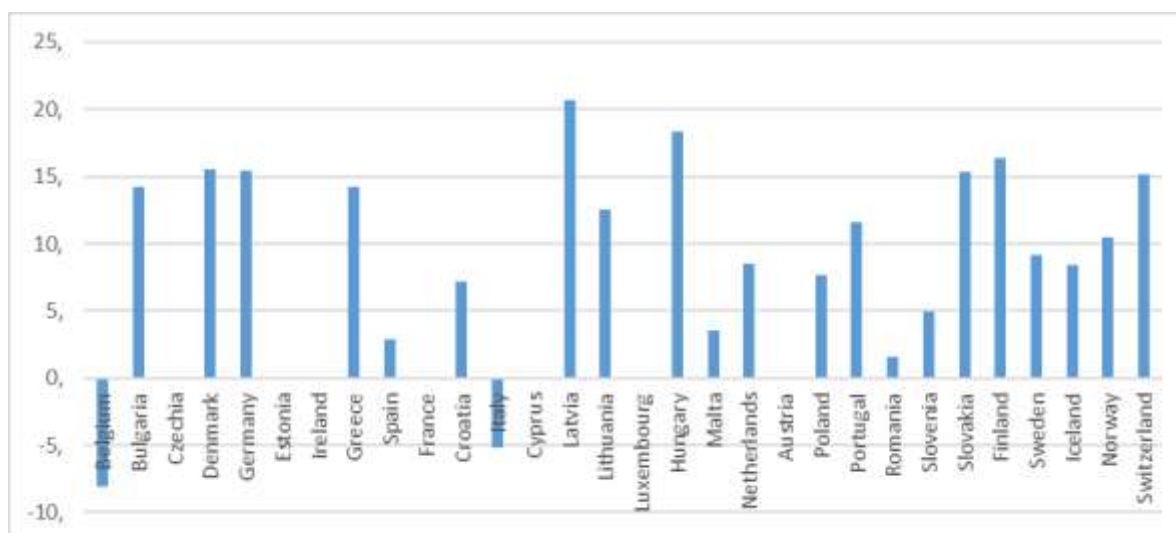


Figure 4. Gender pay gap in 2023 in EU by working time

Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics

The gender pay gap is generally much smaller for new entrants to the labour market and tends to widen with age. However, these age-related differences may have different patterns across EU countries. The gender pay gap could increase with age as a result of the career breaks that women may experience during their working lives.

Table 1 shows the full-time employment (FTE) rates for women and men in the EU for 2023; we note that the largest differences are recorded in Italy, Greece, Austria,

Romania, Malta, Czech Republic, with values significantly higher than the EU average (14,9 points), and the smallest values in Lithuania, Sweden, Finland.

Table 1. FTE employment and Duration of working life in EU, 2023

Member states	FTE employment (aged 15–89)				Duration of working life (years)			
	Women	Men	Total	Gap	Women	Men	Total	Gap
EU	43.5	58.4	50.6	– 14.9	34.2	38.6	36.5	– 4.4
BE	42.1	54.4	47.9	– 12.3	32.7	36.2	34.5	– 3.5
BG	48.6	60.9	54.4	– 12.3	32.3	34.8	33.6	– 2.5
CZ	49.0	66.3	57.4	– 17.3	33.3	39.3	36.4	– 6.0
DK	50.4	60.1	55.0	– 9.7	39.4	42.4	41.0	– 3.0
DE	43.6	60.8	51.8	– 17.2	37.4	41.2	39.3	– 3.8
EE	55.4	66.8	60.7	– 11.4	40.7	39.9	40.3	0.8
IE	49.3	63.9	56.2	– 14.6	36.3	42.3	39.4	– 6.0
EL	36.2	56.0	45.7	– 19.8	30.3	37.3	33.9	– 7.0
ES	42.5	56.6	49.3	– 14.1	34.1	37.8	36.0	– 3.7
FR	45.2	54.5	49.5	– 9.3	35.2	37.9	36.6	– 2.7
HR	42.4	54.4	48.1	– 12.0	32.1	35.7	34.0	– 3.6
IT	32.3	52.4	41.8	– 20.1	27.6	36.5	32.2	– 8.9
CY	52.1	64.5	58.0	– 12.4	35.4	41.7	38.7	– 6.3
LV	52.5	63.3	57.4	– 10.8	36.6	36.6	36.6	0.0
LT	56.1	64.6	60.0	– 8.5	38.1	36.5	37.3	1.6
LU	51.7	62.4	56.9	– 10.7	33.2	36.2	34.7	– 3.0
HU	50.9	64.8	57.5	– 13.9	34.4	37.9	36.2	– 3.5
MT	51.3	68.9	60.4	– 17.6	34.8	41.6	38.4	– 6.8
NL	46.5	62.6	53.8	– 16.1	41.1	45.1	43.2	– 4.0
AT	42.6	60.7	51.2	– 18.1	36.2	40.3	38.3	– 4.1
PL	47.4	63.1	54.8	– 15.7	32.2	36.8	34.6	– 4.6
PT	51.6	61.1	56.0	– 9.5	37.4	39.4	38.4	– 2.0
RO	40.0	57.9	48.7	– 17.9	28.0	34.9	31.5	– 6.9
SI	49.5	60.4	54.9	– 10.9	35.5	37.9	36.7	– 2.4
SK	52.5	64.1	58.1	– 11.6	33.8	36.4	35.2	– 2.6
FI	49.6	56.8	53.0	– 7.2	39.7	40.1	39.9	– 0.4
SE	54.0	62.6	58.2	– 8.6	41.4	43.8	42.6	– 2.4

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, <https://eige.europa.eu>

Family composition, age, education, migration status and ability contribute to the employment gap between women and men. FTE employment rates for women range from 3% for those aged 65+ to 70% for those aged 25- 49. In contrast, the lowest FTE employment rate for men is 6% for those aged 65+ and the highest is 92% for men in couples with children. Fewer women than men work full-time, especially in couples with children. This gap is significantly larger than the FTE employment gap for the general population, of 14 pp.

Other substantial gaps include a 24 pp gap between single women and men and a 22 pp gap between foreign-born women and men. People with low educational qualifications face both a large gap in FTE employment (20 pp) and low full-time employment rates for both women and men, of 18% and 38% respectively.

Table 2 presents the average monthly earnings and net earnings for women and men. We note that significant gaps, in the case of average monthly earnings, are in Denmark and Germany, Austria, France, and the smallest are in Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Romania (the difference between women's vs. men's earnings is 50 pps, the lowest level). Regarding Mean equivalised net income, significant differences are in Lithuania, Latvia, Luxembourg, and the smallest in Romania, Slovakia, Portugal.

Table 2 Mean monthly earnings and Mean equivalised net income in EU, 2023

Member State	Financial resources							
	Mean monthly earnings (PPS, working population)				Mean equivalised net income (PPS, aged 16+)			
	Women	Men	Total	Gap	women	Men	Total	Gap
EU	2 321	2 818	2 581	– 497	20 859	21 967	21 395	– 1 108
BE	2 778	3 075	2 927	– 297	25 684	26 778	26 220	– 1 094
BG	1 078	1 256	1 168	– 178	11 916	12 924	12 399	– 1 008
CZ	1 463	1 845	1 669	– 382	16 629	17 914	17 254	– 1 285
DK	2 868	3 479	3 160	– 611	25 770	26 689	26 223	– 919
DE	2 765	3 461	3 135	– 696	26 209	27 383	26 784	– 1 174
EE	1 461	1 896	1 653	– 435	18 653	19 688	19 136	– 1 035
IE	2 597	3 084	2 833	– 487	22 825	23 991	23 400	– 1 166
EL	1 524	1 802	1 672	– 278	12 272	12 643	12 451	– 371
ES	1 961	2 290	2 135	– 329	19 581	20 378	19 969	– 797
FR	2 282	2 798	2 548	– 516	23 155	24 630	23 859	– 1 475
HR	1 572	1 783	1 681	– 211	13 109	13 875	13 474	– 766
IT	2 201	2 620	2 435	– 419	20 946	22 204	21 554	– 1 258
CY	1 941	2 303	2 123	– 362	22 635	23 456	23 031	– 821
LV	1 349	1 697	1 514	– 348	14 124	15 847	14 897	– 1 723
LT	1 316	1 549	1 427	– 233	16 637	18 553	17 512	– 1 916
LU	3 497	3 625	3 576	– 128	36 469	38 318	37 415	– 1 849
HU	1 408	1 677	1 546	– 269	11 183	11 943	11 542	– 760
MT	2 238	2 662	2 475	– 424	24 133	24 744	24 451	– 611
NL	2 374	2 938	2 663	– 564	26 577	27 816	27 190	– 1 239
AT	2 343	3 018	2 738	– 675	27 838	28 969	28 391	– 1 131
PL	1 677	2 018	1 855	– 341	16 368	16 898	16 622	– 530
PT	1 367	1 541	1 452	– 174	14 654	15 027	14 829	– 373
RO	1 732	1 782	1 758	– 50	11 217	11 455	11 332	– 238
SI	1 847	2 084	1 972	– 237	19 883	20 449	20 167	– 566
SK	1 285	1 628	1 461	– 343	10 284	10 517	10 397	– 233
FI	2 419	2 953	2 667	– 534	22 847	24 147	23 484	– 1 300
SE	2 628	3 024	2 822	– 396	22 102	23 276	22 690	– 1 174

Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, <https://eige.europa.eu>

At EU level, key actions under the 2020-2025 *Gender Equality Strategy* [6] concern ensuring equal opportunities and fair treatment for both women and men in the labour market, such as employment conditions and career progression. New EU initiatives on pay transparency adopted in 2023 under the Pay Transparency Directive give employees the right to request information on their individual and average pay levels, broken down by gender. Employers are also required to publicly report data on the average

pay gap between female and male employees. These directives aim to create a fairer labour market and contribute to the wider objective of gender equality in the EU.

5. Measures to reduce gender disparities in the labor market

Increasing women's participation in the labour market has a strong positive impact on the economy, especially in the context of shrinking labour force and skills shortages. It also enables women to lead their own lives, play a role in public life and be economically independent.

In the EU, the employment rate among women is currently higher than ever before, but many women still face obstacles when it comes to entering and remaining in the labour market. Some women are structurally underrepresented in the labour market, often due to the intersection of gender and additional aspects that make them vulnerable or marginalised, such as belonging to an ethnic or religious minority or having a migrant background.

As mentioned in the 2020-2025 strategy, *improving work-life balance* is one way to close gender gaps in the labour market. The Work-Life Balance Directive introduces minimum standards on family leave and flexible working arrangements for workers, while promoting the fair sharing of caring responsibilities between parents.

Another necessary measure is *to ensure equal participation of women and men in different sectors of the economy*. Although there are more women with university degrees in Europe, they remain underrepresented in the better-paid professions. More women than men are employed and work in low-paid sectors and in lower-level positions. Factors that contribute to this include discriminatory social norms and stereotypes regarding women's and men's skills and the undervaluation of women's work.

To eliminate the gender pay gap, it is necessary to address all the root causes of this phenomenon, including women's lower participation in the labour market, invisible and unpaid work, the wider use of part-time work and career breaks, as well as horizontal segregation based on gender stereotypes and discrimination. When information on pay levels is available, it is easier to detect gaps and discrimination. Because of the lack of transparency, many women do not know or cannot prove that they are at a wage disadvantage.

Such an initiative will strengthen employees' rights to obtain more information on pay levels, although it may increase the administrative burden for employers. The Commission has carried out an in-depth evaluation of the existing framework on equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. Alongside the adoption of this strategy, the Commission is launching a broad and comprehensive consultation process with citizens, Member States and social partners. More broadly, the Commission will relaunch discussions with social partners on how to improve gender equality in the labour market, including within their structures, and will encourage them to step up their efforts to tackle the gender gap in employment and pay.

The elimination of gender discrepancies regarding the assumption of family responsibilities represents another initiative to increase women's participation in the labour market, and their career development, while managing family responsibilities. Women often align their decision and ways of working with their family responsibilities and whether or not they share them with their partner. This is particularly challenging for single parents, the majority of whom are women, and for people living in remote rural areas, where support solutions are often lacking. Women also bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid work, which constitutes a significant part of economic activity. It is essential that family responsibilities are shared equally, as is the provision of childcare, social assistance and domestic services, especially for single

parents. Insufficient access to quality and affordable formal care services is one of the determinants of gender inequality in the labour market. It is therefore important to invest in care services to support women's participation in paid work and their professional development. This also has the potential to create jobs for both women and men. Statistically, in the EU, women spend 22 hours a week on care and domestic tasks, while men spend only 9 hours.

In conclusion, women's participation in the labour market has not only economic implications but also social effects; it improves a person's perception of their overall quality of life and improves the quality of society. Employed women evaluate their lives more positively than those outside the labour market, have higher levels of economic security and social inclusion, and are more empowered. However, in general terms, the effects of employment on these dimensions are greater for men than for women.

Policies to promote women's participation in the labour market vary considerably in how they support individuals to take up employment or increase their working hours, including the provision and flexibility of childcare services, flexibility in parental leave and other leave arrangements, a workplace culture that supports flexible working, and responsiveness to changing needs throughout the life course.

According to Eurofound report [7], in some EU member states (Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) there have been taken policy measures and initiatives which have been identified as good practice examples for encouraging and supporting female labour market participation. The policy measures have been organised in four categories:

- labour market policy measures: active labour market policies, benefits and taxation measures;
- childcare support policies;
- leave policies (maternity, parental, childcare and adult care leave);
- flexible working and work–family reconciliation.

Over the past few decades, women's participation in the labour market has significantly increased throughout the European Union. However, the extent and timing of this increase varies greatly across countries, and appreciable gender gaps in the labour market and economic status are still present. Moreover, and despite higher levels of female participation, significant gender differences in the quality and form of employment are apparent. These persistent disparities and significant cross-country differences represent an economic and social challenge and explain the emphasis policymakers put on women's integration into the labour market.

6. Conclusions

Levels of gender equality vary considerably between Member States, from 82 points in Sweden to 57,5 points in Romania. Although Sweden leads the EU gender equality rankings, its score has fallen slightly in recent years. Denmark and the Netherlands are next in line, both with a score of 78.8 points, while Spain has consistently maintained its fourth place. Malta, the Czech Republic and Lithuania have recorded the biggest gains, of 2,3, 2 and 1,7 points respectively. Improvements are needed in Romania, Hungary and Greece, although the scores for all three countries have increased in this edition. Meanwhile, gender equality has regressed in Croatia, Bulgaria and Sweden, with scores falling by 1 point, 0,6 points and 0,2 points respectively.

Although the gender gap is trending downward at EU level, there are significant regional differences, which depend on labour market characteristics, national policies and

culture. For example, in the northern countries, especially in Finland, the gender pay gap is quite small. In Eastern Europe, for example in the Baltic countries, there is a more equal working environment, both in terms of employment rates and hours worked, which is attributed to the legacy of socialism, which promoted the economic inclusion of women. In Western Europe, male and female employment rates have converged, with many women entering the workforce, often in part-time jobs, and particularly in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. Meanwhile, in Southern Europe, the gender gap in employment has also narrowed significantly, due to a higher share of women in full-time rather than part-time employment. Portugal, which has historically had small gender gaps in employment, is a particularly successful case in this region.

If governments aim to reduce the gender gap in labour markets, public policies should target the obstacles faced by girls and women, for example through paid parental leave policies and investment in childcare. It is well known that fathers play a key role in caring for children, especially in the early years, in supporting women and encouraging their participation in the labour market.

Also, steering women and young girls towards more scientific careers, for example, could help reduce existing gender gaps by opening up alternatives that women traditionally do not consider. Institutional initiatives (mentoring programs, networking opportunities, and training and development programs) can also help empower women and give them the tools they need to succeed.

7. References

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