

Gender Wage Inequality: Literary review Analysis- Evidence from Some regions

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Abstract

Gender inequality in the labor market remains a persistent problem, despite advances in education and access to employment. This article analyzes wage gaps and discrimination using different methodological approaches, including the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition and econometric models. It highlights the structural and normative factors that perpetuate these inequalities, taking into account intersectional dimensions such as ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status. Finally, the study highlights the crucial role of public policies and organizational initiatives in promoting greater professional equality.

Keywords: Gender inequality, labor market, wage discrimination, public policies, econometric analysis.

Jel Classification codes : J16, J20, J31, H53, C21

Introduction

Gender inequality in the labor market remains a major issue, despite progress made in education and access to employment. The persistence of wage gaps, discrimination in hiring, and barriers to career advancement reflect a structural imbalance that varies across socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Numerous studies have shown that these inequalities result not only from differences in qualifications or experience, but also from systemic biases and deeply rooted social norms.

With this in mind, analyzing the mechanisms of discrimination, whether direct or indirect, as well as the policies implemented to reduce these disparities, is essential to better understand and combat these inequalities. This work is part of an analytical approach aimed at examining the determinants of gender gaps in pay and employment, using appropriate theoretical and empirical frameworks.

After presenting an overview of gender inequalities in the labor market, we will

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discuss the various methodologies used to measure them, before examining public policies and initiatives that can contribute to greater professional equality. The objective is to offer an in-depth discussion on ways to mitigate these disparities and encourage a dynamic of inclusion and equal opportunity.

Part one: Exploring Views on Gender Discrimination and inequality

Gender pay inequalities remain a central issue in labor economics, despite advances in education and access to employment. Numerous studies have sought to explain these gaps using different theoretical and methodological approaches. Some attribute these differences to individual worker characteristics (human capital, experience, career choices), while others emphasize the persistence of structural and institutional discrimination.

In this literature review, we analyze the main studies addressing gender pay inequalities in Europe and the MENA region. We will first examine classic economic models of wage discrimination, including the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition and Mincer's equations, which allow us to assess the "explained" and "unexplained" portions of wage gaps. We will then highlight the dynamics of labor market segmentation, occupational segregation, and the effects of social norms on women's labor force participation. Finally, we will compare the various public policies implemented to reduce these inequalities and identify the limitations of existing studies.

This review will thus lay the theoretical and empirical foundations for our comparative analysis between Europe and the MENA region, in order to better understand the specificities and challenges inherent in each context.

This literature review aims to explore the different approaches used to analyze these inequalities, highlighting the methodologies employed and the main findings of empirical studies. We will structure this review around three themes: (1) econometric models for analyzing pay gaps, (2) occupational segmentation and segregation, and (3) the impact of social norms and public policies. Finally, we will provide a critical overview of the main trends and limitations of existing approaches.

I. Wages

Based on McKinsey & Company's 2020 report, the rate of women being promoted to management positions is lower than that of men, with only 85 women being promoted for every 100 men. The gap is even wider for Black and Latina women, with only 58 and 71 women promoted, respectively. A 2022 follow-up report revealed that while many women are seeking more rewarding opportunities, a significant number are also contemplating reducing their work hours or leaving their careers entirely. Although 29% of women and 22% of men considered this shift, the actual number of those who followed through is much lower.

1. Carola Grün (2004) investigates both visible and hidden forms of gender discrimination in South Africa's labor market. Her analysis accounts for the unequal chances individuals have in gaining employment. By applying wage regressions that adjust for selection into the labor force, the study identifies not only wage gaps due to observable characteristics or direct discrimination, but also indirect effects tied to access to jobs. The findings point to a rising disadvantage for African women at the

hiring stage, while White women experience more wage-related disparities after employment.¹

2. Manuel Fernandez-Grela, Sergio De Stefanis, and Yolanda Pena-Boquete, 2010. Comparing the prevalence of gender wage inequality in Spain and Italy using the ECHP

This study uses Jenkins' distributional approach, which was developed in Del Rio et al., to examine the individual distribution of gender wage discrimination in Spain and Italy.

The authors calculate the level of prejudice experienced by each working woman on an individual basis. Then, using the decomposability qualities of these estimations, they evaluate the type and degree of discrimination experienced by different socioeconomic groups.²

3. Orhan Kara (2006), In order to assess occupational gender wage discrimination in Turkey, where there are significant efforts underway to modernize and negotiate its culturally Islamically based gender differences, this article will examine gender-based salary discrepancies by occupation and level of education. To quantify the impact of wage discrimination, this study extends the methodology of Blinder and Oaxaca. Heckman's two-model utilizing data from the Turkish Household income and Expenditure Survey to estimate gender-specific earnings equation.³

4. Nick Drydakis et al. (2022). Conducted a study on Age discrimination in the workplace. The study looks at how age influences access to job openings, salary sorting, and if it interacts with gender and race at the beginning of the recruiting process.

Four concurrent field experiments in England are used to gather data for the study in order to address the research issue. In the private sector, the study focuses on low-skilled positions in sales and hospitality.⁴

5. In their 2017 study, Strawinski and Majchrowska explored the impact of occupational segregation on gender wage inequality in Poland. By utilizing occupational data classified at the three-digit level, they aimed to determine whether a significant association exists between the proportion of male workers in an occupation and the magnitude of the unexplained segment of the gender pay gap. the study employed the Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition technique (1973) to assess

¹ Carola Grün (2004) Direct and indirect gender Discrimination in the South African labour market Journal of Development Economics, 73(1).

²Yolanda Pena-Boquete; Sergio De Stefanis; Manuel Fernandez-Grela, 2010-The distribution of gender wage discrimination in Italy and Spain: a comparison using the ECHP. Empirical Economics, 39(2).

³ Orhan Kara; 2006; Occupational gender wage discrimination in Turkey International Journal of Manpower, 27(7).

⁴ Nick Drydakis; Anna Paraskevopoulou ; Anglia Ruskin; Vasiliki Bozani. 2022 ; A field study of age discrimination in the workplace: the importance of gender and race–pay the gap. Labour Economics, 78.

variations in wage differentials across narrowly defined occupational groups.¹

6. In an effort to address the limited research on gender-based employment disparities in the GCC, Al-Waqfi and Al-Faki (2014) analyzed differences in employment conditions between male and female workers, both local and expatriate, in the UAE. Drawing on data from the 2007 Dubai Labor Market Survey, their study combines descriptive statistics with econometric models to investigate the factors influencing access to employment and wage outcomes, within a context of rising female labor force participation in the region.²

7. Mbratana and Kenne (2017) conducted a microeconomic analysis to explore gender-based wage disparities in both paid employment and self-employment in Cameroon. Utilizing data from the 2007 Cameroon Household Consumption Survey, the study sought to understand the underlying reasons behind the lower average earnings of women compared to men in the labor market. To achieve this, the authors applied the Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition to assess overall wage differences, followed by the Machado and Mata quantile regression technique to examine variations in the gap across different income levels.³

8. A study conducted by Mingming Li, Yuan Tang, Keyan Jin focused on labor market segmentation in China and its effect on wage disparities between men and women. Drawing on data from various years, the research analyzed how gender wage gaps differ across sectors, including public, private, and collective entities. The results indicated that the public sector had the most consistent and narrowest gap, while the private sector showed a growing disparity, especially among both low- and high-income earners. The study attributed much of the inequality to structural differences between sectors and highlighted the influence of discriminatory practices in shaping wage outcomes.⁴

9. In their 2022 study, González, Seo, and Floro explore how gender norms and wage gaps affect the distribution of care work. They show that even with a narrower wage gap, traditional gender expectations continue to influence how long-term care responsibilities are shared. The study also highlights the role of market power and job segregation in reinforcing women's disproportionate unpaid care work. The findings suggest the need for policies that promote gender equity in caregiving and ensure access to affordable, high-quality care.⁵

¹ Pawel Strawinski; Aleksandra Majchrowska.2017; Occupational segregation and wage differences: the case of Poland The Journal of Socio-Economics, 65.

² Mohammed A. Al-Waqfi and Ibrahim Abdalla Al-faki;2014 ; Gender-based differences in employment conditions of local and expatriate workers in the GCC context Empirical evidence from the United Arab Emirates.International Journal of Manpower,35(5).

³ Taoufiki Mbratana and Andrée Fotie Kenne;2017; Investigating gender wage gap in employment A micro econometric type-analysis for Cameroon.African Development Review, 29(4).

⁴ Mingming Li ; Yuan Tang ; Keyan Jin ; (2024) ; Labor market segmentation and the gender wage gap : Evidence from China.PloS One Journal,19(3).

⁵ Ignacio González, Bongsun Seo & Maria S. Floro (2022) Gender Wage Gap, Gender Norms, and Long-Term Care: A Theoretical Framework.Feminist Economics, 28(1).

10. A study by researchers (2020) explored the gap between women's educational progress and stagnant labor force participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Despite significant gains in educational attainment and a narrowing gender gap in education, women's labor force participation remains low. Increases in participation, when they occur, are often associated with rising unemployment rates rather than actual job integration. Using labor force survey data from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, the researchers used country-specific models to examine patterns across different employment categories. The analysis took into account differences in age, education, and marital status to assess participation trends among both women and men.¹

II. Employment

Some other researchers focused on the fact that the discrimination can also appear in employment such as:

1. Ahmed A, Granberg M, Khanna S (2021) investigates gender-based hiring discrimination in Sweden, offering a reevaluation of how gender biases affect recruitment decisions within the Swedish labor market.
2. Wei-Bin Zhang; 2017 ; This research delves into the impact of job discrimination against women, examining its effects on population dynamics within the context of a generalized Solow growth model.
3. Sall, Mame Cheikh Anta, and Adriana Burlea-Schiopoiu (2021) analyze how public investment impacts labor demand, paying particular attention to gender differences and professional categories across different sectors.
4. M. SIVAKUMAR; 2008 ; this study addresses the issue of gender discrimination in India, exploring its effects on women's development and their position in the labor market.

III. Wages and Employment

The study by **Pengpeng Xiao (2022)** investigates gender-based disparities in wages and employment within a balanced labor market context

IV. Non wage

Such as division labor, decision-making power, or access to resources, work of:

1. **David & Rodriguez ; (2016)** investigate how decisions related to family labor markets contribute to statistical gender discrimination in their study.
2. **Francois & Patrick; (1996)** develops a theoretical framework on gender discrimination, arguing that household structures play a crucial role in shaping gender-based inequalities.

V. Synthesis of the Literature Review

This literature review highlights the persistence of wage and professional inequalities, influenced not only by skill gaps but also by structural and normative discrimination. The studies analyzed show that these inequalities vary according to

¹ Ragui Assaad, Rana Hendy, Moundir Lassassi, Shaimaa Yassin; 2021; Explaining the MENA Paradox : Rising Educational Attainment, Yet Stagnant Female Labor Force Participation. Middle East Development Journal, 13(2).

several factors, including gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic background, with differentiated effects on access to employment and compensation.

The studies reviewed agree that discrimination is not limited to observable wage gaps. It begins in the recruitment process, where the probability of being hired differs based on individual characteristics, thus reinforcing inequalities from the moment they enter the labor market. This trend is particularly pronounced for certain groups, notably racialized women and older workers, who experience double discrimination in hiring and compensation.

The methodologies used in this research—ranging from Oaxaca-Blinder decompositions to advanced econometric analyses—make it possible to distinguish between gaps explained by differences in human capital (education, experience, skills) and those resulting from discriminatory biases. Some studies demonstrate that occupational segregation plays a key role in reproducing inequalities, particularly through the overrepresentation of women in lower-paid sectors and the difficulty of accessing management positions.

From a geographical and socioeconomic perspective, perspectives vary:

- ✓ In developed countries, wage gaps are generally narrower thanks to stricter legislative frameworks, but persistent inequalities persist, particularly in career advancement and access to senior positions.
- ✓ In developing countries, these gaps are exacerbated by rigid gender norms and weaker protection of workers' rights, making discrimination more pronounced and more difficult to address.

Finally, this research highlights the importance of public policies and initiatives aimed at reducing gender inequality and other forms of discrimination in the labor market. The most frequently cited measures include:

- ✓ The implementation of stricter laws and regulations to combat discrimination in hiring and pay.
- ✓ Improving pay transparency to limit unjustified gaps.
- ✓ Developing work-life balance policies to reduce the impact of family responsibilities on women's career paths.
- ✓ Awareness-raising and training employers to combat unconscious bias in recruitment and promotion processes.

However, despite these recommendations, several studies emphasize that public policies, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. A more profound transformation of social norms and labor market structures is essential to ensure true equality of opportunity.

In summary, this literature review provides a rich and varied insight into the mechanisms of wage and professional discrimination. It draws attention to the ongoing inequalities while also highlighting the limitations of current policies and the necessity for an integrated approach to design solutions adapted to the economic and social changes underway.

VI. Analysis of Wage Gaps and Discrimination Measurement in Labor Markets

- According to the approach by Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1973), the wage gap is explained by distinguishing between differences in personal

attributes and disparities in the coefficients of earnings equations.(coefficient effects). It is based on an ordinary least squares estimation of a gain equation (formulated by J.Mincer):

Mincer's equations

$$\log w_i = \alpha + \sum_{k=1}^n \beta^k X_i^k + \gamma \mathbb{1}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

The most obvious a priori method for measuring discrimination taking into account the observable differences would consist adding an indicator $\mathbb{1}_{iequal}$ to one if the individual belongs to the a priori discriminated group and zero otherwise in the estimation of a Mincer's equation, where $X_i^1, \dots, X_i^n$ represent observable variables (The total years of education, the square of the years of education, work experience, and other factors).

The term γ then makes it possible to measure the difference in percentage expected salary given the characteristics observed, depending on whether or not one belongs to the a priori discriminated group. No way with this method of actual distinction statistical discrimination.

This first method requires that the effect of the observable variables (education, ...) is the same for all groups. However, discrimination can also occur in the way which these observable variables are remunerated. Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1974) each proposed to estimate separately Mincer's equation on the discriminated group (F) and non-discriminated (H)¹

$$\begin{aligned} \text{si } i \in H : \quad & \log w_i = \alpha_H + \sum_{k=1}^n \beta_H^k X_i^k + \varepsilon_i \\ \text{si } i \in F : \quad & \log w_i = \alpha_F + \sum_{k=1}^n \beta_F^k X_i^k + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

The logarithmic averages of male and female wages women are then:

$$\log \bar{w}^H = \alpha_H + \sum_{k=1}^n \beta_H^k \bar{X}_k^H \quad \log \bar{w}^F = \alpha_F + \sum_{k=1}^n \beta_F^k \bar{X}_k^F$$

Oxacaca and Blinder propose to break down the difference between these two averages into two components:²

¹ Oaxaca Ronald. (1973).Male-Female Wage Differentials in Urban Labor Markets.International Economic Review, 14(3) ,693-709.

² Blinder, A.S. (1973).Wage Discrimination: Reduced Form and Structural Estimates.Journal of Human Resources, 8(4) ,436-455.

$$\log \bar{w}^H - \log \bar{w}^F = \underbrace{\sum_{k=1}^n \beta_H^k (\bar{X}_k^H - \bar{X}_k^F)}_{\text{Explainedpart}} + \underbrace{\alpha^H - \alpha^F + \sum_{k=1}^n (\beta_H^k - \beta_F^k) \bar{X}_k^F}_{\text{Unexplainedpart}}$$

This method (like that derived from Mincer's equations) is sensitive to control variables. It also depends on the reference group to operate the decomposition; here

$$\sum_{k=1}^n \beta_H^k \bar{X}_k^F$$

while we would also have could retain

$$\sum_{k=1}^n \beta_F^k \bar{X}_k^H$$

The analysis of wage gaps and discrimination in the analysis of labor market disparities follows the decomposition method introduced by Oaxaca (1973) and Blinder (1973). Their approach aims to explain wage differences between groups by distinguishing two main sources: differences in individual characteristics, such as education and professional experience, and differences in the remuneration of these characteristics, which can be interpreted as a measure of discrimination. This method is based on the estimation of Mincer's earnings equations, where wages are modeled as a function of explanatory variables such as education level and experience.

A first way to assess discrimination is to introduce an indicator variable into The Mincer equation assigns a value of 1 if the individual is part of the group assumed to face discrimination, and 0 if they do not. The coefficient associated with this variable then represents the unexplained wage gap between groups, after controlling for observable differences. However, this method relies on the assumption that the impact of observable characteristics is consistent across all individuals, which can mask other forms of discrimination. In reality, the remuneration of these characteristics can differ between groups, meaning that discrimination lies not only in average wage differences, but also in how skills and experience are valued in the labor market.

The Oaxaca-Blinder method overcomes this limitation by estimating the Mincer equation separately for the group assumed to be discriminated against and the reference group. This dual estimation allows the average wage gap to be decomposed

into two distinct components. The first corresponds to differences in observable characteristics (characteristic effect), which reflect differences in education, experience, or other explanatory variables. The second is the effect of the coefficients, which measures how these characteristics are remunerated differently depending on the group. This last component is often interpreted as an estimate of wage discrimination, as it reflects a pay gap that cannot be explained by differences in qualifications or experience.

One limitation of this method is its reliance on the variables chosen when calculating wage differences. Changing the set of factors considered can significantly alter the observed outcomes and, in turn, how the results are understood. Additionally, the results are influenced by the group selected as the baseline comparison. For example, if the group not affected by bias is used as a baseline, the wage difference will be calculated in relation to that group, while selecting a different comparison group might result in a different interpretation.

The implementation of this approach in analyzing gender inequality within the labor market effectively highlights its analytical importance. When comparing men's and women's wages, it is generally observed that only a portion of the wage gap can be attributed to differences in productive characteristics, while a significant fraction remains unexplained, suggesting potential discrimination. However, some limitations must be taken into account, including the existence of self-selection biases in the labor market and the possibility that unobservable differences influence wage gaps. Despite these reservations, the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition remains a powerful tool for quantifying and analyzing wage inequality, highlighting the underlying mechanisms that contribute to wage gaps between groups.

Part two: Classification of the Literature Review on Gender Wage Inequality

Wage inequalities between men and women are a major topic of study in labor economics. They result from a combination of factors, including direct discrimination, occupational segregation, differences in human capital, and the influence of social norms. Existing research uses various econometric methods to quantify these gaps and identify their underlying causes. This literature review is organized into three areas:

1. **Econometric models for analyzing wage gaps** (Oaxaca-Blinder, Heckman, quantile regressions).
2. **Occupational segmentation and segregation** (glass ceiling, sticky floor, and access to employment).
3. **The impact of social norms and public policies** on reducing the pay gap.

1. Econometric Models and Measures of Wage Discrimination

The analysis of wage gaps relies heavily on econometric models that distinguish the portion accounted for by visible differences in traits is separated from the remaining unexplained segment, which is frequently regarded as a sign of bias.

Oaxaca-Blinder Method:

- ✓ **Pena-Boquete et al. (2010)** apply this method to compare wage discrimination in Italy and Spain, revealing more pronounced gaps in certain socioeconomic groups.

- ✓ **Orhan Kara (2006)** uses this approach in Turkey and shows that discrimination varies by education level and occupational category.
- ✓ **Strawinski & Majchrowska (2017)** analyze the relationship between occupational segregation and wage gaps in Poland.
- ✓ **Mbratana & Kenne (2017)** combine Oaxaca-Blinder and quantile regressions to analyze wage discrimination in Cameroon.
- **Heckman Approach (Selection Bias in the Labor Market):**
 - ✓ **Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki (2014)** show that wage discrimination in the UAE is exacerbated by differences in access to employment between local and expatriate workers.
- **Quintile Regressions and Other Advanced Methods:**
 - ✓ **Drydakis et al. (2022)** study the interaction between age, gender, and wage discrimination in the United Kingdom.
 - ✓ **Ignacio González, Bongsun Seo, & Maria S. Floro (2022)** develop a theoretical framework explaining how gender norms influence the division of paid and unpaid labor.
- **Critique of Traditional Models:**
- June E. O'Neill and Dave M. O'Neill (2006) question the interpretation of the unexplained gap as clear evidence of discrimination, emphasizing the role of unobserved factors such as career decisions and personal motivation.
- **Direct and indirect discrimination:**
 - ✓ **Carola Grün (2004)** studies the South African labor market and shows that discrimination begins at the hiring stage, well before impacting wages.

These studies show that, although econometric methods can measure the wage gap, they remain sensitive to the choice of variables and assumptions used.

2. Segmentation and occupational segregation

Wage gaps do not result solely from direct discrimination, but also from structural differences in the distribution of jobs.

- **Glass ceiling and sticky floor:**
 - ✓ **Drydakis et al. (2022)** show that women are less likely to access management positions, reinforcing the "glass ceiling."
 - ✓ **Pettinicchio & Maroto (2017)** analyze the combined effect of gender and disability on career prospects in the United States.
- **Sectoral and occupational segregation:**
 - ✓ **Strawinski & Majchrowska (2017)** emphasize the connection between the number of men in a particular occupation and the size of the unexplained wage disparity.
 - ✓ **Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki (2014)** underscore the significance of the public sector as the dominant employer of women in the Gulf countries.
 - ✓ **Mbratana & Kenne (2017)** analyze and compare wage discrimination between salaried work and self-employment in Cameroon.

These results highlight that wage discrimination often reflects structural barriers that prevent women from accessing the highest-paid positions.

3. Impact of social norms and public policies

Cultural norms and public policies strongly influence women's labor market participation and wage gaps.

- **Gender norms and societal expectations:**
 - ✓ **Assaad et al. (2021)** describe the "MENA Paradox": although women in the MENA region achieve high levels of education, their employment rates remain low.
 - ✓ **M. Sivakumar (2008)** analyzes how systemic discrimination hinders women's advancement in India.
- **Policies to reduce pay inequality:**
 - ✓ **OECD (2017)** analyzes the impact of pay transparency laws in several European countries.
 - ✓ **Klasen (2019)** examines the effectiveness of public policies aimed at reducing pay gaps.
 - ✓ **Sidani & Al Ariss (2014)** study the development of female entrepreneurship in the Middle East and its role in reducing economic inequality.
 - ✓ **European Commission (2020)** provides an overview of the wage gap in the EU and the policies implemented to address it.
- **Labor market segmentation and the role of the public sector:**
 - ✓ **Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki (2014)** show that the contraction of the public sector in the MENA region has reduced employment opportunities for women.
 - ✓ **Moghadam (2013)** analyzes labor market segmentation in MENA and its impact on the exclusion of women from the private sector.

4. Critical synthesis and perspectives:

This literature review highlights several trends:

- * **Wage gaps have multiple causes**, combining pure discrimination, labor market segmentation, and the effects of social norms.
- * **Studies on Europe focus on wage inequality**, while those on the MENA region focus more on the low participation of women in the labor market.
- * **Econometric methods are useful but have limitations**, particularly due to the difficulty in distinguishing between pure discrimination and constrained individual choices.
- * **Public policies have a mixed effect**: effective in Europe but still limited in the MENA region.

These elements will serve as the basis for the comparative analysis between Europe and the MENA region that follows in the remainder of this article.

Part three: A Comparative Analysis between Europe and the MENA Region

Equal pay for men and women remains a central issue in the debate on social and economic rights. Despite progress in education and access to the labor market, a pay gap persists in most countries, reflecting deep structural inequalities.

In Europe, women are paid on average 12.7% less than men for equivalent work, a situation that results from a combination of factors related to gender stereotypes, social norms, direct discrimination and systemic barriers in the workforce.¹

In the MENA region, the primary issue is not necessarily the wage gap, but rather the limited involvement of women in the labor force, often referred to as the "MENA paradox." Indeed, although women have achieved high levels of education, they are largely underrepresented in the world of work.²

This part aims to analyze and compare the causes and consequences of professional inequalities between men and women in Europe and the MENA region.

1. Europe: A Labor Market Marked by Invisible Barriers

1.1. The weight of the "glass ceiling" and "sticky floors"

In Europe, the gender pay gap is mainly attributable to two phenomena:

- **The glass ceiling**, which prevents women from accessing high-level positions, and whose impact is particularly marked in Western and Northern Europe.
- **Sticky floors**, which confine women to precarious and lower-paid jobs, are a reality more prevalent in Eastern and Southern Europe.

Studies show that women are often held back in their career progression, particularly because of interruptions linked to maternity, but also because of underrepresentation in high value-added sectors (finance, engineering, technology).³

1.2. Salary gaps: between discrimination and career choice

Wage inequality is not only the result of direct discrimination, but also of differences in career paths. Several factors must be taken into account:

- **Occupational segregation**: women are more numerous in lower-paying sectors (education, health care, social services), while men dominate better-paid sectors such as engineering or information technology.⁴ **Differences in salary negotiation**: Men tend to negotiate higher salaries than women, which increases the pay gap.⁵
- **Constraints linked to parenthood**: career breaks after a birth or the choice of part-time work are more frequent among women, which negatively impacts their salaries and career prospects.⁶

1.3. Policies and measures to reduce the pay gap

Faced with this situation, several European countries have implemented policies to reduce these inequalities:

- **Pay transparency**: More and more countries are requiring companies to publish reports on pay gaps.⁷

¹Blau, F.D., & Kahn, L.M. (2017). "The Gender Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations". *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), 789-865.

² World Bank (2013). *Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, D.C.

³ European Commission (2020). *The Gender Pay Gap in the EU: What It Is and How to Fight It*.

⁴ INSEE (2021). *Les inégalités salariales entre femmes et hommes en France*.

⁵ Bertrand, M. (2020). "Gender in the Labor Market: The Role of Equal Opportunity Policies". *Annual Review of Economics*, 12, 1005-1033.

⁶ Goldin, C. (2014). "A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter". *American Economic Review*, 104(4), 1091-1119.

⁷ OECD (2017). *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

- Advancing equality in leadership roles: Certain organizations are implementing quotas to boost the representation of women on their boards of directors.¹
- Supporting joint parental leave: In nations such as Sweden, parental leave is more equally distributed between both parents, minimizing the career setbacks women face due to motherhood.²

2. The MENA Region: A Paradox of Female Inactivity

2.1. A low participation rate despite educational advances

Unlike in Europe, the challenge in MENA countries is not primarily the wage gap, but rather the low participation of women in the labor market. Although women have caught up with, or even surpassed, men in terms of education, they remain largely excluded from the professional world.³

- This phenomenon can largely be attributed to :
- **The dominance of the public sector:** In several countries, the public sector has traditionally been the primary employer of women. However, as opportunities in this sector decline, women face challenges in entering the private sector.⁴
- **Social and cultural norms:** Societal expectations regarding women's role in the family limit their participation in the labor market [OCDE 2019].
- **Lack of support policies:** few initiatives exist to encourage female entrepreneurship or work flexibility.⁵

2.2. Segmentation of the labor market

Women working in MENA countries often find themselves in very specific sectors:

- **Education and health,** which are seen as extensions of women's domestic role.⁶
- **Public administration,** where they find more stability and better protection of rights.⁷
- **The informal sector,** with a strong presence in undeclared and precarious activities.⁸

2.3. Strategies for better integration of women

Several actions can be considered to promote the employment of women in the region:

¹ Klasen, S. (2019). "What Explains Uneven Female Labor Force Participation Levels and Trends in Developing Countries?" World Bank Research Observer, 34(1), 52-87.

² Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *The Incomplete Revolution: Adapting to Women's New Roles*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

³ Assaad, R., & Krafft, C. (2016). "The Structure and Evolution of Employment in the Middle East and North Africa". *IZA Journal of Labor & Development*, 5(1), 1-25.

⁴ Verme, P. (2015). "Economic Development and Female Labor Participation in the MENA Region: What Do We Know?" World Bank Policy Research Working Paper.

⁵ El-Haddad, A. (2020). "Informality and Gender Wage Gaps in the MENA Region". *Economic Research Forum*.

⁶ UNICEF (2022). *Gender Gaps in Education and Employment in the MENA Region*.

⁷ IMF (2018). *Advancing Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa: Challenges and Opportunities*.

⁸ Moghadam, V. M. (2013). *"Modernizing Women and Economic Development in the Middle East"*. Cambridge University Press.

- **Facilitate access to the private sector:** by establishing incentives for companies that hire women.¹
- **Promoting female entrepreneurship:** by facilitating access to financing and training.²
- **Establish childcare infrastructure:** to enable women to reconcile work and family life.³

3. Comparison and Perspectives: What Lessons?

Despite structural differences between Europe and the MENA region, some lessons can be learned to reduce gender inequalities in the labor market:

- **Combating gender stereotypes from education onwards:** Encouraging girls to pursue scientific and technical fields can reduce professional segregation.⁴
- **Improving parental leave policies:** to balance responsibilities between men and women.⁵
- **Promote more flexible working methods:** in particular through teleworking and flexible working hours.⁶
- **Encourage transparency and salary regulation :** in order to combat salary discrimination and guarantee fair remuneration for equal skills.⁷ Ultimately, reducing gender inequality is a key factor in economic development. In a changing world, it is essential to adopt policies adapted to the cultural and economic realities of each region.

Analysis of gender gaps in employment and wages shows that these inequalities are not only due to direct discrimination, but also to deep-rooted economic and social structures.

As Europe battles glass ceilings and wage inequality, the MENA region faces the challenge of integrating women into the workforce.

While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go to ensure real and lasting professional equality. By combining economic reforms, appropriate social policies, and a shift in attitudes, it is possible to build a fairer labor market for all.

Conclusion

The study of gender inequality within the labor market emphasizes the complexity of the various factors involved. Wage gaps, barriers to hiring, and obstacles to career advancement are not solely linked to differences in skills or experience, but also stem from deep-rooted structural and normative discrimination. Despite advances in legislation and public policy, these inequalities persist, requiring a more integrated and proactive approach.

¹ World Economic Forum (2021). Global Gender Gap Report 2021. Geneva: WEF.

² Sidani, Y., & Al Ariss, A. (2014). "Institutional and Corporate Perspectives on Women's Entrepreneurship in the Middle East". *Journal of Business Ethics*, 127(3), 655-668.

³ UNDP (2020). Human Development Report: Gender Inequality in the Arab World.

⁴ Piketty, T. (2022). *Capital et Idéologie*. Paris: Seuil.

⁵ European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index 2021.

⁶ Goldin, C., & Katz, L. F. (2016). "A Most Egalitarian Profession? Pharmacy and the Evolution of a Family-Friendly Occupation". *Journal of Labor Economics*, 34(3), 705-746.

⁷ Blau, F. D., & Winkler, A. E. (2018). *The Economics of Women, Men, and Work*. Oxford University Press.

The research reviewed shows that implementing policies to promote equal pay, pay transparency, and combat unconscious bias can have a significant impact. However, these measures must be accompanied by lasting cultural and organizational change to be fully effective.

Thus, beyond institutional reforms, it is crucial to adopt a more comprehensive vision integrating economic, social, and educational measures to promote greater inclusion of women in the labor market. A holistic approach, combining political commitments, the transformation of social norms, and business participation, is the key to sustainably reducing inequalities and ensuring a more equitable and inclusive work environment.

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