

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE EFFECTS OF THE GENDER PAY GAP

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Abstract

Women represent approximately half of the global human capital but continue to remain one of the most underutilized resources since their contribution to economic development is hindered by various barriers. Sustainable economic growth can only be achieved by fully allowing women to become economically empowered meaning to have equal access to jobs as men, being equally paid, and having the same opportunities and chances to be promoted to higher positions. The present paper approaches the manner in which women contribute to economic development by focusing on female participation in the labor market as well as on the positive externalities generated by female employment. In addition, the study focuses on the effects of the gender pay gap on the ability of women to contribute to economic development and pays particular attention to the situation in Lebanon, a developing country with a frail economy where women face various forms of labor discrimination and Romania, a country with a better situation regarding gender equality and the gender pay gap. The main findings of the study reveal the importance of addressing the gender pay gap through changes in legislation, public policies, and public services providing in order to help at boosting the economies.

Keywords: economic development, gender pay gap, gender equality, Lebanon, Romania

1. INTRODUCTION

Ensuring equal access to employment opportunities for women has been considered for a long time the surest path towards economic growth and sustainability. Allowing women to succeed can have a transformative effect not only on society as a whole but also on the economy. As women become a larger part of the labor market, economies are able to diversify their sectors and increase exporting activities, organizations are run more efficiently as female representation on organizational boards serve to reduce the perils of group think, and overall income inequality is reduced which in turn, lays the foundation for more sustainable economic growth (Assy & Sayed, 2018). In addition, improving women's participation in economic activities has been shown to have positive effects on society as a whole since it drives the development of human capital and improves the education and health of children, as families have access to a dual-income (Abney & Gonzalez Laya, 2018). However, several factors limit women's contribution to economic development, factors which are most likely to be encountered in developing countries where traditional gender roles make female employment undesirable existing a lack of support for women who have children and want to remain or enter the labor market (Duflo, 2012). In addition, even when they are able to enter the labor market, women's contribution to economic development is hindered by the existence of gender pay gaps and the glass ceiling, phenomena which combined make employment less attractive to women in the first place. The glass ceiling effect refers to the fact that women are prevented from reaching higher positions in organizations as a result of several hidden barriers such as gender biases in promotion and performance evaluation decisions (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). As a result of these barriers, women usually fill up the lower levels of organizations and have fewer opportunities to influence the decision-making process which lowers their ability to contribute effectively to economic growth

(Ayub, Khan & Khunshood, 2019). In contrast, the gender pay gap effect refers to the fact that women are usually paid less than men even if they have the same job position, same educational background, and same professional experience (Jamali, Sidani & Kobeissi, 2008). As a result of this income inequality, women are required to work more in order to be remunerated at the same level as men are, being usually dissuaded from either entering the labor market or attempting to achieve higher positions in organizations (Hejase, Hejase & Hejase, 2014).

In this respect, the present paper aims to explore the ways in which women can contribute to the development of national economies while focusing on how the existence of the gender pay gap diminishes women's potential to contribute to economic development by making employment look less attractive as an option and by creating difficulties for employed women in regard to job performance. The main objective of the study is to analyze and present the main indicators regarding gender quality in Lebanon and Romania, with a focus on the gender pay gap in both countries. The research methodology consists of an exploratory study using secondary data analysis. The presented data was gathered from official documents and reports elaborated by the World Economic Forum, The European Institute for Gender Equality, the European Commission, or the United Nations. The paper also presents the most important aspects regarding women's contribution to economic development, the gender pay gap, and the importance of achieving gender equality considering the importance of the gender issues for the national economies' development. The paper is divided into four main parts. The first part provides a general overview of women's contribution to economic development, the second part details the manner in which the gender pay gap affects women's employment, the third part focuses on gender equality and the nature of the gender pay gap in Lebanon and Romania, while the last part presents the main conclusions of the study.

2. THEORETICAL ASPECTS REGARDING WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

On global level, women's participation in the labor market is lower than that of men. According to data presented by the United Nations, while 75% of working-age men are employed, only 50% of the working-age women work, and among those who are employed, women account for 66% of the workers employed in family businesses that do not offer direct wages (Oxfam, 2017). In addition, women are generally paid less than men and are less likely to have access to pensions, even though they work more hours than men do, when unpaid and domestic work is taken into account (Hejase et al., 2014). However, recent data show that if women would have equal opportunities as men, the global GDP would rise by 26%, the equivalent of \$28 trillion, by 2025 (Woetzel et al., 2015). Enabling women's economic empowerment would generate positive externalities for society as a whole, since studies have shown that women tend to invest more of their income in comparison to men into expenses with education, health, and nutrition, which, in turn, could lead to further economic development as younger generations will grow healthier and more educated (Abney & Gonzalez Laya, 2018; Zgodavova et al, 2020). In addition, studies have linked women's economic empowerment with several benefits that contribute to economic development such as a reduction in the number of people affected by poverty, an increase in fertility rates, an improvement in business performance and innovation, more inclusive legislation, and less environmental pollution (Montero Kuscevic, 2020).

3. THE GENDER PAY GAP AND ITS EFFECTS ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

It is generally acknowledged that the gender pay gap has declined in recent decades, as a result of gender convergence in terms of educational attainment, but there are still significant wage discrepancies that disadvantage particularly, the highly skilled women (Assy & Sayed, 2018). According to the most recent statistics provided by PayScale (2020), the median salary for male workers is 19% higher than the median salary for female workers when all types of jobs and levels of seniority are taken into account. Moreover, if employees with similar experience and hierarchic positions are compared, it can be observed that female workers earn \$0.98 for every dollar earned by male workers which results in a gap in lifetime earnings of approximately \$900,000 (PayScale, 2020). A partial explanation for the persistence of the gender pay gap is given by the fact that women are more likely to take career breaks in order to raise their children and to seek

lower-level job positions which offer sufficient flexibility in order for them to be able to perform their household duties (Hejase et al., 2015). However, this is only a partial explanation, because other factors are also evident when comparing the earnings of men and women with similar educational backgrounds and similar work experience. For example, it has been observed that there is a consistent link between the gender pay gap and the gender differences in the number of hours worked, especially in those types of jobs that reward longer working hours (Cortes & Pan, 2019). The fact that women work fewer hours than men can be the result of the fact that women have to balance career and household responsibilities, that certain social norms place emphasis on women's responsibility to support their spouses' careers and spend longer time at home, and that employers are generally reluctant to promote women in positions that require longer work schedules due to what is known as the motherhood penalty which makes women appear less attractive for promotions in positions of more responsibility since they would eventually have to consider having children and they would no longer be able to comply with the demands of a busy work schedule (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Lovasz, 2019). The existence of the gender pay gap affects women's contribution to economic development in different ways, first, by making it more difficult for women to balance their work and family responsibilities, second, by hindering women's access to social benefits and placing them at risk of poverty, and by compelling women to enter female-dominated professions which are usually paid less than male-dominated professions (Schieder & Gould, 2016).

4. GENDER EQUALITY AND THE GENDER PAY GAP IN LEBANON AND ROMANIA

4.1 Main aspects regarding gender equality and the gender pay gap in Lebanon

In Lebanon, in 2019, 22.9% of women were employed, compared with 72% which was the employment rate among men (UN Women, 2020). More than that, Lebanon ranks 145 out of 153 countries in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2020, having one of the highest overall gender gaps in the world, with a score of 0.599. Regarding women's representation in the national Parliament, only 4.7% of the elected officials in Lebanon are women. Concerning women's presence in the Government, only 3.4% of the ministerial positions are occupied by women (World Economic Forum, 2020). Regarding education, 54.3% of women have graduated at least secondary education level (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

Most studies have established that there is a persistent pay gap that affects women's participation in the labor market in Lebanon. For example, Dah, Salah, and Farouk (2014) found that Lebanese men earn 16% more than Lebanese women irrespective of their educational background, work experience, or job position. Moreover, Alieh (2012) concluded that the gender gap in Lebanon varies significantly between age groups: for employees with ages between 18 and 30 the gap is minimal, while for those with ages between 31 and 40, the gap is 20% reaching a maximum for those employees with ages between 41 and 50 where the gap is 55%. Besides age, the educational background also affects the pay gap since Hejase et al. (2014) found that Lebanese women earn consistently less than Lebanese men even if they have higher educational attainments. Similarly, Harb and Rouhana (2020) concluded that the returns on higher education are much more significant in the case of Lebanese men (45% higher income) than for Lebanese women (26% higher income). In addition, Fahed-Sreih and Sharifi (2010) concluded that Lebanese men are more likely to be promoted in comparison to Lebanese women as they come closer to the higher echelons of the organizational structure, while Harb and Rouhana (2020) found that the gender pay gap at higher job levels is explained by structural factors such as education and work experience, while that on lower levels is most likely caused by hidden forms of gender discrimination. These findings are also reflected in the Gender Inequality Index measured by UNDP which places Lebanon in 92nd place out of 146 countries (UNDP, 2020). Thus, although it has been found that Lebanese women's contribution to the economy has been growing over the recent decades, their contribution is hindered by the fact that they earn consistently less than male workers (Hejase et al., 2015). In light of this situation, Dah and Fakh (2016) recommended the introduction of public and organizational policies that would combat the discrimination against women on the labor market and provide specific support for married women with children (e.g., free day-care, flexible schedule, parental leave for fathers, etc.) who are the one most severely affected by the gender gap.

4.2 Main aspects regarding gender equality and the gender pay gap in Romania

Following its accession to the European Union, Romania has undertaken to promote and guarantee equal opportunities and treatment between men and women, through legislative changes as well as the development of public policies to support this approach. Along with the other Member States, Romania is making considerable efforts to include the gender equality concept in all its policies and strategies in order to remove any type of discrimination between women and men. At the European level and also at the national level, the gender issues have been integrated into public policies designed to increase women's access to the labor market, their representation in decision-making positions in private and public organizations, and to assure them an equal remuneration level. As an example, after transposing the principles and regulations set by the European policies in the national legislation, Romania registered significant progress regarding the representation of women in decision-making positions in politics and public administration, but not enough as to affirm that gender equality has been reached (Moldovan, 2016, Macarie et al. 2011, Macarie & Moldovan, 2012, Șandor et al. 2011, Androniceanu, 2012).

Regarding the Romanian legislative regulations on gender equality, the main legislative act in the field is Law No. 202/2002 on equal opportunities and equal treatment between women and men. This legislative act harmonized the Romanian legislation in the field with the main aspects provided by the European directives (Romanian Parliament, 2013). The law stipulates that all types of institutions (public, private, non-governmental organizations, or political parties) must support and promote the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making positions. Moreover, the legislation stipulates that the local public authorities must also take the necessary steps to achieve a balanced representation of both genders in decision-making positions (Romanian Parliament, 2013, Ciobanu & Androniceanu, 2018).

In addition, the National Agency for Gender Equality (ANES) was created, an institution that promotes gender equality and conducts the main activities that are supposed to reduce and eliminate all kinds of forms of gender discrimination in all areas, strategies, and policies (ANES, 2019). Moreover, in the current period, Romania has a new strategy for promoting gender equality for the period 2018-2021 covering areas such as the labour market, health, education, and representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions (ANES, 2019). Some studies conducted by public institutions found that integrating gender equality principles in public policies had a positive impact on citizens' lives and the economy (Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, 2011).

In order to continue its efforts in this field and taking into consideration Covid-19 pandemic negative impact on gender equality, the European Commission has developed a set of measures for the 2020-2025 period and a new gender equality strategy, laying the foundations for gender mainstreaming in all policies which will be developed and implemented by the European Union (European Commission, 2020). This decision will have a positive impact also on Romanian women's participation in the labor market with direct effects on economic development at the national level.

In Romania, in 2019, 69.3% of women were employed, a better situation compared with the one registered at the European level of 67.3% (Eurostat, 2020). In addition, the proportion was higher than in 2018 when only 56.2% of women were employed. A negative aspect that should be mentioned is that in 2018, women represented 58.3% of the total economically inactive population (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). 70.9% of women worked in the services sector compared with men's proportion of 51.6%. More than that 27.8% of women worked in the industry and construction field compared with men's proportion of 43.9% (National Institute of Statistics, 2019). The representation of men and women in the most important sectors of the economy shows an imbalanced participation which might impact the gender pay gap.

Another aspect regarding gender equality with relevance to women's impact on economic development is their representation in positions requiring high power of decision. For example, in politics, the increased representation of women in national Parliaments, in ministries, or their proportion among elected officials from regional and local levels - mayors or representatives in the local, county, and regional councils contributes to the development of democracy. For this reason, some European countries have adopted measures to increase gender equality in terms of occupying decision-making positions in politics. In some countries (such as Portugal,

Poland, Ireland, or Greece), the so-called gender quotas have been adopted leading to a balanced representation of men and women in political positions and among elected representatives (European Commission, 2017). The countries which introduced these gender quotas have registered significant increases in the representation of women in political positions. However, as stated by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2019), gender quotas are an important measure for increasing the representativeness of women in politically high decision-making positions, but this should be corroborated with a set of initiatives to increase gender equality and the gender balance in all areas where women are prone to discrimination. Romania has not adopted gender quotas but implemented several measures with a positive impact on the public sector workforce (European Commission, 2016). Regarding women's representation in the national Parliament, Romania situates in the last five places among the Member States with only 20% of women elected in Parliament, compared with the European average of 32.7%. Concerning women's presence in the Government, in 2020, only 16.7% of the ministerial positions were occupied by women and in 2021 the situation got worse with only one woman ministry (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). Regarding the European Parliament, significant improvements are observed, as, in the 2019-2024 period, 40.4% of its members are women. Romania has only 7 women out of 32 elected members in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2019). Another aspect regarding decision-making is the proportion of women in the largest listed companies, occupying positions of presidents, board members, and employee representatives. In Romania, in 2020, only 12.8% of women occupied these positions, compared with 29.5% - the European average (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). The data show that in Romania, gender equality regarding the access to positions which suppose high power of decision has not been achieved. Regarding other types of positions which suppose power of decision as to the management positions within institutions from the Central Public Administration, Romania's situation is better than in the other Member States, occupying leading positions in the European rankings as more than 50% of the management positions within these institutions are occupied by women (European Institute for Gender equality, 2019). Consequently, the Central Public Administration is an area where gender equality has been achieved and gender balance is in equilibrium (Profiroiu & Nastacă, 2018), although gender segregation in both its forms is still observed.

According to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2020, Romania ranks 55 out of 153 countries regarding overall gender gaps, with a score of 0.724. Related to the gender pay gap, the differences between men's and women's incomes can be caused by a series of aspects. First of all, it should be mentioned that the Romanian work legislation specifies the fact that equal work is paid at the same level, regardless of gender (Labour Code, 2019). In these conditions, it can be assumed that the pay gap is not caused by discriminatory labor legislation. More than that, it cannot also be believed that women are less educated than men because, at the EU's level, 60% of the graduates are women (European Commission, 2020). This assumption is available in Romania's case too, because women represent 52% of the total number of graduates. More than that, out of the total number of graduates with bachelor degrees, women represent 58%. Also, women represent 61% of the graduates with master degrees and 51% of the Ph.D. graduates. The data show that women's proportion among graduates is higher in all the education stages revealing that Romanian women possess the necessary abilities, competencies, and qualifications to occupy highly paid positions and have equal incomes as men.

As other studies approaching this subject revealed, the differences in remuneration between men and women in Romania may be caused by occupational segregation which divides the labor market into feminine and masculine professions, the vertical and horizontal segregation present in all the labor areas, the presence of gender stereotypes, the choices made by men and women concerning their professions and areas of study as well as by the fact that women do not evolve in their careers in the same rhythm as men do, due to the fact that they are dedicated to raising children and spend more time with them as men do, taking more time off their jobs in detriment of their careers. More than that, women make more extra unpaid work in their households than men, caring for their children and elders and doing housework (European Commission, 2020). Above all the mentioned impact factors, it is believed that 30% of the total gender pay gap is explained by the overrepresentation of women in relatively low-paying sectors and the most important reason for the existence of the differences in income is the lower representation in women in male-dominated professions (European Commission, 2019). However, these factors might not have a very strong impact in Romania's case, as the gender pay gap registers one of the lowest values among the European Member States. A European Commission's report reveals Romania's evolution in narrowing the gender pay gap and one of the mentioned

reasons is the fact that in this country, women's presence in male-dominated professions is higher than in other member states (European Commission, 2018).

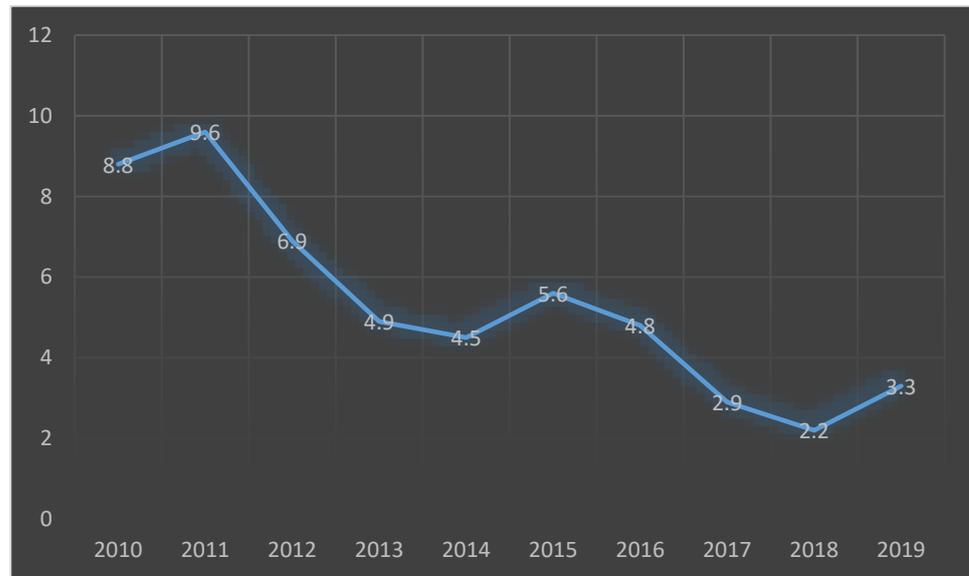


FIGURE 1: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GENDER PAY GAP IN ROMANIA
Source: Authors, adapted by Eurostat data (2021)

Figure 1 presents the gender pay gap in Romania. It can be observed that the indicator varies during the time. Starting with 2013, the gender pay gap tends to remain at low levels. The last available data show that in 2018 the pay gap was 2.2%, situating Romania in second place in the European ranking where the member state with the lowest gender pay gap is Luxemburg (1.4%). Romania ranking second among 28 Member States shows that the gender policies and implemented strategies have a positive impact on women's employment rate and their incomes. More than that, at the European level, the average gender pay gap was still significantly higher, namely 14.1% (European Commission, 2020). However, in 2019, the gender pay gap in Romania was expected to rise at 3.3% but currently, this remains only an estimation, considering that the data for 2019 is not available yet. More than that, the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact on gender equality and consequently, the gender pay gap might be higher in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic affected mostly the working fields considered to be traditionally feminine like tourism, education, public administration, food services, art and recreation, and wholesales (McKinsey and Company, 2020). Considering that the feminine professions were already paid less than the masculine ones and that the unemployment among women raised, it is expected that the gender pay gap to have already widened. The situation created by the pandemic raised the gender inequalities, lowered women's incomes, and consequently will have a negative impact on the countries' economic development. In this respect, most probably, considering women's contribution to economic development, the global GDP growth will be affected (McKinsey and Company, 2020).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The paper has analyzed the manner in which women could contribute to economic development either directly, through the supply of human resources for the labor market, or indirectly, through changes in the allocation of resources. The overall conclusion is that there is still much to be done in order to ensure gender equality on the labor market and to take full advantage of women's potential. The analysis of the situation in Lebanon revealed that the gender gap is a significant factor that limits the ability of women workers to contribute to the development of the Lebanese economy since it makes employment less attractive to women and tends to create severe economic disadvantages for women who are married and have children. In light of these findings, it is evident that a joint effort from the public and private sphere is necessary in order to combat current gender stereotypes and create equal opportunities for employment for both men and women. In particular, the analysis revealed that childbearing is one of the most significant factors which penalize women on the labor market,

suggesting that policy measures should give priority to those initiatives that alleviate the burden of household responsibilities on women. Regarding Romania, the study revealed that the gender gap is narrow, its level positioning Romania in the first places in the European rankings. Even if the data show an improving situation regarding the gender pay gap, Romania still faces other problems regarding gender equality, such as the low level of women's representation in the Parliament and Government, the horizontal and vertical segregation of the labor market, and the low proportion of women in positions requiring real high power of decision in the private and public sectors.

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