

GENDER AS A FACTOR BEHIND UNEQUAL LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES

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Abstract: Gender is one of the determinants of economic activity of populations. Dissimilarities and changes in employment and unemployment among women and men are the result of gender roles, historical background, and dynamic transformations of recent years. Differences in female and male employment are significant to the point of necessitating detailed analyses in the context of present-day living conditions. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to determine the gap in economic activity of women and men in European Union countries (EU-28) and to discover the position of Poland in this respect. Moreover, an attempt was made to specify causes of the differences found. This problem was evaluated using indicators describing economic activity by gender. The empirical data has been obtained from the European Statistical Office. The analysis involved 28 countries of the European Union. The researched period spanned from 2005 through 2017. The data was analysed statistically. In European Union countries, indicators describing economic activity of populations are varied. There is a significant gap in employment between women and men that, since 2005, has remained at 11%, while the same gap in unemployment has widened. In Poland, the employment gap has remained constant at 14%. Female and male unemployment, as well as the gender employment gap, have been decreasing in Poland since 2014. The EU-28 in general, and Poland as well, have observed an increasing rate of inactive population due to caring responsibilities. In addition, variation of this rate between women and men has also increased.

Keywords: employment gap, economic activity, unemployment, variation, gender.

JEL Classification: E24, R23.

Introduction

Dynamics of the processes taking place in a number of areas of the global market in the last decade, in particular political changes, economic growth, technological progress, improving international mobility, demographic changes, and social transformations, are direct causes of

the increasing diversity of modern societies (Gotowska, Antoszak, Majcherek, 2018, p. 5; Krysińska-Kościańska, 2018, pp. 104-112). These trends have influenced the modern labour market. In addition to positive developments, such as an increase in job offers available, a development in the number of highly qualified individuals, or the higher level of average and minimum wages, negative ones should also be mentioned, such as an ageing population, a shrinking number of working age individuals, a low rate of female employment, or low mobility of workers. The situation on regional or national labour markets is diverse and shows a strong correlation with the standard of living and the quality of life of workers. This particularly applies to those who are in a specific situation on the labour market, i.e. young people up to 24 years of age, aged 50+, women, people who have not yet worked and have no work experience, the long-term unemployed, or those living in rural areas (Murawska, 2015, pp. 216-225; Murawska, 2016, pp. 375-388).

One of the determinants influencing economic activity of the population, and thus their standard of living and the quality of life, is gender. The diversity of employment, also with regard to gender, has been analysed within many research fields and disciplines. In management sciences, this issue is addressed in the context of human resources management and pointed out as the most important trend of the 21st century (Hasson Barrett, 2012) and a strategic challenge for the HR function (Besler, Sezerel, 2012). Therefore, studying and recognising the scale of employment gap between women and men, and the causes of its occurrence in the local, regional, or national context seems to be important from the viewpoint of effective and efficient human resources management in enterprises.

An analysis of gender employment gaps appears to be significant not only in terms of human resources management in enterprises and the reasons behind this phenomenon, but, more importantly, in terms of their economic and social impact. It has been estimated that losses in *GDP per capita* resulting from unequal situation of women and men on the labour market in Europe may amount up to 10% (Cuberes, and Teignier-Baqué, 2016). According to McKinsey & Company experts (Bogdan, Boniecki et al., 2014, p. 73), an increase in economic activity of women aged 24-54 by four percentage points would help bridge the gap between Poland and the leader of this statistic, Sweden, and increase employment by 300,000 additional people. Of equal importance are the social consequences. Low economic activity of women compared to men may lead to a reduced standard of living and quality of life. As noted by Trifan et al. (2012, p. 134), participation of women in a labour market where their period of social security cover is shorter than that of men, is a significant cause of pension imbalance. Women's professional careers include more interruptions due to maternal responsibilities, and thereby mobilisation of female workforce in Europe has become an essential factor in increasing the affluence of women, and, consequently, of whole families, households as well as social and professional groups.

Research methods and course of the research process

Differences in female and male employment are significant to the point of necessitating detailed analyses in the context of present-day living conditions. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to determine the gap in economic activity of women and men in European Union countries (EU-28) and to discover the position of Poland in this respect. The second objective was to present disproportions between individual indicators describing the labour market and the calculated gaps, in the context of answering the question whether the differences in employment and unemployment rates between women and men in European Union countries are growing and to reflect on the causes of these inequalities.

This problem was evaluated using indicators describing economic activity according to gender. The analysis covered indicators such as employment rate, unemployment rate, youth unemployment rate, long-term unemployment rate, and rate of inactivity due to caring responsibilities (Table 1).

Table 1.

Indicators used for the assessment of labour market participation gap between women and men in EU countries (28)

Variable designation	Variable description	Gender gap name***
X1 _M * and X1 _K **	Employment rate in % – the employed percentage of total population aged 20-64	L1 _{MK}
X2 _M and X2 _K	Unemployment rate in % – the unemployed percentage of total economically active population aged 15-74	L2 _{MK}
X3 _M and X3 _K	Youth unemployment rate in % – the unemployed percentage of total economically active youth aged 15-24	L3 _{MK}
X4 _M and X4 _K	Long-term unemployment rate in % – the long-term unemployed (12 months and more) percentage of total economically active population aged 15-74	L4 _{MK}
X5 _M and X5 _K	The percentage of population aged 20-64 who are inactive due to caring responsibilities	L5 _{MK}

Key: M* – men, K** – women, *** – difference of indicator value for men and that for women, e.g. X1_M - X1_K = L1_{MK}, etc.

Source: own work based on Eurostat, 2019, Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (as of 15-30 April 2019).

The empirical data has been obtained from the European Statistical Office. The analysis covered 28 countries of the European Union, with a special focus on presenting the situation in Poland. The researched period lasted from 2005 through 2017. The data was analysed statistically. The rate of change indicators P_t and coefficients of variation V_s were calculated (cf. Wysocki, Lira, 2003). In particular, employment and unemployment gaps between women and men were analysed (L1_{MK}, L2_{MK}, L3_{MK}, L4_{MK}, L5_{MK}), and the position of Poland in the light of the studied variables was shown.

Evaluation of the gender employment and unemployment gap in European Union countries and in Poland

The employed percentage of total population aged 20-64, also known as employment rate, has been on the rise in European Union countries both in the male and female group. The employment rate in the EU (28) in 2017 for men was 78.0% (75.9% in 2005) and for women – 66.5% (60.0% in 2005). The female economic activity rate in Poland was below par compared to the European average and was equal to 63.6% (51.7% in 2005), and the said rate for men was on par with EU (28) values at 78.2% (65.1% in 2005).

The numerical data shows that there is an employment gap between women and men, and that European countries vary significantly in this respect. This is supported by the calculated coefficient of variation V_s for 2005-2017, which oscillated between 48.1% in 2008 and 65.7% in 2010. Since 2005, the employment gap in the EU (28) has been rapidly declining. While in 2005 it was equal to 15.9%, it dropped by as much as 4.4 p.p. down to 11.5% in 2017. As for Poland, the employment gap has widened, for in 2005 it amounted to 13.4% and in 2017 – to 14.6%, and was higher than the average for EU (28) countries across the entire period of analysis (Table 2).

Table 2.

Employment gap between women and men in European Union countries and in Poland in 2005-2017

Specification	EU (28)			PL			EU (28) statistics		
	XI_M	XI_K	LI_{MK}	XI_M	XI_K	LI_{MK}	$min LI_{MK}$	$max LI_{MK}$	V_s^{**}
2005	75.9	60.0	15.9	65.1	51.7	13.4	4.3 (FI)	44.9 (MT)	54.2
2006	76.8	61.1	15.7	67.3	53.1	14.2	4.8 (FI)	43.9 (MT)	52.1
2007	77.7	62.1	15.6	70.2	55.5	14.7	4.7 (FI)	41.3 (MT)	48.8
2008	77.9	62.8	15.1	73.0	57.3	15.7	5.3 (FI)	39.1 (MT)	48.1
2009	75.7	62.3	13.4	72.6	57.6	15.0	0.3 (LV)	37.5 (MT)	63.8
2010	75.1	62.1	13.0	71.3	57.3	14.0	(-)0.5 (LV)	36.6 (MT)	65.7
2011	75.0	62.2	12.8	71.9	57.2	14.7	0.6 (LT)	35.2 (MT)	59.2
2012	74.6	62.4	12.2	72.0	57.5	14.5	1.2 (LT)	31.4 (MT)	56.2
2013	74.3	62.6	11.7	72.1	57.6	14.5	2.6 (LT)	28.6 (MT)	52.5
2014	75.0	63.5	11.5	73.6	59.4	14.2	1.9 (FI)	26.8 (MT)	51.0
2015	75.9	64.3	11.6	74.7	60.9	13.8	2.1 (FI)	26.8 (MT)	51.3
2016	76.9	65.3	11.6	76.4	62.2	14.2	1.9 (LT)	25.5 (MT)	51.3
2017	78.0	66.5	11.5	78.2	63.6	14.6	1.0 (LT)	24.1 (MT)	50.1
P_{11}^*	2.1	6.5	-4.4	13.1	11.9	1.2	-	-	-
P_{12}^*	2.9	4.4	-1.5	6.9	6.3	0.6	-	-	-

For indicators XI_M , XI_K , LI_{MK} see description in Table 1; $*P_i$ – differences between values of indicators: $P_{11} = X1_{M2017} - X1_{M2005}$ (etc.), $P_{12} = X1_{M2017} - X1_{M2010}$ (etc.), $**V_s$ – coefficient of variation for LI_{MK} in EU (28) countries; $min LI_{MK}$ – minimum values of the gap in EU (28) countries; $max LI_{MK}$ – maximum values of the gap in EU (28) countries.

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2019). Database. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 15-30 April 2019.

EU (28) countries have the lowest variation of employment gap in years, but it still is rather high. The largest employment gap has been found in Malta followed by, in descending order, Italy, Greece, Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and then by Poland. The narrowest employment gap has been found in Lithuania and then, in ascending order, in Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Denmark, Slovenia, and Estonia (Figure 1).

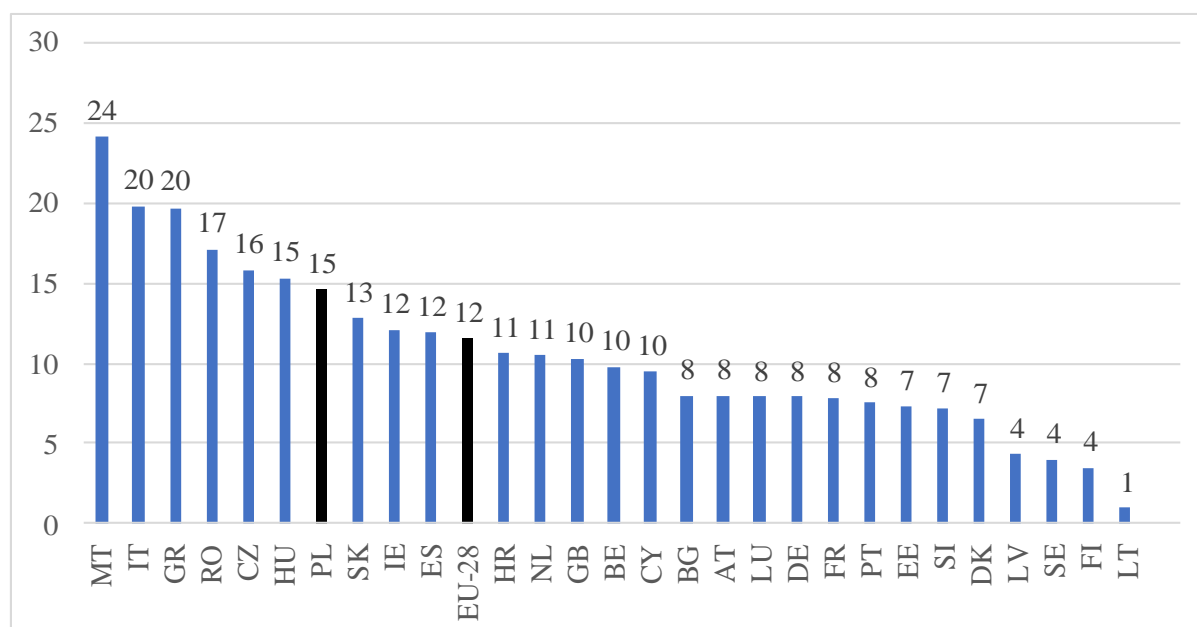


Figure 1. Employment gap in % in European Union countries in 2017. Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2019). Database. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 15-30 April 2019.

Analysis of the situation of women and men on the labour market included controlling for the unemployment rate in general population, youth unemployment rate, and long-term unemployment, in addition to the employment rate.

Results for the numerical data under analysis show that in 2017 the unemployment rate in EU (28) countries was 7.9% among women and 7.4% among men. In thirteen Member States the unemployment rate was higher for women, in twelve – higher for men, and in Bulgaria, Luxembourg, and Poland it was equal for both genders. The greatest differences to the disadvantage of economically active women were found in Greece, where 26.1% of them were unemployed, as opposed to 17.8% of men, and in Spain, with 19.0% and 15.7%, respectively (Eurostat 2019). In 2017, the lowest unemployment rate was noted among men in the Czech Republic (2.3%), and among women – in Germany (3.3%). No gender unemployment gap was found in Belgium, Luxembourg, and Poland (even though the unemployment rate among women and men in these countries is not the lowest). In previous years, no gap in the unemployment rate had also been shown in countries such as Hungary, Malta, Sweden, and Latvia (Table 3).

Table 3.

Gaps in general, youth, and long-term unemployment rate by gender in European Union countries and in Poland in 2005-2017

Specification	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	P ₁₁	P ₁₂
Gap in general unemployment rate [%]							
<i>L2_{MKEU}</i> (28)	(-)1.4	0.1	(-)0.2	(-)0.4	(-)0.5	0.9	-0.6
<i>L2_{MK} PL</i>	(-)2.7	(-)0.6	(-)0.4	(-)0.1	0.0	2.7	0.6
<i>min L2_{MK}</i>	0.1 (LV)	0.2 (SE)	0.0 (MT)	0.0 (HU)	0.0 (LU)	-	-
<i>max L2_{MK}</i>	(-)9.2 (GR)	6.7 (LT)	(-)7.1 (GR)	(-)8.2 (GR)	(-)8.3 (GR)	-	-
Gap in youth unemployment rate [%]							
<i>L3_{MKEU}</i> (28)	(-)0.2	1.8	1.6	1.5	1.3	1.5	-0.5
<i>L3_{MK} PL</i>	(-)2.6	(-)3	(-)0.2	(-)0.6	(-)0.5	2.1	2.5
<i>min L3_{MK}</i>	0.0 (DE)	0.0 (BE)	0.1 (NL)	0.0 (HU)	0.2 (NL)	-	-
<i>max L3_{MK}</i>	(-)15.3 (GR)	(-)13.9 (GR)	(-)9.8 (GR)	(-)9.3 (GR)	(-)8.9 (GR)	-	-
Gap in long-term unemployment rate [%]							
<i>L4_{MKEU}</i> (28)	(-)0.7	0.2	0.0	(-)0.1	(-)0.2	0.5	-0.4
<i>L4_{MK} PL</i>	(-)2.1	(-)0.3	(-)0.1	0.1	0.1	2.2	0,4
<i>min L4_{MK}</i>	0.0 (LU, HU)	0.0 (CY, NL)	0.0 (LU, HU)	(-)0.1 (DK, LU, HU, PL)	0.0 (DE, MT)	-	-
<i>max L4_{MK}</i>	(-)6.3 (GR)	4.7 (IE)	(-)5.4 (GR)	(-)6.4 (GR)	(-)6.8 (GR)	-	-

For indicators *L2*, *L3*, and *L4* see description in Table 1; **P_i* – differences between values of indicators: *P₁₁* = *L2_{MK}2017* - *L2_{MK}2005* (etc.), *P₁₂* = *L2_{MK}2017* - *L2_{MK}2010* (etc.); *min L2_{MK}* – minimum values of the gap in EU (28) countries; *max L2_{MK}* – maximum values of the gap in EU (28) countries.

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat, 2019, Database, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (as of 15 - 30 April 2019).

The highest unemployment rate for male youth was seen in Greece and Spain, reaching 39.3% and 39.5%, respectively, whereas for young women it reached 48.2% and 37.4%, respectively. On the other hand, the lowest values of the unemployment rate among young males were noted in the Czech Republic (7.4%) and Germany (7.6%), and among young females – also in Germany (5.8%) as well as in the Czech Republic, Austria, and the Netherlands (8.7%).

In Poland, the unemployment rate for unemployed youth aged 15-24 is 14.6% for men and 15.1% for women (Eurostat 2019). It transpires from the data contained in Table 3 that the unemployment gap between young women and men for EU-28 in 2017 averaged at 1.3 p.p., which means that in EU (28) there are more unemployed young men than unemployed young women. In Poland, in turn, the value of this gap is unfavourable for young women ((-)0.5 p.p. in 2017). The widest gap in the unemployment rate among young women and men has been found in Greece ((-)8.9 p.p.) and in Italy ((-)4.3 p.p.), and the narrowest gap has been noted in the Netherlands (0.2 p.p.), Romania (0.5 p.p.), and in the aforementioned Poland (0.5 p.p.).

The highest percentages of the long-term unemployed for both men and women have consistently been recorded in Greece (12.6% and 19.4%, respectively) and Spain (6.7% and 8.8%), while the lowest percentages for men have been recorded in the Czech Republic (0.8%), Germany and the United Kingdom (1.3%), and for women in the United Kingdom (1%) and Sweden (1%). In Poland, the value of this indicator in 2017 amounted to 1.6% for men and 1.5% for women (Eurostat 2019). The gap in the long-term unemployment rate between women

and men for years has been the highest in Greece (6.8 p.p. in 2017), and the lowest in Germany, Malta, Slovenia, Poland, and Croatia. There are more long-term unemployed women than men with the same status in Greece, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Hungary (Table 3).

In EU (28) countries, the percentage of inactive men aged 20 to 64 is significantly lower than the percentage of women not working due to caring responsibilities and this disproportion has been maintained since 2005 (Table 4). In 2017, the percentage of men who were not working because of caring for someone else was 4.5%, and the same percentage for women amounted to 31.0%. It should be also emphasised that the value of this indicator was steadily increasing between 2005 and 2017 in the EU countries, but much more so among women, as confirmed by the calculated values of P_{t1} and P_{t2} . The highest numbers of men not working due to caring responsibilities were found in Bulgaria (14.7%), Ireland (10.5%), Cyprus (10.4%), and Poland (10.0%), and the lowest in Sweden (1.0%), France (1.1%), Greece (1.2%), and Romania (1.7%). As for women, the highest number of them being unemployed for the same reason is found in Cyprus (60.3%), Ireland (54.2%), Spain (43.3%), the United Kingdom (38.4%), and Poland (39.6%), and the lowest in Denmark (6.9%) and Sweden (10.1%) (Eurostat 2019).

Variation in the gap in the percentage of inactive population due to caring responsibilities among EU (28) countries has been slowly diminishing, as evidenced by the calculated V_s , variation coefficient, but the differences are still considerable and significant (Table 4). As shown by numerical data, the value of the gap for this indicator has been rapidly increasing both for the EU (28) countries in general and for Poland. Calculations have revealed that since 2005, the gap in inactive population due to caring responsibilities has increased to the disadvantage of female EU (28) residents and in 2017 it amounted to 26.5 p.p. (while in 2005 it amounted to 23.4 p.p.) (Table 4). In Poland, the difference (gap) in employment between women and men due to caring responsibilities is even greater than in EU (28) countries and in 2017 it reached 29.2 p.p. (while in 2005 it was 24.5 p.p.).

Table4.

The percentages of population aged 20-64 professionally inactive due to caring responsibilities by gender in the European Union in 2005-2017

Specification	EU (28)			PL			EU (28) statistics		
	X5 _M	X5 _K	L5 _{MK}	X5 _M	X5 _K	L5 _{MK}	min L5 _{MK}	max L5 _{MK}	V _s
2005	1.5	24.9	(-)23.4	1.2	25.7	(-)24.5	(-)7.0 (GB)	(-)68.5 (MT)	55.5
2006	1.9	25.6	(-)23.7	4.1	27.1	(-)23.0	(-)2.8 (IE)	(-)65.4 (LU)	54.0
2007	2.2	25.7	(-)23.5	5.3	28.3	(-)23.0	(-)2.4 (IE)	(-)63.7 (LU)	55.8
2008	2.9	29.0	(-)26.1	5.4	29.4	(-)24.0	(-)1.7 (IE)	(-)60.4 (LU)	48.9
2009	3.1	28.8	(-)25.7	5.3	29.6	(-)24.3	(-)2.1 (IE)	(-)61.2 (MT)	50.8
2010	3.3	27.6	(-)24.3	5.9	28.8	(-)22.9	(-)1.5 (FR)	(-)55.5 (MT)	52.9
2011	3.4	27.5	(-)24.1	6.1	30.1	(-)24.0	(-)2.7 (IE)	(-)52.9 (MT)	48.1
2012	3.7	28.0	(-)24.3	6.7	30.3	(-)23.6	(-)1.6 (FR)	(-)52.8 (MT)	46.7
2013	4.0	29.5	(-)25.5	7.2	30.7	(-)23.5	(-)4.9 (DK)	(-)51.9 (MT)	42.7

Cont. table 4.

2014	3.9	29.4	(-)25.5	7.8	31.6	(-)23.8	(-)5.5 (DK)	(-)46.9 (MT)	40.2
2015	4.1	30.1	(-)26.0	8.9	33.5	(-)24.6	(-)5.7 (DK)	(-)46.8 (IE)	39.9
2016	4.3	30.6	(-)26.3	9.8	37	(-)27.2	(-)5.2 (DK)	(-)48.4 (CY)	41.7
2017	4.5	31.0	(-)26.5	10	39.2	(-)29.2	(-)4.5 (DK)	(-)49.9 (CY)	39.6
Pt1	3.0	6.1	-3.1	8.8	13.5	-4.7	-	-	-
Pt2	1.2	3.4	-2.2	4.1	10.4	-6.3	-	-	-

For indicators $X5_M$, $X5_K$, $L5_{MK}$ see the description in Table 1; $*P_t$ – differences between values of indicators: $P_{15} = X5_{M2017} - X5_{M2005}$ (etc.), $P_{12} = X5_{M2017} - X5_{M2010}$ (etc.), $**V_s$ – coefficient of variation for $L5_{MK}$ in EU (28) countries; $min L5_{MK}$ – minimum values of the gap in EU (28) countries; $max L5_{MK}$ – maximum values of the gap in EU (28) countries.

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2019). Database. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 15-30 April 2019.

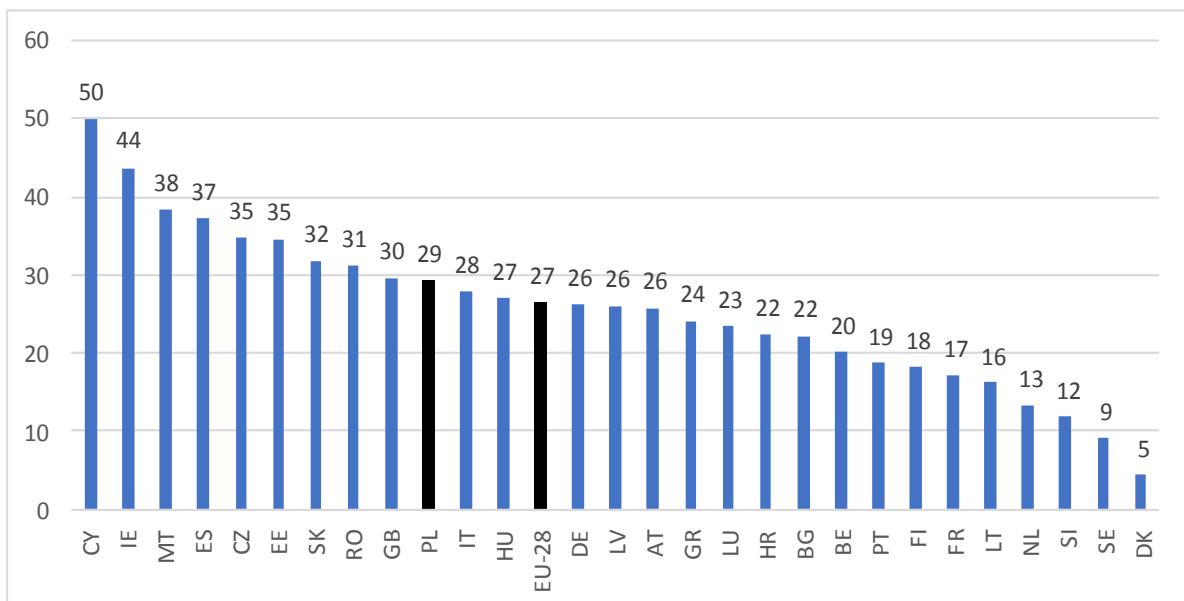


Figure 2. Gap in the percentage of population aged 20-64 professionally inactive due to caring responsibilities in European Union countries in 2017. Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2019). Database. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>, accessed 15-30 April 2019.

The smallest gap in the percentage of professionally inactive population due to caring responsibilities was observed in 2005 in the UK, in 2006-2009 and 2011 in Ireland, in 2010 and 2012 in France, and in the most recent years under analysis, namely in 2013-2017, in Denmark. On the other hand, the widest gap to the disadvantage of women in the analysed period was noted in Malta (2005 and 2009 through 2014), Luxembourg (2006-2008), in Ireland in 2015, and in Cyprus in 2016 and 2017 (Table 3 and Figure 2).

Reasons behind the dissimilarity in economic activity of women and men in the European Union and in Poland

Dissimilarities and changes in employment and unemployment among women and men are the result of gender roles, historical background, and dynamic transformations of recent years. Low participation of women in the labour force is related, among other things, to the fact that they are subject to gender-specific conditions. These include limitation of professional work for the benefit of household activity. Women name housework (96.7%), childcare (98.3%), and caring for the disabled or elderly household members (80.3%) as the three most common causes of their unemployment (Strzelecki et al., 2015, p. 160). Roots of limiting women's professional activity may be found in specific family models prevalent in individual countries and, consequently, in an unequal distribution of household duties. The reasons can also be attributed to poor access to care institutions and insufficient availability of services that replace and facilitate household work. It is also often mentioned that there are barriers to finding a job by women and getting decent wages, and that integration with the labour market is challenging after the maternity period (Sztanderska, and Grotkowska, 2007, pp. 168-169).

Factors supporting the gender gap in labour market participation in EU countries are: the number of children in the family, part-time work, the level of monthly salaries, hourly wages for the positions held, and the level of education (GUS [Statistics Poland], Eurostat 2018).

The gender gap in employment rates in EU countries widens with the increasing number of children in the family. The employment rate for women without children in 2017 was 66%, compared to 74% for men. In families with one child, 71% of women and 86% of men were working, and in families with two children, 72% and 90%, respectively. In families with three or more children, the female employment rate decreased to 57%, compared to 85% for men. The same pattern was observed in a vast majority of EU (28) countries (GUS [Statistics Poland], Eurostat 2018).

As working part-time renders it possible to reconcile work and family responsibilities, almost one third of women in the EU (28) have part-time jobs (32% in 2017) compared to 9% of men. The situation varies between Member States, with the largest number of women working part-time in the Netherlands (76%), Austria (47%), and Germany (46%), and the highest number of men – in the Netherlands (27%) and Denmark (16%). The lowest percentage was recorded in Bulgaria (2% for both genders).

Statistical data shows that women earn less than men do but the scale of inequality varies. In 2016, in the EU (28), women earned 16.2% less than men (according to average gross hourly rates), and the largest discrepancies were reported in Estonia (25.3%), the Czech Republic (21.8%), Germany (21.5%), the UK (21.0%) and Austria (20.1%). The smallest wage disparities were recorded in Romania (5.2%), Italy (5.3%), Luxembourg (5.5%), Belgium (6.1%), and Poland (7.2%). The gender pay gap is a measure of the scale of inequality between

average gross hourly rates of pay. The pay gap may be caused by individual characteristics of employees, e.g. their experience or education, as well as the division related to the specificity of individual sectors of the economy and professions.

A comparison between hourly rates in nine occupational groups according to an occupation and specialisation classification revealed that in the EU (28), in 2014, women, on average, earned less than men in all groups. The largest pay gap occurs among executives, where women earn 23% less than men. The smallest differences (8%) were observed among the two groups with the lowest earnings, i.e. administrative support staff (e.g. office workers, secretaries), employees in the service sector and salespersons (GUS [Statistics Poland], Eurostat 2018, p. 16).

In Poland, just like in other European countries, there are gender differences in economic activity possibly attributable to distinguishing features of women and men, conditions and mode of employment, the workplace, etc. (GUS [Statistics Poland] 2018).

Nearly 45% of employed women in Poland have higher education, and the percentage of employed men with higher education is 27.1%. Women, regardless of their education, are less economically active than men; however, the smallest difference in employment rate occurs within the higher education group and amounts to 7.3 p.p., having remained stable for a long time. This proves that in that educational group the frequency of substitution of economic activity with household activity is the most limited (Wiśniewski, 2018, pp. 269-278).

Women in Poland tend to work more frequently in the public sector (women – 33.2%, men – 16.7%) and men in the private sector (women – 66.8%, men – 83.3%). As far as men are concerned, 16.8% of them are self-employed and do not hire employees, while the same is true for 10% of women. Women happen to work more often in the service sector and as salespersons, specialists, office workers, workers performing simple tasks, technicians, and other mid level personnel, while men more often work as industrial workers and craftsmen, operators and fitters of machinery and equipment, representatives of public authorities, senior officials and managers, farmers, gardeners, foresters, and fishermen. The highest percentage of women work in healthcare and social care, while the largest percentage of men are employed in the construction industry.

In Poland, 10.6% of women work part-time (as opposed to 4.4% of men), with 16.5% of them doing so due to childcare (4.5% for men). In 2017, 7.8% of the total number of employed were working under hazardous conditions, of which men were the majority (83.8%) and women constituted 16.2%. Statistical data shows that the remuneration of women is 26% lower than the remuneration received by men. The greatest difference is present in the group of representatives of public authorities, senior officials, and managers. Incidentally, the wages of women are less varied, as the Gini coefficient for women is 0.348 and for men – 0.406 (GUS [Statistics Poland] 2018).

Conclusions

To conclude, labour market participation, both in EU (28) states and in Poland, has been lower for women compared with men. Indicators describing economic activity among the population vary to a significant degree. In EU (28), there is a gender employment gap that has remained at 11% in recent years. In Poland, the employment gap is wider than the average EU (28) gap and it has consistently averaged at 14% since 2005. On the other hand, while the unemployment gap in EU (28) countries has widened, Poland has observed the opposite trend, and in 2017 the unemployment rate for women and men in Poland was the same. The EU (28) in general, and Poland as well, have seen an increasing rate of inactive population due to caring responsibilities, and this tendency applies to women and men alike. Moreover, the gap calculated for this indicator has widened to the disadvantage of women in the analysed period. This means that increasing numbers of economically active women are not taking up employment or are resigning due to caring responsibilities.

The lower status of women on the labour market is not caused solely by them staying home to look after children, elderly or disabled household members. Employed women usually work shorter hours, are employed in lower-paying sectors, and occupy lower positions when compared to men. This leads to a significant gender pay gap and disproportions in respect of earnings. To some extent, the aforesaid gap is a result of deeply rooted traditional stereotypes concerning gender roles as well as economic incentives and social policies implemented by governments. In addition, it is worth noting that the issue of gender diversity in the workplace is one of the most crucial challenges for personnel actions in order to avoid homogeneity and to improve employers' market competitiveness.

Improving female labour market participation and raising the employment rate among women is of key significance for achieving the basic goal of the Europe 2020 strategy, which is ensuring a 75% employment rate among population aged 20-64 by 2020 (EC 2017). This could stimulate economic growth and limit social risk as well as risk for public finances related to an ageing population. Moreover, continuous efforts are needed to eliminate unequal treatment of women and men and to implement a dualistic model where both men and women could function as employees and breadwinners as well as carers and housekeepers.

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