



UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE ECONOMICHE ED AZIENDALI
"M.FANNO"

CORSO DI LAUREA MAGISTRALE / SPECIALISTICA IN BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION

TESI DI LAUREA

**"She-cession: The amplification of gender inequalities in the EU labor market
since the Covid-19 pandemic."**

RELATORE:

CH.MO PROF. Donata Favaro

LAUREANDO/A: Shireen Saleh

MATRICOLA N. 2043874

ANNO ACCADEMICO 2023-2024

Il candidato dichiara che il presente lavoro è originale e non è già stato sottoposto, in tutto o in parte, per il conseguimento di un titolo accademico in altre Università italiane o straniere.

Il candidato dichiara altresì che tutti i materiali utilizzati durante la preparazione dell'elaborato sono stati indicati nel testo e nella sezione "Riferimenti bibliografici" e che le eventuali citazioni testuali sono individuabili attraverso l'esplicito richiamo alla pubblicazione originale.

The candidate declares that the present work is original and has not already been submitted, totally or in part, for the purposes of attaining an academic degree in other Italian or foreign universities. The candidate also declares that all the materials used during the preparation of the thesis have been explicitly indicated in the text and in the section "Bibliographical references" and that any textual citations can be identified through an explicit reference to the original publication.

Firma dello studente

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive script that is difficult to decipher. The signature is written over a horizontal line.

Contents

- 1
- Abstract: 4
- Introduction 5
 - Significance of Study**..... 10
- Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework..... 11
 - 1.1 Gender and Economic Recessions 11
 - Gender Role in Economic Downturns** 11
 - Man-cession: A Historical Context**..... 15
 - 1.2 Feminization of the Labor Market..... 19
 - Intra-household and Extra-household Feminization**..... 19
 - Long-term Feminization Trend in the EU** 25
 - 1.3 EU She-Cession: Conceptual Understanding..... 32
 - Differences Between She-Cession and Previous Gendered Impacts of Recessions in the EU ...** 34
 - She-cession: Covid-19 Specific Factors** 46
 - Long-Term Implications of the She-Cession on Labor Market Feminization in the EU** 53
- Chapter 2: The Covid-19 She-Cession..... 57
 - 2.1 Impact of Covid-19 on Women’s Employment in the EU 57
 - 2.2 Comparative Analysis with Previous Recession (2008 Global Financial Crisis) 69
 - 77
 - 2.3 Short-term vs. Long-term Effects (rate of Unemployment before and during covid) 77
- Chapter 3: Long-term Feminization and Covid-19 86
 - 3.1 Intra-household Feminization..... 86
 - 4.2 Extra-household Feminization..... 93
 - 3.3 Intersectionality in Labor Market Dynamics 100
- Chapter 4: Future Implications Post-Covid 111
 - 4.1 Post-Covid Employment Trends 112
 - 5.2 The Role of EU Policy 118
 - An Overview of the Key Policies Addressing Gender Inequality**..... 119
 - EU Policy Effectiveness and Limitations** 122
 - Future Policy Recommendations** 125
 - 5.3 Gender Equality and Economic Recovery 127
- Conclusion 131
 - Key Literature Findings**..... 131

Abstract:

This thesis is a literature study that explores the Covid-19 she-cession as a phenomenon within the broader context of long-term gender inequalities in the European Union (EU) labor market. The research investigates the Covid-19 pandemic's exacerbation of pre-existing gender disparities through the examination of both long-term intra-household and extra-household feminization trends across nine EU member states: Poland, Hungary, Romania, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain.. Analyzing the differential impacts on male and female dominated sectors, it is evident that this framework contrasts the she-cession with previous economic downturns, which were mainly considered as man-cessions. This literature study also examines the future implications for women's labor market participation as the economy enters the post-pandemic phase and considers the role played by EU policies in mitigating the pandemic's effect on women's employment. Over-all this thesis highlights the amplification of long-term feminization trends in the EU during the pandemic, especially within female-dominated sectors such as healthcare, education, hospitality, and tourism as well as retail, with an emphasis on the need for equitable labor force reforms that lead to a gender-balanced economic recovery.

Introduction

This thesis study is based on how economic downturns expose gender as a key factor in determining the extent of their effects on different demographic groups. Through numerous studies, it can be concluded that women in particular are often disproportionately impacted during downturns, where they face higher job losses, wage cuts, and reduced work hours which exposes deep-rooted inequalities in labor markets (Bivens & Shierholz, 2018).

These gendered disparities are not isolated to economic events but are embedded within socio-economic structures, which ultimately perpetuate disadvantages for women through institutionalized practices. This is further highlighted by Hoynes et al. (2012) which includes in his research how economic crises exacerbate pre-existing inequalities, particularly affecting minority groups, including women, who are overrepresented in precarious, low-wage jobs. These vulnerabilities therefore are compounded by intersectional factors such as race, gender, and age (Crenshaw, 1989).

Further studies, including Albelda's (2009) work on the Great Recession, demonstrate that women in female-dominated sectors face greater risks of unemployment and underemployment in the face of austerity measures, which reveals a gendered labor market structure. Kochhar (2020) also states that economic downturns, including the Covid-19 pandemic, not only lead to immediate job losses but contribute to slower recovery for women. Additionally, Joan Acker's (2006) concept of "gendered organizations" offers a theoretical framework for understanding how labor market inequalities go on to perpetuate women's economic marginalization, which makes them more vulnerable during economic crises.

This thesis will start by exploring both horizontal and vertical labor market segmentation, since it plays an important role in the gendered outcomes of the EU's labor market. The horizontal labor market segmentation refers to the concentration of women in industries that are regarded to as 'feminine,' such as the healthcare, education and retail sectors which were are witnessed to be particularly vulnerable during economic downturns. However, the vertical labor market segmentation refers to the gendered disparities that women face within the sectors they are employed in. Women are seen to be more often than not confined to lower-paying, supporting roles that limit their career advancement and perpetuated wage gaps, especially during economic downturns (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2021; Blau & Kahn, 2020).

In addition to labor market segmentation, another factor that is seen to further exacerbate the economic challenges that women face during economic downturns is unpaid labor. Unpaid labor in this context refers to the disproportionate burdens that women are primarily taking on in regard to domestic household and childcare responsibilities. These disproportionate burdens that women primarily take on place women in a compromised position during economic downturns, and this was especially the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, since school and caregiving facilities went into lockdown and both public services and social safety nets were stretched thin in the EU (Alon et al., 2020). According to Folber (2004), traditional economic theories should be critiqued for overlooking the value of unpaid labor since such labor is both uncompensated and undervalued despite its critical role in supporting the broader economy.

Therefore, this thesis will delve into a nuanced exploration in regard to the specific causes and the differentiated inequalities that women face during economic downturns. This exploration will focus on how labor market segmentation, wage gaps, and the undervaluation of unpaid labor go on to exacerbate women's economic vulnerability. Through this exploration, this thesis study can ultimately highlight on the specific needs that a required to be integrated within the EU's gender-responsive recovery policies in order to be achieve the dismantling of institutionalized inequalities in the labor market.

Moreover, this thesis study will include the exploration of the 'man-cession' concept, which regards the disproportionate impact of past economic downturns on male-dominated industries. For example, the Great Recession disproportionately affected male-dominated sectors like construction, manufacturing, and automotives, while on the other hand, women were more likely employed in more stable public sectors that witnessed a lesser impact in comparison (Alon et al., 2010). This case was similar during the Dot-Com Bubble Burst since it impacted male-dominated sectors like tech and telecommunications, while women in administrative and support roles experienced less severe job losses (Parker, 2002).

Nonetheless, during the Covid-19 pandemic related research turned this around with scholars calling this economic crisis a 'she-cession' instead of a prior term 'man-cession'. According to Alon et al. (2020), the reason the Covid-19 pandemic showed an unprecedented impact on female-dominated industries like hospitality, retail, and education, where these sectors faced disproportionate disruptions following the Covid-19 pandemic's lockdowns and social distancing measures. On the other hand, male-dominated sectors like construction and manufacturing,

experienced short-term disruptions and recovered more quickly as they are regarded to as 'essential' sectors which enabled stronger financial resources that were employed by governments.

While exploring both the 'man-cession' and 'she-cession' concepts, research shows that while recessions do traditionally have a more immediate and severe impact on male-dominated sectors, the female-dominated sectors are witnessed to experience slower recoveries due to women having a high concentration in lower-wage, part-time, and temporary positions. This dynamic highlights the need for policies that address these disparities, particularly in the aftermath of economic crises like the Covid-19 pandemic (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

The concept of feminization refers to both sociological and economic shifts that occurred in regard to gender roles and labor market participation. Historically, there was a clear division between men's paid labor (extra-household work) and women's unpaid domestic labor (intra-household work), a division that reinforced gender norms and economic structures. While this gender divide is witnessed to lessen over time, it continues to affect contemporary labor markets, as gendered expectations persist and shape opportunities. The rise of dual-income households, fueled by the feminist movement and changing economic needs in the late 20th century, led to increased female labor force participation. However, women's participation often still entails balancing professional work with traditional domestic duties, which reinforces gender inequalities in both spheres.

The term extra-household feminization involves both quantitative and qualitative changes in the labor market. The quantitative change involves the significant increase in women's workforce participation, which is reflected in the rising labor force participation rates across the EU (Eurostat, 2024). However, despite this increase, women remain concentrated in lower-paying, service-oriented sectors like healthcare and education, where they face wage gaps and precarious working conditions (Charles, 2020). Therefore, the qualitative change involves the types of jobs women occupy which ultimately reflect gendered societal expectations and leads to the undervaluation of these roles. Rubery and Rafferty (2013) emphasize in their research that while women's workforce participation has increased, entrenched gender inequalities were not eliminated in return.

Intra-household feminization however involves the dual burden women face, when combining paid work with unpaid domestic responsibilities. Studies show that despite more women in the

workforce, the gendered division of labor at home persists, with women still spending more time on household tasks than men (Mattingly & Smith, 2022). The ‘second shift’ by Hochschild and Machung (2012) describes this additional workload, which contributes to stress and negatively impacts women's health, career advancement, and job satisfaction. Organizational biases continue to reinforce this imbalance, as women are often perceived as more likely to prioritize family responsibilities, which can potentially lead to career penalties and stagnation (Killewald & Zhuo, 2019).

Based on these feminization trends, this thesis will also explore how these trends are exacerbated by the ongoing shift from manufacturing to service-based economies, gender segregation in education, and globalization which played their parts in entrenching gendered occupational segregation. Ultimately, through these findings, the study will offer better insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the EU policy reforms that are aimed at fostering gender equality in the EU's labor market, particularly in the post-pandemic era.

In order to understand the she-cession in the context of the EU, a consideration of the region's diverse economic and social landscape is required. The EU's fragmented labor market and social policies create varying gendered outcomes across its member states. Based on this, this thesis will focus on the geographical variation in the impact of the she-cession within the EU will be explored by this study, considering how the differences in national social policies, economic structures, and cultural norms shaped women's experiences during the crisis.

In addition, a discussion will be dedicated to the sectoral expressions of the she-cession focusing on how the pandemic has predominantly impacted sectors with high percentages of women including healthcare, education, retail, and tourism. Analysis of these intersections is at the heart of this thesis and will help develop a nuanced understanding of the she-cession, as well as inform our expectation about post-pandemic gender equality prospects on the indicative EU labor market.

Lastly, the thesis will explore the long-term implications of the she-cession, focusing on three key areas: shifting gender roles, the redistribution of unpaid care work, and reducing structural barriers to women's labor market participation. With a deep focus on the effectiveness and limitations of the EU policy measures, particularly by exploring the EU's response to tackle the gender inequality in the labor market through the RRF, ESF+ and Work-Life Balance Directive, which represent an ambitious attempt at addressing the pandemic's exacerbated gendered

impacts. In the end, this literature thesis will include a focus on the critical role of gender equality in fostering a better and resilient economic recovery where equitable policies in the EU can actually contribute to sustainable economic growth and overall social stability.

Ultimately, the rationale for the research questions is grounded in the core themes of this thesis, which addresses specific issues surrounding labor market feminization, the differential impacts of economic downturns in regard to gender, and the potential for better EU policy interventions.

1. What factors led to the Covid-19 recession being identified specifically as a She-cession in comparison to past recessions?

This question aims to uncover the distinctive circumstances that surrounded the Covid-19 pandemic which differentiated it from previous economic downturns. By investigating these factors, a better understanding of how the pandemic's impact on women diverged from historical patterns would be achieved, highlighting the specific vulnerabilities female workers dealt with.

Thus this question directly engages with the identification of the she-cession as a unique phenomenon, contrasting it with historical economic downturns, and over-all addressing the need for a deeper understanding of gender-specific vulnerabilities in crisis situations. Prior research has emphasized the critical role that sectoral disparities and employment types play in shaping recession impacts (Rubery & Figueiredo, 2022).

2. Is the COVID-19 She-cession an isolated event or an exacerbated result of long-term feminization in the labor market in the EU?

This question links the she-cession with the ongoing long-term trends of labor market feminization. The aim is to determine whether the pandemic's effects represent a broader, long-standing issue of gender disparities in the labor market or if they represent a distinct crisis. This exploration will provide vital insights into the structural challenges that women face in the workforce.

Thus this question focuses on long-term trends in labor market feminization, which aligns with literature examining the structural factors contributing to gender disparities in the labor market (Mariscal, 2023; Kuhlmann & Annink, 2023).

3. What are the future implications for women's employment as we enter the post-pandemic stage?

This future-oriented question is designed to understand how reforms and recovery plans could improve in order to contribute to better employment prospects for women in the post-pandemic era within the EU. It emphasizes the urgent need to approach policy with a comprehensive mindset, taking into account the challenges exacerbated by the she-cession and aiming to improve women's labor market experiences and participation.

This question therefore taps into broader debates on what EU policy responses such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility, European Social Fund Plus and the Work-life Balance Directive might be able to achieve in terms of reducing gendered effects (Magnusson & Nordenmark, 2023; Fagnani & Letablier, 2020).

Significance of Study

In order to properly address the persistent gender inequalities within the EU labor market, a better understanding of how and why the gendered impacts occur during economic recessions is needed. This is especially important in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic where women faced disproportionate economic hardships in comparison to men, such as exacerbated wage gaps and job losses in female-dominated sectors like healthcare, hospitality, education, and retail. In addition to these economic hardships, women also experienced heightened mental health issues and risks to their long-term career prospects due to the increased caregiving responsibilities and reduced workforce participation (Collins et al., 2021; Rubery & Figueiredo, 2022).

It is also important to tie the above findings to broader implications for the EU's labor and social policies, highlighting the role of the EU's recovery policies in the post-pandemic era in addressing these gender disparities and the importance of integrating gender-sensitive measures into the EU's economic recovery plans.

In addition, this literature study explores how economic crises reshape gender roles in both intra-household and extra-household labor. Therefore, this study can contribute to the literature on labor market feminizations and the pandemic's she-cession by highlighting the need for further investigation into the long-term effects of the pandemic on women's employment and the potential economic benefits of minimizing gender disparity in the labor market within the EU. gender equality (Mariscal, 2023; Kuhlmann & Annink, 2023).

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1 Gender and Economic Recessions

Gender Role in Economic Downturns

During economic downturns, extensive literature reveal that there is a marked difference in the economic impact that is felt across different demographic groups, such as gender, race, and age. However, this is especially the case for gender, which is a significant determinant of these differentiated economic impacts. According to Bivens and Shierholz (2018), women are considered to frequently be the bearers of a disproportionate share of job losses, wage cuts and reduced work hours during economic hardships, which reveals the structural gendered inequalities that are embedded within the labor market. The authors note that these disparities are not a modern-day issue but are deeply rooted within the socio-economic structures that perpetuate the disadvantages women face through institutionalized practices.

Research by Hoynes et al. (2021) shows that economic downturns do not create these gender inequalities within the labor market, but that economic downturns exacerbate these pre-existing labor market inequalities which leads to minority groups experiencing more severe employment losses. According to the author, the reason these minority groups face additional economic vulnerability is due to their overrepresentation in precarious roles with lower wages. The intersectionality of gender, race, and age compounds these vulnerabilities, which then intensifies the adverse effects on these marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1989).

Albelda's (2009) study on the Great Recession further emphasizes these differences during economic downturns, since even in female-dominated sectors women often encounter greater risks of unemployment in comparison to men. This discrepancy is due to the gendered structure of the labor market, where women are concentrated in less stable positions and are frequently the first to face furlough during economic hardships.

Kochhar (2020) expands on the long-term impacts of economic downturns, especially in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, where they underscore that recessions disproportionately affect women, not only through the immediate job losses they face but also in term of the slower recovery they go through.

Joan Acker's (2006) concept of "gendered organizations" further illuminates how these entrenched inequalities in the labor market sustain women's economic marginalization. As Acker argues, the persistence of these inequalities leaves women more vulnerable to the amplified impacts of economic crises, making their recovery longer and underscoring the need for gender-responsive recovery policies and deeper understanding of structural disparities.

Backed by more research, Kabeer, N. (2012) states in their research that as long as structural inequalities, whether in gender, race, class, or age, exist in the labor market and run biases in firm employment, undoubtedly the economic downturns will deepen disparities, making the two synonymous indefinitely. Accordingly, this thesis probes into the specific causes of gendered inequalities, and further categorizes each cause, linking their differentiated impacts in economic downturns on gender.

Labor Market Segmentation

Labor market segmentation highlights the division into male- and female-dominated sectors, creating gender-specific occupational patterns. Horizontal segregation refers to the distribution of men and women across different industries, with women overrepresented in sectors like healthcare, education, administrative work, hospitality, and retail, often associated with traditionally "feminine" roles. Conversely, men dominate fields such as engineering, finance, and technology, tied to "masculine" archetypes (Charles & Grusky, 2004). Horizontal segregation thus affects how men and women both experience economic downturns, which historically impacted these sectors differently.

Vertical segregation describes gender-based disparities within the same industry, where men frequently occupy higher-paying, leadership roles, while women are often relegated to lower-status, support positions, like administrative work. This vertical division limits career advancement for women (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2021). Even in fields where women make significant inroads, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles due to the "glass ceiling" effect, which perpetuates their gender wage gaps despite their gains in education and labor market participation (Cotter et al., 2021).

- *Horizontal Segmentation*

This horizontal segmentation manifests itself through women being overrepresented in sectors such as retail, healthcare, education, hospitality, and administrative work. This overrepresentation is due to societal structures rather than personal choices, since women are often the ones to take

on the roles that are seen as ‘feminine’ or ‘motherly’ like care and service work (Rubery & Rafferty, 2013). The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2020) explains that these sectors face heightened vulnerability during economic shocks due to the fluctuations in discretionary spending, however, in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, this was also due to the social distancing and lockdown measure which led to drastic operational reductions.

In particular, sectors like retail and hospitality were among the first to be impacted by cost-cutting measures during the pandemic since they are more reliant on part-time and temporary roles in comparison to other sectors, which made women employed in these sectors vulnerable to job losses and income instability (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2018). According to Schierholz and Bivens (2018), these roles are typically characterized by minimal job security and benefits, which is why women and other marginalized groups are exposed to deeper job losses and wage cuts during economic downturns. Standing (2011) introduces the “precarariat,” which is a social class that arises from insecure, low-wage work. This type of work leads to a shift towards unstable labor market dynamics and disproportionately affects women due to occupational segregation and the undervaluation of care work.

According to Karamessini and Rubery (2013); Clarke and Grimshaw (2019), austerity measures compound the economic hardships that women face. This was the case during the 2008 global financial crisis, where women faced reduced work hours or exits from the labor market due to the governmental budget cuts that were set on the public sectors, which led to barriers of re-entry due to skill and experience gaps. Additionally, women face slower recoveries in these sectors in comparison to men who are overrepresented in resilient industries, which also compounds their economic hardships during downturns (Alon et al., 2020; Collins & Mayer, 2017).

- *Vertical Segmentation*

Additionally, structural inequalities within each sector are evident, particularly in how work and qualifications are undervalued. This is referred to as vertical segmentation, which is markedly pronounced in female-dominated industries in comparison to male-dominated sectors. For example, care work is often undervalued because it is seen as an extension of natural female roles rather than as skilled labor deserving of compensation (England, Budig, & Folbre, 2002).

Additionally, Joan Acker’s (2006) concept of "gendered organizations" provides a critical framework that helps in better understanding vertical segmentation. Acker argues that organizational structures, cultures, and practices are not neutral but are designed in ways that

reinforce traditional gender roles and perpetuate gender inequalities. The author emphasizes that organizations are deeply influenced by societal norms and expectations surrounding gender, which results in the systemic undervaluation of women's work and credentials. Research done by Blau and Kahn (2017) supports this concept, as the authors indicate that women's employment in lower-status and part-time roles is related to the systemic undervaluation of their labor which exacerbates their vulnerability during economic downturns.

Ultimately, in order to truly tackle vertical segmentation, a multifaceted approach is needed to make sure organizations reform their practices into improved practices that ensure the equitable valuation of women's work. Additionally, EU policies that support women in part-time and temporary roles, enhance job security, and foster career advancement opportunities for women in the labor market are essential to overcome vertical segmentation (Chodorow, 2020).

The gender wage gap, which is defined as the disparity in average earnings between men and women, is a crucial factor in understanding vertical segmentation and the nuanced interplay of gender dynamics during economic downturns. The gender wage gap becomes even more pronounced during economic downturns since women earning less and save less due to them being severely impacted by job losses, reduced working hours, and income declines (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Alon et al., 2020).

The gender wage gap compounds the economic struggles women deal with during economic downturns, but this especially the case for women who are single parents or are the primary earners in their households. According to Chodorow (2020) these women face heightened financial stress and instability since their income is more susceptible to reductions, which underscores the need for targeted policy interventions to mitigate the adverse impacts of income disparities.

Unpaid Labor

Labor segregation, both vertical and horizontal, significantly impacts gender during economic downturns when compounded by the undervaluation of unpaid labor. Essential household care responsibilities-such as childcare, eldercare, and household maintenance-are primarily assigned to women and still presently remain uncompensated, which leads to increased burdens and work-life balance difficulties, especially during downturns when public services and social safety nets are cut. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic, where women managed the housework and childcare predominantly, with little third-party assistance (Alon et al., 2020).

Folbre (2004) critically analyzes how traditional labor market theories have overlooked and undervalued domestic and care work, which contributes to ongoing gendered economic disparities. The author argues that this work, crucial for supporting the workforce, is systematically undervalued and excluded from economic measures like GDP. Hobson and Luigino (2009) examine how women's involvement in unpaid care work leads to reduced career advancement, lower wages, and higher rates of part-time employment, which is exacerbated during economic downturns when demand for unpaid care increases.

It is crucial when discussing unpaid labor to consider the pandemic's impact on women since it led to an unprecedented increase in unpaid labor that was primarily shouldered by women. This impact highlights the fragility of the systems that support women's workforce participation especially concerning their work-life balance (Alon, T. M. et al., 2020).

Ultimately, in order to truly address the unpaid labor issue there should be a fundamental shift in how society, governments, economists, and organization all value this domestic work. Therefore, the economic contribution of unpaid labor should be recognized, and multi-faceted measures such as affordable childcare, paid family leave, and robust social safety nets should be implemented (Hook & Wolfe, 2022).

Man-cession: A Historical Context

When discussing the labor market effects of economic downturns on minorities, especially on women, it is important to include the historical and structural differences of these economic downturns' effects on men. Therefore, this section includes a comprehensive discussion that delves into the structural differences between how men and women were impacted by multiple economic downturns in the past. While previous recessions were often labeled as 'man-cessions' due to their heavy impact on male-dominated industries, the recent Covid-19 pandemic shows a different dynamic since female-dominated sectors were impacted the most, dubbing it as a 'she-cession' instead.

The concept of 'man-cession' emerged during the 2007-2009 great recession, however, earlier economic downturns also showed a greater effect on men in comparison to the women. According to Alon et al. (2010) the greater employment loss that men faced is often because of the higher employment of men in sectors that were particularly affected by such downturns.

The Great Recession

During the Great Recession (2007-2009), male-dominated industries such as construction, manufacturing, and automotives experienced severe job losses, impacting men more than women, who were predominantly employed in public sectors and essential roles in healthcare, education, and social services (Hoynes, Miller, & Schaller, 2012). The recession was driven by the real estate financial crisis and housing market collapse, which disrupted construction-related industries. The credit crunch led to a decline in manufacturing as companies faced financial difficulties, resulting in production cuts and layoffs.

In response, several EU member states, including Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, and Cyprus, implemented austerity measures during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, which involved significant cuts in public spending, reductions in public sector wages and pensions, and tax increases to address budget deficits. However, the public sector did not experience immediate effects compared to the private sector. The EU prioritized protecting essential service sectors to ensure the continuity of critical functions and support economic recovery. Regulations following layoffs in public sectors made it difficult for employers to dismiss workers, while private sectors experienced concentrated job losses due to less stringent protections. Moreover, the EU's robust social protection systems (e.g., unemployment benefits) mitigated the recession's impact on women, particularly in public services (Olivier Blanchard & Jennifer A. Salem, 2013).

Data from Eurostat indicates that the unemployment rate for men peaked at around 11.4% in early 2010, while for women, it was around 10.1%, which emphasizes the recession's uneven impact on men. Conversely, the long-term effects of the recession led to prolonged "hysteresis," where unemployment rates remained elevated, which deteriorates workers' skills, future employability, and overall labor participation (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). Furthermore, the post-recession labor market in Europe shifted towards precarious employment forms, including temporary, part-time, and gig economy jobs, which raised concerns about job quality and long-term worker protection, since these jobs often come with lower wages and fewer benefits (Eurofound, 2015). A similar pattern was observed during the early 1990s recession in the EU, influenced by factors like the end of the Cold War, which led to significant declines in manufacturing and heavy industries, resulting in higher unemployment rates for men (Blanchard & Summers, 1986).

The Dot-Com Bubble Burst

During the Dot-Com Bubble Burst (2000-2002), an analogous pattern to the great recession was in effect in yet other male dominated sectors, the technology and telecommunications sector. This recession was notably pronounced in the EU, with significant tech industries in member states like the UK and Germany. The bubble burst resulted from excessive investment and speculation in IT and telecommunications stocks, leading to sharp stock declines and heavy losses. In response, many tech and telecom companies resorted to debt restructuring, ultimately declaring bankruptcy or downsizing, which caused substantial layoffs, especially among men, the demographic largely employed in these sectors (Parker, 2002).

The decline in venture capital also affected entrepreneurship and the male-dominated start-up ecosystem in tech hubs. This downturn was closely tied to engineering and manufacturing, which were integral to the global tech industry (Bottazzi & Da Rin, 2002). Women were affected differently; those employed in tech and telecommunications faced less direct job loss, as they often held roles in administration, marketing, and customer support, which experienced lower downsizing. However, the Dot-Com Burst extended to the broader economy, which impacted the public and service sectors, where women were more profound. Government budget cuts, decreased consumer spending, and declining demand for services exacerbated the job losses and wage stagnation (Wagman & Bendre, 2002)

The Eurozone Crisis

The Eurozone Crisis (2009-2014), which heavily impacted Greece, Spain, and Portugal due to banking crises and sovereign debt issues, profoundly affected economies across the EU. In the countries most affected, men experienced higher job losses compared to women. For instance, in Greece, male unemployment reached 27.4% in 2013, while female unemployment was 23.4% (Eurostat).

High public debt levels became unsustainable after the 2008 global financial crisis, leading to significant sovereign default concerns and soaring bond yields due to waning investor confidence. Austerity measures aimed at reducing budget deficits-such as cuts in public spending, tax increases, and structural reforms-resulted in a deeper recession and further weakened the economy, hitting male-dominated industries like construction, manufacturing, and financial services the hardest. This was evident in countries like Ireland and Spain, where the construction sector experienced massive layoffs following the housing bubble burst (Karamessini, 2014).

The impact of austerity measures was delayed for women, who were predominantly employed in the public sector, since these measures did not immediately affect public employment compared to the private sector. Furthermore, the credit crunch and subsequent austerity measures severely damaged small and medium enterprises (SMEs), significantly increasing male unemployment (Rubery & Karamessini, 2014).

The Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in widespread job losses across various sectors, with a notable gender disparity in its impact. Initially, female-dominated sectors-such as hospitality, retail, education, and travel-were hit hard. However, within these sectors, healthcare workers experienced a surge in demand, while businesses in retail, travel, and hospitality faced temporary or permanent closures due to lockdowns and social distancing measures (Boniol et al., 2019).

In the early months of the pandemic, male-dominated sectors such as construction and manufacturing faced employment and productivity disruptions since the global supply chains were affected. According to Smith and Williams (2022), factories encountered material shortages and construction slowed down due to project delays and lockdown restrictions during the early phase of the pandemic, which reflects a short ‘man-cession. However, these sectors rebounded quickly in comparison to female-dominated sectors, such a hospitality and retail, which continued to experience prolonged employment disadvantages and slow recovery trajectory (Alon et al., 2020).

In conclusion, a trend is revealed where male-dominated sectors tend to initially face significant disruptions during economic downturns, however they often recover swiftly due to the larger budgets and financial resources set by governments for these sectors (Blau & Kahn, 2017). In contrast, female-dominated sectors, such as healthcare and education, go on to exhibit slower growth and budgetary restrictions despite being considered as essential, which prolongs their recovery. Moreover, even in sectors that recover more quickly, women are more likely to hold part-time, temporary, and lower-wage positions, which exacerbates their economic vulnerability (Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011).

1.2 Feminization of the Labor Market

Intra-household and Extra-household Feminization

The term "feminization" encompasses both sociological and economic studies, particularly in the exploration of gender roles and employment patterns. Historically, there had been a stark gender division characterized the labor market, as men predominantly engaged in paid professional labor, referred to as extra-household work, while women were largely confined to unpaid domestic labor, termed as intra-household work. This division underscores the deeply ingrained gender norms that have shaped societal expectations then, particularly when concerning labor market participation. According to Mandel and Shalev (2020), this gender division is so entrenched in economic structures that it does not only constrains women's historical participation in paid labor but also perpetuates their downgrade to unpaid domestic spheres. Even as this division appears to diminish today, it persists in various forms, which illustrates the complexities of gender dynamics in contemporary labor markets.

The association of intra-household and extra-household terminologies with feminization gained its prominence during the 1970s and 1980s, which coincided with the feminist movement that successfully brought women's issues into the forefront of policy and academic discussions. The significant social, economic, and political changes throughout the 20th century challenged traditional gender divisions. Damaske and Frech (2022) argue that societal shifts regarding gender roles, economic necessities, and rising labor demand contributed to the emergence of dual-income households, which fostered broader societal recognition of women's contributions in the professional space. Such evolving recognition began to alter labor market dynamics, which created opportunities for women that were previously limited.

Several key factors have driven the association of feminization with these developments. First, increased educational access for women played a pivotal role in expanding professional opportunities. This enhanced educational access, combined with a challenge to traditional gender norms, significantly increased women's labor force participation, which allowing them to steer away from the exclusive burdens of domestic labor. Consequently, this shift led to more egalitarian labor market outcomes (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020). Furthermore, the economic and industrial advancements led to the rising labor demand and the changing of economic necessities. Ribar (2022) notes that as economies expanded and living expenses increased, the practicality of single-income households decreased, which blurred the lines

between intra-household and extra-household gender divisions. Both men and women then increasingly take on dual breadwinner roles; however, women have often found themselves shouldering both the professional responsibilities and their traditional domestic duties.

Today, the feminization of the labor market does not only include the increase in female labor participation but also the discussion of the persistent gender inequalities and norms that continue to shape various aspects of women's labor. Despite the significant advancements in women's professional participation, entrenched gender inequalities persist within both intra-household and extra-household contexts, which limits career opportunities, advancement, and contributes to wage disparities (Williams & Muller, 2021).

Consequently, there is an increasing call among scholars and policymakers for a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics in the labor market. Such investigation is crucial in order to develop more effective strategies in order to dismantle gender inequalities. Grimshaw and Rubery (2022) emphasize that achieving gender equality in the labor market cannot be solely addressed through policy interventions targeting wage gaps and employment limitations. Instead, a broader societal change is needed to challenge and reshape the norms that sustain these gender disparities.

Extra-household feminization

Within the labor market context, the term 'extra-household feminization' encompasses a multifaceted concept that includes both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The quantitative aspect reflects the increasing participation of women in the workforce over the years, while the qualitative aspect reflects the structural changes in the labor market that result from this increase, ranging from the types of jobs women occupy to implications for wages, work conditions, and job security.

Rubery and Rafferty (2013) argue that the feminization of extra-household labor is not merely about women comprising a larger portion of the workforce but also involves the changes in employment patterns that reflect traditional gender roles, bringing in both societal and economic impacts. Grimshaw and Rubery (2015) contend that these changes perpetuate already existing inequalities in the labor market. This is evident when the influx of women into certain job sectors leads to their devaluation, which results in poor work conditions or lower wages and benefits. Such devaluation is then a byproduct of broader societal and economic factors, including the reinforcement of gendered expectations both in society and within the workplace.

Charles (2020) highlights the paradox of women's workforce participation, noting that while their increase can reinforce existing gender disparities, it can also challenge them. This dynamic depends on the extent and willingness of organizational practices and policy adaptations to accommodate this increase.

- *Quantitative Aspects of Extra-household Feminization*

The quantitative aspect of labor market feminization refers to the measurement of women's **increasing participation in the workforce**, which is a trend observed globally over the past decades and is primarily assessed through labor force participation rates. In the European Union (EU), this trend is particularly noticeable, due to the significant rises in the participation rates in recent years. For instance, between 2010 and 2022, Spain experienced a notable increase among EU member states, with female participation climbing from 60.6% to 69.8%. Despite this rise, women remain underrepresented in the Spanish labor market. Ireland also witnessed such a trend, with a rise from 60.8% in 2010 to 72.4% in 2022. Conversely, Greece, which has one of the lowest female participation rates in the EU, improved its rates from 48.6% to 56.5% during the same period (Eurostat, 2024).

According to Blau and Kahn (2017), the rising percentage of women in the EU labor market is largely due to the expanded access to education, which equipped more women with the qualifications and skills needed for job opportunities and career advancement. Additionally, the shifts in societal norms and evolving attitudes toward addressing the gender disparities have encouraged the acceptance of women in the professional sphere. Economic advancements and the necessity for dual-income households have also led to more job opportunities. Collectively, these factors contribute to the quantitative dimension of extra-household feminization within the EU.

Another means of assessing quantitative extra-household feminization is **through occupational distribution**, which examines the concentration of women in specific sectors and occupations. In the EU, women are predominantly seen employed in healthcare, education, social services, hospitality, and other service-related sectors. Charles (2020) notes that these sectors are often characterized by lower wages and less favorable labor conditions compared to male-dominated sectors such as technology, engineering, and finance. This occupational segregation shows the ongoing gender disparities in the EU labor market, which reinforces traditional gender roles and contributes to the persistent pay gap, with women earning, on average, 13% less per hour than men (Eurostat, 2023).

Another quantitative measure involves examining **the concentration of women in part-time and precarious** work compared to men. This discrepancy is seen as mostly involuntary and linked to the faced household and caregiving responsibilities, coupled with the lack of access to full-time positions. According to Eurostat, about 29% of employed women in the EU work part-time, compared to only 8% of men (Eurostat, 2023). Rubery and Rafferty (2013) highlight that while part-time jobs can contribute to women's overall participation, they often can lead to less favorable working conditions, such as lower pay and reduced job security, leading to lower lifetime earnings and reduced pension benefits. This double-edged sword effect underscores the complexities of extra-household feminization. Within the EU, approximately 14% of employed women held temporary contracts in 2022, compared to 12% of men (Eurostat, 2022).

- *Qualitative aspect of Extra-household Feminization*

The qualitative aspect of labor market feminization involves the **structural changes** in the nature and conditions of work that follow the quantitative increase of women in the workforce. This phenomenon signifies not only a numerical increase but also a transformation in the job characteristics and perceptions that are associated with female-dominated occupations. As women enter certain sectors more than others, these sectors will more likely experience shifts in both the economic conditions and the labor valuation.

A critical component of this qualitative aspect is the **type and nature of the work** women tend to concentrate in, which usually reflects the traditional gender roles. This alignment extends the domestic and caregiving responsibilities into the labor market, which reinforces the gender division of labor and leads to the undervaluation of these jobs (Rubery & Johnson, 2019). The societal perception that a woman's work is less demanding in skill and intellect compared to traditionally male-dominated sectors like construction, engineering, or finance contributes to this undervaluation.

Examples of these caregiving roles includes nursing, elementary education, and elder care, which are positions that embody traits traditionally associated with femininity. While vital to societal functioning, these roles are often underappreciated in terms of status, prestige, and pay. In organizational settings, women frequently occupy supporting roles, such as administrative positions, which are often seen as less prestigious due to their association with femininity (Rubery & Johnson, 2019). It is important to state that these are, however, stereotypical

reinforcements that do not reflect the actual skills or efforts required in these jobs but rather highlight the broader gender biases in the labor market (Blau & Kahn, 2021).

Furthermore, feminization extends qualitatively to the **conditions under which women work**, particularly in part-time and precarious positions. The historical association of women as primary caregivers and secondary income earners shapes the labor market's supply and demand. Women may self-select into jobs offering the flexibility they need for work-life balance, while employers may perceive these jobs as more suitable for women, perpetuating their concentration in precarious work (Budig & Misra, 2010).

Extra-household feminization has significant economic implications, as the undervaluation of female-dominated professions can lead to misallocation of resources and talent, which negatively impacts productivity and economic growth (Rubery & Tavora, 2021). The interplay of qualitative and quantitative feminization manifests itself in the increase of women's economic vulnerability which affects their overall economic security, particularly during downturns.

In conclusion, a comprehensive examination of both qualitative and quantitative changes is necessary to understand the full scope of extra-household feminization. As more women enter certain sectors, those sectors often witness declines in labor conditions and welfare, further reinforcing gender disparities socially and economically.

Intra-household feminization

Recent research indicates that while women did increasingly participate in paid labor, this shift has not been balanced by a proportional reduction in the unpaid domestic work they do, resulting in what is known as intra-household feminization. This concept emphasizes how women's dual roles as paid employees and unpaid domestic caretakers create a dual burden, compromising both their career advancement and well-being in return (Chung, Birkett, Forbes, & Seo, 2021). Societal expectations is the main contributor to this imbalance, as women often maintain domestic roles alongside their jobs. Studies by Kalleberg and Vallas (2023) and Mattingly and Smith (2022) underline the persistent gendered division of labor, with women still dedicating more time than men to household work outside their paid employment.

The concept of the second shift, introduced by Hochschild and Machung (2012), describes this additional unpaid workload that women take on at home after completing their paid workday. This dual workload highlights the challenges women face in balancing both professional and

personal responsibilities. Supporting this, Blair-Loy's (2023) study on the second shift's impact demonstrates that despite recent advances, the increased presence of women in the labor market has not corresponded with reduced domestic demands. This ongoing imbalance contributes to higher levels of stress and fatigue among working women, which can, in turn, adversely affect their job productivity, physical health, and mental well-being.

Despite gender equality advancements, women still bear a disproportionate share of household tasks and caregiving, which sustains an unequal social division of labor at home (Bianchi et al., 2022). Even as dual-income households and reduced labor market disparities become more common, women continue to shoulder the majority of domestic duties due to the traditional social norms (Hook & Wolfe, 2024). This division imposes a certain "maternity price," where women face greater economic and career penalties than men, often leading to professional sacrifices and career stagnation.

Organizations further impact this imbalance by subtly reinforcing the cultural maternal expectations, often viewing caregiving as a primary female responsibility. This bias still persists despite policies promoting gender equality, which in return affects the process of hiring, promotions, and evaluations, especially as women are viewed as more likely than counterparts to prioritize family responsibilities over professional ones (Killewald & Zhuo, 2019). Inadequate work-family policies compound these challenges, with limited parental leave for both parents and costly childcare options, leaving women with the bulk of caregiving duties overall (Koslowski et al., 2021).

Additionally, flexibility options such as part-time work and telecommuting are often penalizing, since they are often viewed as indicators of lower professional commitment (Chung & van der Horst, 2018). These arrangements reinforce perceptions of reduced dedication, hindering career advancement for women and exacerbating the "motherhood penalty," which contributes significantly to gender wage gaps and occupational segregation. The penalty extends beyond mothers, affecting even those assumed to prioritize future family plans (Correll et al., 2007). When mothers take maternity leave or work part-time, they miss on promotions and networking opportunities, resulting in compounded long-term wage disparities (Kleven, Landais, & Sogaard, 2019). The motherhood penalty also contributes to occupational segregation, with mothers more frequently confined to lower-paying positions due to employer reluctance to invest in perceived

family-focused employees. This segregation reinforces the glass ceiling effect, limiting women's advancement and financial security (Correll et al., 2007).

Balancing work and family responsibilities also has significant psychological and social impacts, which often lead to chronic stress, burnout, and mental health issues like anxiety and depression. Women in return experience diminished job satisfaction and domestic disengagement due to the dual pressures of professional and domestic responsibilities, with some reducing career aspirations or leadership pursuits as a result (Collins et al., 2021; Bianchi et al., 2022). This internalization of pressures perpetuates the gender disparities in the workplace and can strain family dynamics and social networks, often times leading to social isolation (Hook & Wolfe, 2024).

Intra-household and extra-household feminization are interwoven, where strain in one area exacerbates the imbalance in the other. Women's increased labor force participation without domestic task reduction intensifies intrahousehold inequality, creating a "double shift" effect that strains their mental and physical health, which reinforces the gender divides in the home and workplace. As women's labor market participation rises, gender-inclusive policies and cultural shifts could drive productivity, innovation, and economic growth. Organizations that provide equal opportunities can promote diverse workforces that enhance decision-making and global competitiveness. Supporting work-life balance and addressing gender disparities can unlock women's potential, which contributes to a sustainable greater economic development (Klasen, 2019).

Long-term Feminization Trend in the EU

Feminist Movements

The EU's long-term trend of labor market feminization began in the 1970s as women increasingly joined the workforce, which reflected significant social and economic changes. This shift mirrored the global trends but was notably influenced by the evolving social norms surrounding women's roles in both work and family life. Feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s across Europe, particularly in countries like France and Germany, challenged patriarchal structures and pushed for gender equality in society. These movements, which were supported by legal reforms for educational access and anti-discrimination measures, advocated for policies like equal pay and maternity leave (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

In *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (1987), Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz highlight how the feminist activism transformed women's roles in the European society, paving the way for reforms in the workforce and expanding their public presence. This activism in turn influenced the political agenda as it shifted societal perceptions of women beyond just the domestic sphere. McBride and Mazur's (2012) work on state feminism discusses further how feminist activists utilized state structures in Northern Europe in order to advocate for gender equality policies under the welfare regimes, and for ensuring that protections like equal pay and maternity leave become a standard across the EU.

In France, the feminist activism was crucial in expanding women's rights and labor protections through landmark reforms that increased women's autonomy and their labor market participation. The 1967 Neuwirth Law, which legalized contraception, was a significant step in enabling reproductive autonomy for women, which allowed them for greater control over family planning and career choices. This continued with the 1975 Veil Law, which legalized abortion, set by Health Minister Simone Veil, which strengthened women's control further in their personal and professional life. France also introduced its first equal pay legislation in 1972, but despite this effort, the gender wage gaps persisted.

In Germany, the feminist activism led to significant workplace protections. The 1952 Maternity Protection Act (*Mutterschutzgesetz*) initially provided job security and paid leave during pregnancy and childbirth, which later on expanded to prohibit any dismissals during such leave and to offer 14 weeks of coverage. By the 1970s, the focus on wage disparities increased, which aligned with the European Economic Community (EEC) mandates requiring equal pay for equal work.

Sweden's feminist movements had the most lasting influence, especially with the 1979 Equal Pay Act that ensured pay equity and the 1974 Parental Insurance Act which established a shared parental leave, which led to a cultural shift towards shared caregiving responsibilities and an egalitarian stance. This policy did not only support women's return to work, but it also helped reduce career stagnation due to childcare obligations.

In Italy, the 1975 Family Law Reform worked on dismantling the patriarchal laws that designated men as the heads of households, which granted women greater legal autonomy over their personal and professional decisions. This foundation of gender equality in the family and in women's economic decisions facilitated a better gender parity in the labor market. Italy also

implemented maternity protection laws, which secured women's employment during paid pregnancy leave.

As documented by Bridenthal and Koonz (1987) in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, these feminist movements across Europe helped enact cultural shifts in the perceptions of women's roles and rights. McBride and Mazur (2012) also illustrate how the feminist groups leveraged state mechanisms to achieve reforms in countries like Northern Europe, which built a foundation for better equality in labor and beyond.

In the United Kingdom, the feminist activism was propelled by events like the 1968 Ford sewing machinist strike, which led to the 1970 Equal Pay Act and the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, with the latter establishing the Equal Opportunities Commission. Denmark also followed with its 1976 Equal Pay Act and parental leave policies, which was supported by state-supported childcare services and reproductive rights reforms.

Norway's 1979 gender representation law, which mandated that at least 40% of local election candidates have to be women, reflected feminist advocacy for equitable political representation. Finland also pursued equal treatment in education and the workplace, by enacting the Act on Equality alongside other various labor protections. Austria's 1979 Equal Treatment Act also targeted workplace gender discrimination in regard to both pay and promotions.

In the Netherlands, groups like the *Dolle Mina* advocated for equal pay and reproductive rights, which led to the 1975 Equal Pay Act and the eventual legalization of abortion in 1981. Spain and Portugal also saw a feminist resurgence after the fall of authoritarian regimes in the 1970s, with constitutional reforms that advocated for gender equality and other subsequent labor rights legislations for women, such as Spain's Equal Pay and Opportunities Act and Portugal's maternity leave and equal pay laws.

Authors Kaplan (1992) and Evans (1997) both discuss how feminist movements shaped the Western European policies, underscoring the significant impacts of the 1960s and 1970s activism on supporting the advancement in gender equality in labor rights and economic justice. Therefore, this period had laid the groundwork for the future reforms by intertwining gender, labor rights, and social justice across diverse European contexts.

From Manufacturing to Service-based Models

Following the feminist movements, the evolution of female labor participation rates across the EU since the 1970s marks a significant shift in the labor market. In the 20th century the female labor participation in the EU was able to reach and remain hovered around 40%, but as early as the 21st century the participation rate increased rapidly to an average of 67.3% (Eurostat, 2023). Within the labor market, the key factors that enabled this increase are- firstly the witnessed expansion of the service sectors after the shift from manufacturing. Secondly, the rise of the part-time work notion that enabled women's participation by accommodating the dual burden of domestic responsibilities (Rubery & Fagan, 1995). To reiterate however, both the social and policy changes played a crucial role in shaping these trends. Parental leave policies, antidiscrimination laws and equal pay legislations, such as the EU's Directive 54/EC in 2006 on equal treatment, all paved the way for women to join and remain in the workforce.

The shift from manufacturing to the service sectors played a significant role in the development of new market dynamics in the EU, where traditionally jobs had been more male oriented and dominated, offering both relatively high wages and stable employment. However, with the economic shift towards service-based models since the 1970s, which opened employment opportunities in fields such as education, retail, and healthcare, women increasingly entered the workforce. The composition of the labor force changed significantly due to the rising demand in labor within the service sectors, however these female-dominated sectors are characterized with a cycle of economic vulnerability that is perpetuated by part-time and precarious work. This shift is therefore a double-edged sword phenomenon, where on one side it increased the participation of women in labor, but simultaneously reinforced occupational segregation and gender inequality on the other (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2011).

Additionally, this trend intersects with other forms of inequality, including racial and class disparities, which makes it difficult for women from marginalized communities to secure economic stability. In conclusion, this shift to a service-based economy led to a greater inclusion of women in the labor market but it did not translate into an economic parity for women with men. Precarious work along-side the fueled undervaluation of the feminized service sectors, perpetuated inequalities in pay, job security and career advancement (Bettio et al., 2009).

Gender segregation in Education and Labor

Furthermore, despite the advancements for women in the labor market and education, structural barriers continued to hinder parity. Gender segregation in education and its persistence

perpetuated the divide between male and female dominated sectors, as women were continuously channeled into feminized academic and labor fields. Gender segregation in education often begins at an early age, as societal norms, and gender-based stereotypes go on to influence the educational paths and choices women take, often steering them into traditionally feminized fields linked to service and care as an expansion of their domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, men were encouraged into the pursuit of careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) along side business (finance, management, etc.). This segregation manifests itself in the long-term effects on both genders in the labor market, further reinforcing the gender based economic inequalities (Charles & Grusky, 2004).

In Germany, educational selections remain gender-divided, as women go on to pursue healthcare and education, while men dominate engineering and IT. By 2020, 86% of healthcare workers in Germany were women. In 2023, the gender divide continued as women held only 12% of engineering and 24% of computer science roles, while they represented 76% in healthcare. These disparities perpetuate the occupational segregation and gender wage gaps (EU Science Hub).

Similarly, in Italy, women tend to concentrate in teaching and humanities while men dominate technical fields. Women's high representation in part-time roles, especially in education, stems from limited full-time positions and short-term contracts. By 2023, 70% of Italy's part-time workers were women, which reinforces gender inequality and limits women's upward mobility (EU Science Hub).

In contrast, Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark have reduced their educational gender segregation through multiple policy interventions. Sweden, for instance, has set career counseling programs and financial incentives to encourage women into STEM majors and fields, which is also supported by parental leave and workplace equality laws. This approach has balanced gender distribution, although as of 2023, women still comprised only 28% of STEM graduates (Euro Health Observatory).

In the UK, educational gender segregation is primarily pronounced in vocational education and apprenticeships, with women also gravitating towards health and social care, while men focus on construction and engineering. In 2023, women made up 59% of apprentices in health and social fields, while men constituted about 85% in manufacturing and construction, which reinforces the gendered labor market and pay gap (UK Department for Education).

Efforts to promote women in STEM fields have progressed within the EU, but both structural and cultural factors still have their impacts on women's educational and career choices. The key influences on women's participation in STEM include cultural norms, educational guidance, parental and peer influence, and the scarcity of female role models, which all together shape women's ultimate educational interests and career paths (Charles & Bradley, 2009).

Traditional cultural and gender norms often portray STEM fields as masculine, which can be discouraging for women from entering these fields. Media, entertainment, and toys reinforce this by directing boys towards science and engineering interests while also steering girls towards care and beauty. This is due to toys being marketed to boys mainly emphasizing construction and exploration, which is linked to STEM skills, while toys for girls mainly focus on caregiving and domestic roles (Schmuck & Schmuck, 2017).

In educational settings, teachers may unconsciously encourage boys toward math and science while guiding girls into language and social sciences, which impacts girls' self-perception in STEM. This differential encouragement reduces girls' self-efficacy and professional aspirations in STEM fields over time (Reilly, Neumann, & Andrews, 2019).

Parents additionally significantly shape children's interests and career aspirations from an early age, where they often encourage girls to engage in play aligned with traditional gender roles and domestic tasks, while boys are guided towards problem-solving and technical play. These parental expectations, whether intentional or not, along with societal pressures, are critical in women's early childhood development (Eccles, 2014).

Peer interactions also further reinforce gendered expectations, as girls interested in STEM may face ridicule from peers, which can deter them from pursuing these fields in an effort to fit in with other girls. Studies by Leaper, Farkas, & Brown (2012) show that middle and high school girls often encounter peer pressure that labels them as 'unfeminine' or socially isolates them for excelling in traditionally 'masculine' perceived activities.

The underrepresentation of women as role models in STEM contributes to the perception that these fields are male-dominated, which can hinder girls' self-efficacy and confidence due to a lack of female role models. This absence of inspiration and guidance makes it challenging for girls to envision themselves in scientific careers during their early-stage development (Beasley & Fischer, 2012).

Moreover, even if women overcome early pressures and enter STEM fields, they frequently encounter structural barriers associated with male dominance in these sectors. These barriers, include discrimination, unequal pay, and limited advancement opportunities, which can contribute to the 'leaky pipeline' effect, where women gradually leave STEM due to a hostile work environment and their or others' perceptions of their own competence (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012).

Globalization

Adjacent to the shift from manufacturing to a service-based economy, globalization plays a role to reshaping labor markets worldwide by increasing the demand for female labor, which in return intensifies the feminization of certain sectors such as healthcare, education, and domestic work. Globalization is significant in this phenomenon as it promotes international migration and sets gendered global supply chains, which illustrates how economic processes influence gendered labor dynamics.

International migration in the labor market, which is facilitated by globalization, enables female workers to move from less developed to more developed economies. Scholars like Hochschild (2000) and Parreñas (2015) note that women who migrate often find themselves in low-wage sectors, including domestic work, elder care, and other service-based industries. The limited opportunities available to these migrant women further feminizes these industries and exacerbates the gender divide within the labor market.

A prominent example of developed countries experiencing these trends includes the United States, the United Kingdom, and several European Union member states. Italy, Spain, and Germany stand out, with migrant women constituting a substantial portion of the domestic and elder care work. Despite being crucial part in the care of aging populations in these developed countries, their roles are often undervalued in the labor market, as they are characterized by minimal wages and limited job security. These conditions result in restricted upward mobility for these women, which reinforces the gender and class divides in the labor market (Yeates, 2012).

Moreover, the inadequate representation and protection of migrant women in labor unions and in advocacy groups further exacerbates their vulnerability in employment. The global care economy then perpetuates structural inequalities that disproportionately affect migrant women, making this group particularly susceptible to exploitation and marginalization. Such marginalization

emphasizes the necessity for policies that address the intersectional vulnerabilities faced by migrant women, alongside the gendered nature of the labor market (Anderson, 2022).

Simultaneously, globalization accelerated the promotion and outsourcing of low-wage labor to developing countries, particularly in sectors such as textile and electronic manufacturing, which predominantly employ women. These sectors operate under cost-cutting strategies, which often results in poor working conditions, minimal labor protections, and low wages for female workers in factories (Kabeer, 2004). According to Mezzadri (2016), the predominance of female labor in these outsourced jobs is linked to gendered assumptions that women are more suited for repetitive, low-skilled labor requiring simple manual effort. In the European Union, particularly in its Eastern and Southern regions, women comprise a significant portion of such outsourced labor in these sectors, where labor costs are comparatively lower than in Western Europe

In conclusion, while globalization has created employment opportunities for women, it has simultaneously directed them into low-wage, low-security jobs that exacerbate gender disparities. Despite women's critical contributions to the global trade, they are often transferred to precarious working conditions, making them more vulnerable to exploitation by multinational corporations (Mezzadri, 2016).

However, globalization also draws attention to these malpractices, leading to various initiatives within the EU that are aimed at improving labor standards and advocating for fair trade practices. For instance, the European Pillar of Social Rights program goes on to address gender inequalities in these industries through promoting rights for fair wages, better working conditions, and labor protections (European Commission, 2017). Similarly, the European Social Fund (ESF) aims to apply gender equality and labor rights agendas, particularly for vulnerable groups like women in low-wage sectors (Eurofound, 2021). However, despite such initiatives, the structural inequalities and power imbalances that are inherent in the global supply chains often limit the effectiveness of such efforts, as these initiatives face challenges in addressing deeply entrenched gendered divisions of labor and addressing the root causes of exploitation within the globalized economy.

1.3 EU She-Cession: Conceptual Understanding

The term 'she-cession' garners its name from the disproportionate impact that an economic downturn has on women, of which leads experts to underscore the gendered effects that recessions cause. The terminology gained its particular relevance during the Covid-19 pandemic, when women across the globe -including the European Union (EU)- dealt with significantly

greater job losses and overall prolonged economic hardships compared to men. This poses a challenge for the traditional belief of recessions being termed as mainly ‘man-cessions,’ since historically recessions impacted greatly what is considered as male-dominated industries such as manufacturing and construction. In contrast to man-cessions, she-cessions highlight a greater effect on sectors that are overrepresented by women, such as healthcare, education, retail, and social care (Alon et al., 2020). This concept diverts attention to an important aspect at hand, where women’s vulnerabilities in the labor market are understood to not solely be the result of the pandemic’s unique economic outcomes but are an exacerbation of pre-existing structural inequalities stemming from a long-term trend of extra and intra-household feminization witnessed in the labor market (Kabeer et al., 2021).

In order to understand the she-cession within the EU, a reflection of the region’s diverse economic and social landscape is required. The EU labor market is highly segmented, with varying gender disparities witnessed across each member state due to the differences in social policies, cultural norms and economic structures adopted. For instance, countries like Sweden and Denmark, are known for their progressive gender equality frameworks applied into their labor force, along-side robust welfare systems that were able to buffer the impact on women’s employment more effectively and efficiently than other member states (Rubery & Tavora, 2021). However, the case is contrasting in southern European countries, including Italy and Spain, due to such member states having historically lower female labor participation rate and fragile social protection systems which led to significant declines in women’s employment during the pandemic’s downturn (Blaskó et al., 2022).

She-cessions are then a reflection of the intersection between various economic and social factors across the different member states. This is evident during the Covid-19 pandemic as lockdowns severely impacted women’s labor participation in sectors that were directly affected by this protocol like retail, tourism, and hospitality. Additionally, such a protocol intensified the burden on women in regard to unpaid caregiving responsibilities, as schools and daycare facilities and centers closed, which further limited their abilities to maintain paid employment (Collins et al., 2021).

Member states in Northern Europe, of which characterized with stronger social policies, had more comprehensive work-life balance frameworks that included subsidized childcare and flexible work arrangements. These adopted provisions aided in the mitigation of school closure

effects on women's labor force participation. In contrast, member states in the Southern and Eastern parts of Europe saw a disproportionate effect on women and their exit from the workforce as labor market provisions were less flexible (Bianchi et al., 2022).

These disparities between member states are thus understood mainly by the EU's fragmented social policies. While the European Commission has promoted gender equality through initiatives as the Work-life Balance Directive, the implementation across member states of these policies is uneven which exacerbates the differential impacts of she-cessions. An example of such differential effects can be seen in France and Germany for instance, where pre-existing frameworks for parental leave and childcare helped women maintain their participation in the labor force, while countries with less-developed support systems such as Poland and Hungary, saw sharper declines in female participation during the covid-19 pandemic. As the EU emerges from the pandemic, understanding these national disparities is crucial for designing effective, gender-sensitive recovery policies (Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

Differences Between She-Cession and Previous Gendered Impacts of Recessions in the EU

As discussed, it is evident that the Covid-19 pandemic pushed the narrative of the 'she-cession' phenomenon due to the unique circumstances that the economic recession was brought upon by the pandemic. This introduced a significant insight on how economic recessions affected gendered labor market outcomes. It is important then to discuss the sectoral impact and geographical variation of the she-cession within the EU while comparing it to previous crises, as unlike previous recessions that primarily impacted male-dominated sectors, the Covid-19 crisis was focal profoundly on female-dominated sectors.

Sectoral Impact

During past economic recessions and downturns, such as the case of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), sectors as construction and manufacturing as well as finance experienced significant declines in comparison to the service and care sectors, terming such a recession as a man-cession. During the GFC men bore the weight and brunt of the majority job losses, while women that concentrated in service and care sectors, maintained a more stable employment (Rubery & Johnson, 2022). According to the authors, the Covid-19 pandemic bore the opposite effect, as it struck the heart of healthcare, retail, education, and hospitality/tourism along-side part-time employment, which is previously characterized as vulnerable to economic shifts, magnifying the vulnerabilities at hand.

- *Healthcare Sector*

The healthcare sector, which was epicenter of the pandemic is predominantly staffed by women as female workers represent a significant percentage of the frontline medical staff, nurses and caregivers that geared to the help of patients infected. According to Rubery and Travora (2021), even as the demand for healthcare staff surged, women in the sector faced multiple challenges, one of which was the inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE), alongside long hours of hard labor, and increased health threats due to their firsthand exposure to the virus. These conditions brought upon the healthcare sector, and thus females predominantly, physical, and emotional burdens that resulted in intense levels of burnout, stress, and mental health issues.

According to Kabeer, Razavi, & van der Meulen Rodgers (2021), Covid-19 highlighted the longstanding undervaluation of general care work, especially healthcare work in this case, due to such labor being disproportionately done by women, which remained underpaid and underappreciated despite it being classified as essential during the pandemic. This undervaluation burdened women in healthcare with significant economic vulnerabilities, where they are typically concentrated in lower-paying positions and supporting roles while the few men dominated the higher-status and better compensated positions. This wage disparity left women economically insecure despite the central demand for their labor.

Another significant disparity is job precarity, as part-time and temporary contracts offer limited benefits to women, and during the pandemic, such precarious roles were among the most vulnerable to income loss, leaving women without the economic security necessary to weather the global crisis. Furthermore, structural inequalities that tie women in lower-tier roles exacerbate the struggle to achieve professional and financial growth over the course of handling Covid-19 necessities, even as they possessed similar qualifications and extended working hours to men, which also placed women in a position where they lacked access to hazard pay and healthcare compensations.

Amplifying their financial and personal vulnerabilities further, is the unpaid household labor that forced many women to reduce their working hours or leave their jobs entirely in the face of lockdown protocols that coincided with the increase in medical work and hours required in hospitals (Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2022).

- *Education Sector*

The education sector, another female-dominated sector, experienced its own significant disruptions following the lockdown protocols due to school closures, remote learning transitions and widespread furlough. While teachers were mainly able to navigate and pivot to online teaching instructions, many women in administrative positions, or teaching assistants and childcare workers, of which are in lower-paid and non-teaching roles, faced layoffs and furlough (Collins, Landivar, Ruppner, & Scarborough, 2021).

According to multiple following research (Collins, Landivar, Ruppner, & Scarborough, 2021; Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2022; OECD, 2021; Rubery & Johnson, 2022), these furloughs were primarily faced due to the reduced need for in-person operations done by such positions which rendered them temporarily redundant. Financial pressures set on educational institutions following previous undervaluation such as reduced funding along-side the new increase in costs for remote learning infrastructure, forced many institutions towards cost cutting plans. These furloughs thus highlight the gendered vulnerabilities in the education sector, where women were mostly the demographic concentrated in these less-secure precarious roles, especially in childcare work.

Furthermore, countries with inadequate support for childcare and education has a cascading effect on women's labor force participation in education during lockdowns, as many women were faced with the additional caregiving responsibilities at home, limiting their ability to remain in paid educational labor (Blaskó et al., 2022). This was unlike the 2008 GFC, where public sector jobs remain relatively more stable, wherein during the Covid-19 crisis unprecedented disruptions were caused in these seemingly secure areas.

- *Retail and Tourism Sectors*

Among the hardest hit sectors are the **retail and tourism sectors**, which are service-oriented sectors that employ a high percentage of women. Such sectors were impacted as well due to the lockdown and stringent social distancing measures implemented to avoid high spread of the virus. The temporary closure of non-essential businesses, such as shops, restaurants, and hotels severely disrupted employment. The impact of these measures was considerable as well in the cancellation of events, reduced consumer spending and the collapse of international travel. The sudden halt of tourism in particular, had devastating results on economies that were heavily reliant on hospitality and leisure (Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

According to these authors, in the face of these events, these sectors were particularly impacted by large-scale job losses that were inevitable, with women as the majority affected due to their overrepresentation within their fields in part-time and precarious employment. The research by the authors underscores that women are more likely in these fields to have front-line roles, such as customer service where remote work is not feasible. Additionally, the gendered burden of childcare responsibilities limited their ability to remain in or return to their positions. Such a pressure was pronounced in Southern European countries like Spain, Greece, and Italy as the informal nature of many jobs in tourism along side the lack of work-life balance initiatives meant that a significant number of -predominantly female- workers had been excluded from social protection schemes shielding them from unemployment and failing to provide them with unemployment benefits and wage subsidies.

- *Recovery Trajectory*

The economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic differs significantly from previous recessions, such as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), particularly in its gendered employment impacts. During the 2008 GFC, male unemployment rose disproportionately in male-dominated sectors, but recovery was swift, which allowed men to regain employment quickly due to governmental interventions like infrastructure projects and fiscal stimulus programs (Rubery & Tavora, 2021). These globalized industries, such as manufacturing and finance, rebounded as trade and consumer demand resumed.

According to the authors, higher job security and wage protections in these sectors contributed to this swift recovery, which offer full-time contracts, union representation, and unemployment benefits that facilitated quicker re-employment. Policymakers prioritized these sectors for stabilization as they were deemed as essential sectors. In contrast, female-dominated sectors received less governmental support and were characterized by lower wages and informal contracts, which emphasizes the structural advantages of male-dominated sectors in shaping post-crisis employment trajectories.

However during the Covid-19 pandemic, the pattern reversed, with female-dominated industries, reliant on face-to-face interaction, faced significant challenges. The dependence on physical presence made these service-oriented sectors vulnerable to prolonged closures and slower recoveries (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020). Therefore, a sharp decline in consumer demand led to operational restrictions, resulting in an uneven and sluggish recovery for female-dominated industries compared to their male counterparts.

Tourism and hospitality faced ongoing health-related concerns regarding Covid-19 vaccinations, along with travel restrictions, changing public health guidelines, and uncertainties about future outbreaks. This unstable operating environment hindered the recovery back to pre-pandemic activity levels. Research by Sparreboom & Blankenburg (2020) shows that Southern Europe, particularly the tourism-dependent countries, suffered significant setbacks as international travel and consumer hesitancy toward non-essential travel persisted, even post-vaccination.

According to Alon et al. (2020), the shifts in consumer behavior exacerbated the challenges for these female-dominated industries. The pandemic caused individuals to prioritize health and safety, which led to a preference for remote services and a decline in demand for in-person activities, which ultimately resulted in reduced operational capacity and delayed recovery. Women in roles such as hotel workers and flight attendants, characterized by low pay and informal contracts, became more vulnerable to long-term unemployment, underscoring the need for targeted interventions for equitable economic recovery.

Additionally, changes in workplace norms due to remote work have raised concerns about the future viability of traditional roles in female-dominated sectors. Businesses rapidly adopted remote solutions to maintain operations, while male-dominated fields like technology and finance transitioned more smoothly to digital environments, highlighting flexibility in tele-commutable jobs in these fields. However, this shift raises doubts about the demand for roles requiring physical presence, especially for women's positions that are less adaptable to remote work, which can result in long-term job displacements as consumers shift towards digital services (Alon et al., 2020).

The uncertainty regarding the recovery of service-oriented industries versus the potential dominance of remote and automated alternatives further complicates the challenges for women in these vulnerable positions. Remote work creates new inequalities, as access to remote-friendly positions is often limited to higher-skilled workers, leaving many women and low-wage workers facing prolonged unemployment.

Moreover, women with part-time and informal contracts struggle with furloughs amid structural vulnerabilities. Exiting the workforce, particularly during the pandemic due to prolonged caregiving responsibilities, presents re-entry challenges, leading to career setbacks and financial instability. Employment gaps hinder their reintegration as they are viewed unfavorably by employers, which limits their job prospects. Lastly, many governmental recovery efforts focused

on male-dominated industries, leaving female-dominated sectors underfunded and unsupported, which slows the recovery without targeted policies to address structural inequalities (Rubery & Tavora, 2021).

Geographical Variation

As stated, the Covid-19 she-cession did not have a uniform impact across the EU. This impact varied significantly based on the differences in economic structures, labor market policies and welfare systems between member states. What is witnessed however, is that it was possible to mitigate the she-cession's worst impacts when stronger welfare systems and gender-equal labor market policies are applied.

- *Southern Europe*

In Southern Europe, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted economies reliant on tourism, hospitality, and retail, notably in member states such as Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal, where women disproportionately faced job losses as they comprised a significant share of the workforce in these sectors.

Blaskó et al. (2022) report that Italy experienced prolonged closures and reduced consumer demand in retail and hospitality, with many women employed in part-time and informal contracts laid off or furloughed, often without access to unemployment benefits due to high temporary work prevalence. Women in part-time roles were often perceived as more 'available' for household tasks and caregiving than men in full-time positions.

Low female labor force participation rates worsened as increased childcare responsibilities from lockdowns prevented many women from re-entering the workforce. Italian society's entrenched gender norms view women as primary caregivers, which led to unequal intra-household labor distribution during lockdowns (Del Boca et al., 2020). Additionally, pre-existing limited childcare services and inflexible work arrangements exacerbated challenges, as families relied on disrupted informal support during the pandemic (Naldini & Pavolini, 2021).

Spain faced similar dynamics, where the reliance on tourism and high informal work rates led to significant job losses for women in female-dominated sectors due to business closures. Tourism accounted for about 12% of Spain's GDP, and the shutdown resulted in devastating furloughs and

layoffs in hospitality, where women were the majority employed (Sparreboom & Blankenburg, 2020).

Blaskó et al. (2022) note that Spain's high youth unemployment and prevalence of informal contracts further exacerbated economic challenges for women. Many lacked formal protections and took on disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, which forced them to reduce work hours or quit jobs. These compounded issues threaten to deepen gender inequalities as women attempt to re-enter the labor market amid uncertain tourism recovery.

In Greece, the tourism sector, which contributes to around 20% of GDP, faced a collapse in female-dominated hospitality jobs due to halted international travel. Women working informally in hotels and restaurants experienced layoffs and were ineligible for governmental assistance (Blaskó et al., 2022). Pre-existing structural challenges, such as high female and youth unemployment, combined with inadequate labor protections, led to deepened financial instability and long-term gender inequalities in the labor market.

Similarly, Portugal's heavy reliance on tourism and retail led to disproportionate unemployment for women in these sectors. The slow return to pre-pandemic consumer behavior, alongside increased household responsibilities due to school closures, created barriers for women in both Greece and Portugal to re-enter the labor market, which deepened the gender disparities with long-term implications for their economic security and participation (Blaskó et al., 2022).

- *Northern Europe*

In comparison to Southern European countries, the Northern European region such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden were more resilient in mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 recession, due to their robust welfare systems and work-life balance policies (OECD, 2021). These countries exhibit higher female labor force participation rates alongside comprehensive family-friendly policies, including extensive paid parental leave and subsidized childcare, which cushioned gender disparities in their labor markets during economic downturns.

Denmark's social safety nets and governmental subsidies, particularly the wage compensation schemes, were pivotal for retaining employees, including women in the hardest-hit sectors like hospitality and retail. These subsidies supported businesses in retaining their workforce, safeguarding women's employment, and contributing to overall economic stability during the pandemic (Rubery & Johnson, 2022). However, challenges were faced due to school closures, which shifted work-life balance and led many women to shoulder increased unpaid childcare

responsibilities, resulting in reduced working hours or temporary exits from the workforce, which complicates their return to full-time employment.

Sweden took a distinctive approach since it largely kept society open, relying on voluntary compliance rather than stringent lockdowns. This strategy, despite leading to higher infection rates, allowed businesses in female-dominated sectors, such as healthcare and retail, to operate with minimal disruption. Consequently, this made many Swedish women to be able to maintain their jobs and income, fostering workforce resilience (Rubery & Johnson, 2022). Sweden's combination of strong social protections, work-life balance policies, and flexible lockdown measures softened the overall impact of the pandemic as a she-cession. Research indicates that Sweden effectively enabled many women to retain their positions, which mitigated the adverse gendered employment outcomes from the pandemic (OECD, 2021; Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

The Netherlands similarly benefited from social security systems and family-friendly policies, which helped women navigate familial and economic pressures during the downturn. Robust parental leave, subsidized childcare, and flexible working conditions enabled women to manage increased childcare responsibilities during lockdowns while remaining in the workforce. Wage subsidies also aided female employee retention in severely impacted sectors (Rubery & Johnson, 2022; Collins et al., 2021). Despite these supports, many women faced difficulties balancing work and domestic responsibilities compared to fathers, which led to increased stress, reduced working hours, and temporary exits from the labor force. This situation contributes to long-term gender disparities within the Dutch labor market as women encounter challenges related to experience gaps and lagging career achievements when re-entering the workforce.

- *Eastern Europe*

In Eastern Europe, the pandemic-induced she-cession's effects varied by country, as they were influenced by the economic composition, particularly by the balance between the manufacturing and service sectors. Countries like Poland and Hungary, with substantial industrial sectors, had significant female employment in textiles, electronics, and automotives, which helped mitigate the early pandemic impact on women's employment. Men typically dominate technical and heavy-duty manufacturing roles, while women occupy positions in assembly lines and quality control (Collins et al., 2021).

This industrial composition is crucial as manufacturing sectors were less affected by lockdowns during the early Covid-19 pandemic, allowing many factories to operate with safety measures,

thus cushioning the initial blow to female employment. However, as the crisis continued, the service sectors experienced pronounced impacts, adversely affecting female employment (Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2022). Retail, hospitality, and tourism in Poland and Hungary were particularly hit hard, with women disproportionately facing job losses and furloughs due to their employment in lower-wage, part-time, and informal roles, which are more vulnerable during downturns (Collins et al., 2021; Adăscăliței & Guga, 2021).

Conversely, Romania's economy, which is heavily reliant on retail and healthcare-both female-dominated sectors-was more vulnerable due to its lesser reliance on manufacturing, which can mitigate the pandemic's economic shocks. The pandemic severely impacted these sectors, which led to significant job losses or reduced hours for many Romanian women (Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2022). This effect was worsened by many women working in informal or low-wage jobs, which left them in particularly vulnerable positions without formal protections like unemployment benefits and wage subsidies.

Eastern European welfare systems offered limited support due to the insufficient social safety nets, which exacerbated the toll on women. Additionally, the ingrained cultural norms surrounding women's roles in households contributed to the strain faced by Eastern European women. Extended lockdowns of childcare facilities and schools forced many female workers to exit the workforce to manage increased household and childcare responsibilities, with this lack of flexible work arrangements and efficient childcare services. The slow re-entry into the workforce post-pandemic is set with many challenges, which led to wage losses and delayed career progression, deepening pre-existing gender disparities (Adăscăliței & Guga, 2021).

- *Western Europe*

In Western Europe, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was comparable to that of Eastern Europe, as these countries have robust service-based economies with a high concentration of female workers. However, the pattern of impact differed due to the region's more vigorous social protection systems, stronger service sector presence, and diversified economies. For instance, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom benefited from the generous welfare policies and governmental interventions that helped to mitigate the effects on their service-based economies, particularly where women are heavily employed.

In France, various social measures, including the *chômage partiel* (partial unemployment) scheme, prevented massive layoffs in heavily affected sectors like hospitality, retail, and care

work. Although women were overrepresented in these sectors and faced significant challenges, the wage subsidies allowed companies to reduce working hours instead of their terminating jobs, which enabled many women to retain their positions or receive benefits through temporary furloughs. Nonetheless, the structural vulnerabilities due to part-time and informal work led to reduced access to unemployment benefits, which increased job insecurity for women (Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

Extensive childcare facilities and public schooling systems traditionally supported women's workforce participation in France. However, the prolonged closures during the pandemic heightened caregiving responsibilities, which forced many women to reduce their working hours or leave work temporarily. This impact was exacerbated by existing inequalities in household labor division, with women bearing a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work. Even the temporary exits from the workforce resulted in career disruptions, wage losses, and delayed re-entry, which raised concerns about the deepening of gender disparities in the long term (Collins et al., 2021).

Germany implemented the short-term scheme (Kurzarbeit), which provided significant support during the pandemic, especially in the service sectors where women were highly concentrated. This scheme allowed businesses to reduce working hours instead of just laying off employees, as the government compensated a substantial portion of lost wages. Due to this many women remained employed but with reduced hours. Kurzarbeit was essential for cushioning the economic shocks faced by women in the heavily impacted sectors such as retail, hospitality, and care work (Fuchs-Schündeln et al., 2021). Despite these efforts, the pandemic still revealed structural inequalities in the German labor market, since women are often concentrated in part-time and lower-paid roles. The closure of schools and childcare centers also imposed dual burdens of work and caregiving, which prompted many women to further reduce their work hours or exit the labor market. Studies show that German women are more likely than men to shoulder the household responsibilities, which exacerbated pre-existing gender disparities in employment and income in the long term (Blaskó, Papadimitriou, & Manca, 2022; Möhring et al., 2021).

In the United Kingdom, women also faced significant job losses during the pandemic, especially in hospitality, retail, and personal services sectors. The UK government provided some temporary relief through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which allowed businesses to retain employees by reducing their hours as they covered 80% of their wages. However, limitations in

the scheme affected women in precarious or part-time employment, since many held temporary and low-wage jobs, which made them vulnerable to layoffs. The pandemic's impact on childcare services and school closures exacerbated the existing gender disparities, since caregiving responsibilities predominantly fell onto the mothers. Many women reduced working hours, took unpaid leave, or exited the workforce, which challenged their ability to return to stable employment in struggling sectors in the post-pandemic era. This cumulative impact of job losses, caregiving burdens, and reduced hours led to the deepening of the gender pay gap and the hampering of future career prospects for women in the UK (Andrew et al., 2021).

- *Comparison to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC)*

When comparing the regional effects and variances between the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the different economic structures, welfare systems, and gender norms across European regions significantly shaped the impact on women and men. The Covid-19 crisis disproportionately affected women, while the 2008 GFC was felt more by men, particularly in male-dominated sectors like manufacturing, construction, and finance, especially in industrial economies like Germany and Poland. In these countries, layoffs in manufacturing and halted construction projects highlighted the downturn's effects. Similarly, Spain and Ireland experienced a collapse in construction, leading to unemployment for many men (Sparreboom & Blankenburg, 2020). Despite Germany's strong industrial base, the global downturn reduced demand in export-driven manufacturing, particularly in the automotive and machinery industries, predominantly employing men.

In contrast, the Southern region of Europe, with a larger service sector and public employment share, such as the case of Greece and Portugal, faced a muted downturn. Although male-dominated sectors experienced job losses, the public sector, which employed many women, provided relative stability in the initial phase of the 2008 GFC. However, the austerity measures later resulted in significant job cuts in the public sector, which disproportionately impacted women (Sparreboom & Blankenburg, 2020).

The strength of the welfare systems also influenced the regional gendered impacts. Northern European countries like Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, known as the better comprehensive welfare states, offered significant protections during economic downturns. Wage subsidy programs, retainment schemes, and extended unemployment benefits helped mitigate job losses, particularly for men in manufacturing. Denmark's active labor market policies enabled

smooth transitions into new employment sectors, which reduced long-term unemployment (Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

Conversely, the Southern regions like Italy, Spain, and Greece struggled due to their weaker welfare systems and labor market protections. Both men and women were affected as men faced immediate job losses in construction and manufacturing, while women experienced unemployment later due to austerity measures that targeted public sector cuts in healthcare, education, and social services, sectors that heavily employ women. In Spain, these cuts exacerbated initial gendered effects and labor market disparities.

The Cultural norms and labor market structures further influenced the financial crisis's gendered impacts. In the northern region, the entrenched gender equality policies and dual-income households helped protect both genders. For instance, Sweden's progressive labor policies, including the generous parental leaves, provided stability during the crisis, which enabled households to navigate the economic challenges effectively (Rubery & Johnson, 2022).

In southern Europe, however, the persistent traditional gender norms led to reliance on men as the primary breadwinners, which significantly impacted household income when men lost jobs during the crisis, particularly in Italy and Greece. The collapse of the construction and manufacturing sectors exacerbated the unemployment struggles for men, affecting long-term household economic security (Naldini & Pavolini, 2021).

In conclusion, the long-term gendered implications of the financial crisis varied across the European Union, largely due to the differences in welfare systems and gender-equal policies. Countries with strong welfare states and gender-equal policies, such as Denmark and Sweden, experienced smoother recoveries relative to the GFC's disruptions in other states. The comprehensive unemployment benefits, family-friendly policies, and retainment strategies cushioned job losses for men, while the access to childcare and flexible work arrangements helped mitigate the negative impacts on women's employment prospects.

This contrasted sharply with the southern region, where men faced persistent high unemployment rates and women dealt with austerity measures that increased financial vulnerability and economic insecurity. The cuts to social services, public sector job losses, and limited access to childcare and flexible employment options hindered women's ability to maintain employment, especially in countries like Spain and Greece, where many were employed in precarious, part-

time roles lacking any sufficient protections during the economic downturn (Del Boca et al., 2020).

She-cession: Covid-19 Specific Factors

The Covid-19 pandemic caused disproportionate economic effects on women, which exposed deep-rooted inequalities within the European Union (EU) labor market and led to what is referred to as a ‘she-cession’. Contrary to previous recessions which hit male-dominated sectors primarily, the sectors that were the hardest hit during the pandemic were service-based sectors, which predominantly employ women (Alon et al., 2020).

However, this sectoral effect does not provide the full impact and extent of the gendered employment crisis that occurred due to the pandemic. There is, therefore, a multitude of additional structural and societal factors that converged to worsen the outcomes of female employment during the crisis in the EU (Rubery & Tavora, 2020).

This section provides a detailed inspection and explanation of the specific factors that aggravated the she-cession previously discussed in this chapter, from the particular labor market structures to the long-standing disparities and gender dynamics that left women more vulnerable in the face of economic shocks while simultaneously managing a health epidemic.

Sectoral Disparities

- *Sector-Specific Impact*

As evident from previous sections, the Covid-19 pandemic presented an uneven effect across different sectors, which presented differential effects across the European Union regionally. This uneven impact is presented through female-dominated industries bearing the majority of the downturn and economic fallout, such sectors being healthcare, retail, education, hospitality, and tourism, which employed women as the majority. This uneven effect is due to the nature of the pandemic, which posed lockdown and social distancing measures, leading to decreased or stalled operations and service demands (Rubery & Tavora, 2020).

While the healthcare and education sectors remained operational, they were under immense strain and pressure, that led to general overwork and burnout, especially for women. In contrast, the hospitality, tourism, and retail sectors faced intense layoffs due to the prolonged closures. The jobs held in these sectors were often part-time or precarious as mentioned, which further compounds the vulnerability faced during the crisis (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020). This imbalance in sectoral impact was the main factor for the she-cession, as this imbalance alone

drove disproportionately high rates of job losses for women compared to men, which were dominating in industries like manufacturing, construction, technology, and finance that quickly rebounded as restrictions eased.

- ***Job Recovery Trends***

Following the initial waves of the pandemic, the recovery trends indicate a stark difference between the male- and female-dominated sectors. Male-dominated sectors, particularly manufacturing, construction and finance experienced a faster rebound and recovery since governments mainly prioritized infrastructure projects and the gradual reopening of these industries. Additionally, sectors as finance and technology posed a high capability for telecommuting and remote work, which enabled institutions to resume normal pre-pandemic operations faster (Alon et al., 2020).

In contrast, the recovery witnessed by female-dominated sectors lagged significantly behind especially hospitality, tourism, and retail. These sectors faced slower reopening, but also encountered structural barriers and changes, such as the reduced demand, long business closures, and the adoption of automation, which led to permanent job losses for women with fewer future employment opportunities (Power, 2020).

Even in sectors like healthcare and education which resumed operations under intensive conditions, recovery was uneven. Despite the ongoing demand for the services provided, budget cuts and policy changes led to job insecurities (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020). These unequal recovery trajectories between sectors only deepen the gender gap in employment and wage inequalities.

Labor Market Structure

The labor market structure in the EU is historically characterized by gender disparities due to women predominantly occupying sectors and job roles that, more often than not, are lower-wage or more precarious and less secure in nature, which contribute to exacerbated negative impacts on employment during a financial crisis. From all the gathered scholarly research in this chapter, this literature study can identify and divide pre-existing vulnerabilities within the labor market structures as overrepresentation in part-time work, precarious employment and job insecurity, and telecommuting challenges.

- ***Women's Overrepresentation in Part-Time Work***

The overrepresentation of women in part-time employment is a critical aspect in the exacerbation of employment effects onto women during the pandemic. As of 2019, before the covid-19 pandemic, nearly 30% of women in the EU, compared to less than 10% of men, occupied part-time roles and contracts (Eurostat, 2020). According to Rubery and Tavora (2020), the most immanent reason for women occupying part-time roles and being entrenched in less secure employment, can be linked to the disproportionate domestic and childcare responsibilities burdened onto women from long-standing societal expectations that surround gender roles. Furthermore, women from marginalized socio-economic backgrounds or racial minorities, were also overrepresented in part-time roles, facing even greater economic insecurities (Power, 2020).

The pandemic worsened this dynamic since the sectors most affected are service-based sectors, such as healthcare, hospitality and tourism, education, and retail that offered part-time contracts predominantly. The lack of job security offered by the part-time contracts and the reduced hours in part-time roles due to lockdown measures and a decrease in operations and service demand, further marginalized women, which made it exponentially harder for them to re-enter the workforce in post-pandemic economic recovery (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020).

- ***Precarious Work and Job Insecurity***

The prevalence of women in precarious employment that is characterized by short-term contracts, limited benefits, and lower wages, is another aggravating factor in the covid-19 she-cession. This prevalence of women led to the feminization of precarious work and posed a longstanding issue in the EU labor market- sectors like retail, education, and healthcare especially, predominantly employed women in temporary and zero-hour contracts that left women with little job security.

During the pandemic, these positions were the first to experience layoffs and contract terminations with lack of access to unemployment benefits and other forms of social protection, making women in these sectors vulnerable to the economic shock by leaving them without stable income (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). This was especially the case in retail and hospitality sectors, however women in healthcare were also faced by additional challenges such as increased workloads and heightened exposure to the virus, without any proportional improvements in job security or compensation (Boniol et al., 2021).

Therefore, the reliance on precarious, often feminized roles, in the EU labor market structure, directly posed the amplification of job insecurity and economic instability for women during the pandemic which contributed to the she-cession.

Digital Divide

- *Access to Technology*

In addition to telecommuting and gender dynamics, the gendered digital divide was exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, affecting women in particular in the EU labor market. As remote work accelerated, access to technology and digital tools became a necessity, not just for remote work but for education and communication during the lockdowns. According to the International Telecommunication Union (2021), interestingly enough women globally were 23% less likely than men to have internet access than men. While the gap is narrower in the EU, it still exists. According to Eurostat (201), around 11% of women within the EU do not have access to proper digital tools, in comparison to 8% for men. This was particularly the case in regions with larger populations and lower digital infrastructure, such as Eastern and Southern Europe where women in rural areas and low-income dynamics faced significant challenges in obtaining reliable internet connectivity and modern devices.

This challenge in access to the proper digital tools hindered women further in their abilities to resume work from their homes, along-side restricting the ability to resume online education and training programs. This gendered digital divide reinforces existing gender inequalities in the labor market and deepens the long-term disparity in employment due to the limitation on women's abilities to adapt to digital work demands and gaining the proper skills for future career opportunities, competitiveness, and employability (Kirk & Day, 2020).

Studies have also shown that women are more likely to be employed in roles and industries where remote work is less feasible, which limits their options in an increasing digital labor market as employers pivot to remote work and digital platforms due to the stability and efficiency it provides (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020). With the high demand for digital skills, shifts in job prospects and long-term career advancement opportunities become a concern for marginalized women. McKinsey Global Institute (2021) however, highlight in their study that such digital demand includes an important role in closing the gender gap in labor markets, as women with access to digital skills training, are more likely to transition higher-paying jobs in the long-term.

- *Telecommuting and Gender Dynamics*

The witnessed shift to telecommuting during the lockdowns and social distancing that occurred to manage the pandemic also played its critical role in exacerbating the gendered effects and gender inequalities in the labor market. On one hand, telecommuting offered workers flexibility to continue working during enforced lockdowns and allowed them to secure their job prospects. However, on the other hand, it presented modern unique challenges particularly for women with care giving responsibilities (Del Boca et al., 2020).

Research by Collins et al. (2021), shows that women shouldered most of the burden of unpaid domestic work, especially the childcare and homeschooling tasks that were unique to the pandemic due to schools' and caregiving facilities' lockdowns. This homeschooling and childcare burden was unequally divided particularly in dual-income household, leading to increased stress and higher likelihood for temporary exits by women from the labor force due to the pressure of maintaining equal productivity in remote work settings. As a result, women faced career setbacks, reduced hours, or job loss during the pandemic, further contributing to the she-cession (Fodor et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the shift to telecommuting posed a significant challenge for women in roles that were not easily adaptable to remote work conditions, especially for women in precarious employment sectors. An example of these roles includes waitressing, front-desk operations, retail, and other services that required physical face-to-face interactions (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). This is particularly the case for women in lower socio-economic backgrounds and racial minorities. Additionally, as demand for telecommunication rises and as digital transformation accelerates due to the pandemic, barriers of re-entry to the workforce are exacerbated for women, which poses a deepening in the gendered economic divide during and after the pandemic (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020).

Health and Safety Concerns

- *Health Risks in Female-Dominated Jobs*

Female-dominated industries bore the disproportionate burden of significant health risks to workers that the Covid-19 pandemic posed in various sectors. Education, social care, retail, hospitality and especially healthcare, require unavoidable physical proximity and face-to-face interactions, which increased the exposure of women that overrepresented these sectors to the virus (Boniol et al., 2019). According to Eurofound (2020), around 76% of healthcare workers within the EU are women, many of whom were on the frontlines during the outbreak. These

women provided critical care in hospitals, nursing homes and community health services especially.

Shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) was especially a struggle for many women working in healthcare, as they not only faced heightened health risks but also grappled with inadequate protective measures in the early stages of the pandemic. Additionally, women in those professions bore and had to navigate emotionally taxing environments with heightened demand for work required. These health risks and heightened responsibilities, combined with the precarious nature of their roles, led to both physical and psychological strains during the pandemic of which pushed many women into temporary or complete exits from the labor market (Hennekam & Shymko, 2020).

- ***Mental Health Impact***

As female-dominated sectors were the most impacted during the crisis, the mental health impacts on women were quite profound. The pressures of work-life balance was particularly difficult for women as school and childcare facilities went into lockdowns. This combination of increase in caregiving responsibilities with minimal support and the high-stress and uncertain conditions of their positions contributed to an overwhelming sense of burnout.

Research by Collins et al. (2021) concludes that women, especially mothers, reported experiencing high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression during the pandemic significantly more than men. This report is due to the dual burden of paid and unpaid work especially. This is particularly the case for women in healthcare for example, which reported experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges, which included post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the high mortality rates and emotional toll of caring for Covid-19 affected patients and their family members (Greenberg et al., 2020).

Furthermore, many studies indicate the unequal distribution of domestic labor, especially in dual-income households, increased the feelings of isolation and mental fatigue among women, which led to many cases of absenteeism and exits from the labor force. This was especially the case for single women, and due to the social distancing conducts, which disabled the extended support for women from third party members during schools' and caregiving facilities' lockdowns. Additionally, the lack of adequate mental health support systems for female workers, particularly in the healthcare sector and other essential lines of work, highlighted the gendered psychological disparity (Fodor et al., 2021).

Gendered Stereotypes and Expectations

- *Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Roles*

Throughout the crisis, women were more likely than their counterparts to take on most of the burdens of unpaid domestic labor, which included household maintenance and childcare. This inevitably intensified pre-existing gendered stereotypes and led to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles both in the household alongside the workplace. This dynamic evidently reflected and stemmed from societal norms that consider women as the primary caregivers despite being in a dual-income household. Women were expected, more than their spouses, to put their careers in the backburner in the face of school closures (Del Boca et al., 2020).

This reinforcement of traditional gender roles in household responsibilities resulted in women reducing their work hours, taking unpaid leaves, or even exiting entirely from the labor force. Therefore, the pandemic only resulted in the endurance of gendered expectations in households, which in return deepened the gender inequalities in the labor force employment participation as women's reduced labor participation had long-term effects on their career progression, wage growth and overall economic stability (Sevilla & Smith, 2020).

- *Workplace Culture and Support*

Many institutions in the EU lacked the adequate support systems required for employees to balance work and caregiving responsibilities, especially for women. Therefore, the workplace culture during the pandemic also played its part in reinforcing gendered expectations and deepening gender inequality in the labor force. A particular case would be employers that often expected their employees to maintain pre-pandemic levels of work and productivity, despite the additional struggles stemming from intensified caregiving responsibilities that women mainly faced. In many particular cases as well, workplace flexibility agreements were insufficient to accommodate the new burdens posed by the pandemic, which more likely led to negative career consequences for employees. Women who take time off for household and childcare are often met with penalties, such as passed promotions (Collins et al., 2021).

Additionally, a common workplace culture historically sought and favoured presenteeism and hiring employees without the additional caregiving responsibilities, which further disadvantages women, especially surrounding the traditional view of women prioritizing their familial prospects over their careers in life (Fodor et al., 2021). Even in cases where remote work is an option, the gendered expectation surrounding productivity persists, favouring men all while women face

greater scrutiny regarding their organizational dedication and ability to balance work and family responsibilities adequately (Alon et al., 2020).

Social Protection Systems

- Overview of EU Welfare Systems

The European Union (EU) provides its citizens with diverse social protection systems which maintain their social security such as healthcare, unemployment benefits, and family support. However, the effectiveness of these social protection and welfare systems in mitigating the gendered impact of the pandemic varied across regions and member states in the EU. Scandinavian countries are prevalent in the strength of their welfare states, which made them better equipped at supporting women through various means, such as unemployment benefits, income support and family leave policies. In contrast, countries in the Southern regions for examples struggled, with weaker social safety nets, to provide the sufficient support required for women, especially those who are in precarious job positions and facing increasing childcare responsibilities (Rubery & Tavora, 2020).

This variation between member states with their welfare and social protection systems led to uneven experiences of the ‘she-cession’ across the EU. The weakness and gaps of the social protection systems in certain member states across the EU, such as the absence in comprehensive childcare support, insufficient unemployment benefits for part-time and precarious work and a lack in targeted interventions for women affected disproportionately by the pandemic, all contributed to the deepened gender inequalities of the labor market (Rubery & Tavora, 2020).

Long-Term Implications of the She-Cession on Labor Market Feminization in the EU

As the Covid-19 pandemic marked a disproportionate effect on the job losses faced by women in comparison to men, which coined the term ‘she-cession’, the long-term implications of such she-cession on the EU’s labor market feminization is significant. The gendered impact of the pandemic deepened existing inequalities in the labor market and exposed the structural vulnerabilities that disproportionately affected women in the EU.

It is crucial therefore, as the EU moves into a post-pandemic era, to shed light on how the posed she-cession will go on to shape the future dynamics of women’s participation in the labor market. The areas of consideration in this section, therefore, focus on the shifting dynamics of gender roles, the unequal distribution of unpaid household labor, and the prospects of minimizing long-

standing structural barriers to women's labor participation and overall economic standing. However, a crucial discussion at hand is also the possibility that any set initiatives for addressing these areas of consideration could lead towards either the mitigation or in contrary, the exacerbation of existing inequalities, which makes it essential to evaluate both the opportunities and potential setbacks for progress.

This section thus examines how the she-cession due to the covid-19 pandemic influences future gender roles as the world recovers, potentially reshaping societal expectations that surround women's professional and familial responsibilities. Additionally, it highlights the centrality of unpaid household labor and its impacts on women's labor participation. Lastly, the section will assess the potential for reducing structural barriers which include occupational segregation and wage disparities that limit women's career progression. This section's discussion therefore aims at providing a framework for understanding the she-cession's impact on long-term feminization of the EU labor market.

Shifting Gender Roles

The pandemic shed a spotlight on women's dual roles as both paid workers and primary caregivers in their households, which exacerbates the tension they face in regard to their work-life balance. Such disproportionate burden raises questions about the persistence of traditional gender roles despite feminist and gender equality advancements. This struggle is evident in academic research, particularly the research by Collins, Landivar, Ruppner, and Scarborough (2021) which reveals that working mothers especially, experience a higher disruption in their employment when compared to the fathers. This was particularly the case in the pandemic as mothers shouldered the sudden spike in household and childcare chores during the lockdowns.

The pandemic thus amplified the 'motherhood penalty,' a phenomenon where women struggle with career stagnation due to intra-household feminization. Caregiving has been historically viewed as "feminine" labor, and by association has been both underpaid and undervalued in economic and societal terms (Folbre, 2019). According to the author, this devaluation translates into lower wages, reduced career progression, and limited job security for women disproportionately burdened by caregiving roles. Thus, this dual burden restricts the ability of competing on equal footing in the labor market and perpetuates the gendered inequalities in regard to job security, promotions, and lifetime earnings.

As the EU recovers and moves into the post-pandemic era, a long-term potential implication of this witnessed she-cession could be a backlash reaction against these traditional gender roles. Policy interventions, such as paid parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and the EU's work-life balance directive are key solutions to push for a more equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities between men and women (Hook & Wolfe, 2022). Governments and organizations should then hold the responsibility of better efficient implementation and sustainability of these policies to promote a more equitable and suitable work-life balance for women.

An optimistic result of the she-cession then is that it could catalyze a shift towards a more gender-balanced household dynamic, especially in the case where dual-income households are presently being the new norm. Moreover, the relative increase in the participation of men in caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic can potentially result in a configuration of societal expectations about gender and work, which can lead to a more inclusive labor market for working women (Bianchi et al., 2022).

However, another possible long-term effect can be the full reinforcement of traditional gender roles. If policy interventions remain insufficient, women will continue to shoulder the burden of unpaid care work after the pandemic, and as they were forced to reduce their working hours or leave the labor market entirely during the pandemic, this will make it exponentially harder for women to re-enter or maintain full-time employment, lagging their recovery as the rest of the economy fully recovers. Therefore, a re-domestication of women's labor roles along-side the compounding effect of missed opportunities and skill development gaps during their temporary exists, will reduce their participation in the paid economy (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020).

The Redistribution of Unpaid Care Work

The pandemic exposed therefore, the critical role of redistributing the unpaid care work in the functioning of the broader economy, through structural reforms that recognize and compensate for this unpaid care (Folbre, 2019). Before the pandemic, women in the EU already spent significantly more time on unpaid care work, lowering the overall labor market participation.

According to Craig and Churchill (2020), flexible working arrangements, investment in public childcare services, and the better implementation of the EU's work-life balance directive is crucial to address such care penalty, especially in the face of the intensified childcare responsibilities that women faced after school and childcare facilities lockdowns during the pandemic.

However, Nancy Folbre (2019) argues that true redistribution of care work requires a broader cultural shift on top of structural and policy changes. These cultural shifts must recognize and value both paid and unpaid care work as essential to economic growth and sustainability. If the EU recognizes success in the integration of care work into its labor market policies, then the childcare infrastructure and men's increased participation in caregiving, could exponentially relieve the pressure on women by normalizing dual-earner and dual-caregiver households, and facilitate the increased participation in paid employment of an essential demographic in the economy.

Prospects for Reducing Structural Barriers

The she-cession highlighted the structural barriers that women also face in the EU labor market, which includes their overrepresentation in precarious, part-time, and lower-paid jobs. This segmentation in the roles and positions taken on by women made them exponentially vulnerable to the economic downturn, as they faced sectoral segmentation due to them being overrepresented in the service sectors and as these precarious positions were often the first to be cut and laid-off during the crisis. Without any targeted interventions, this segmentation could deepen in the long-term, further marginalizing women in the labor market and entrenching existing inequalities by pushing women further into undervalued roles. This deepened segmentation reduces women's economic independence and limits their contributions to the broader economy (Blundell et al., 2020).

However, the pandemic underscoring these structural barriers provides a critical juncture for addressing them. The EU's recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) aims at rebuilding post-pandemic economies, but with the unique opportunity of addressing the gender disparity that exacerbated the effects of the pandemic. This could be possible through the allocation of funds to female-dominated sectors, supporting women in STEM fields, and promoting equal pay and labor market inclusivity.

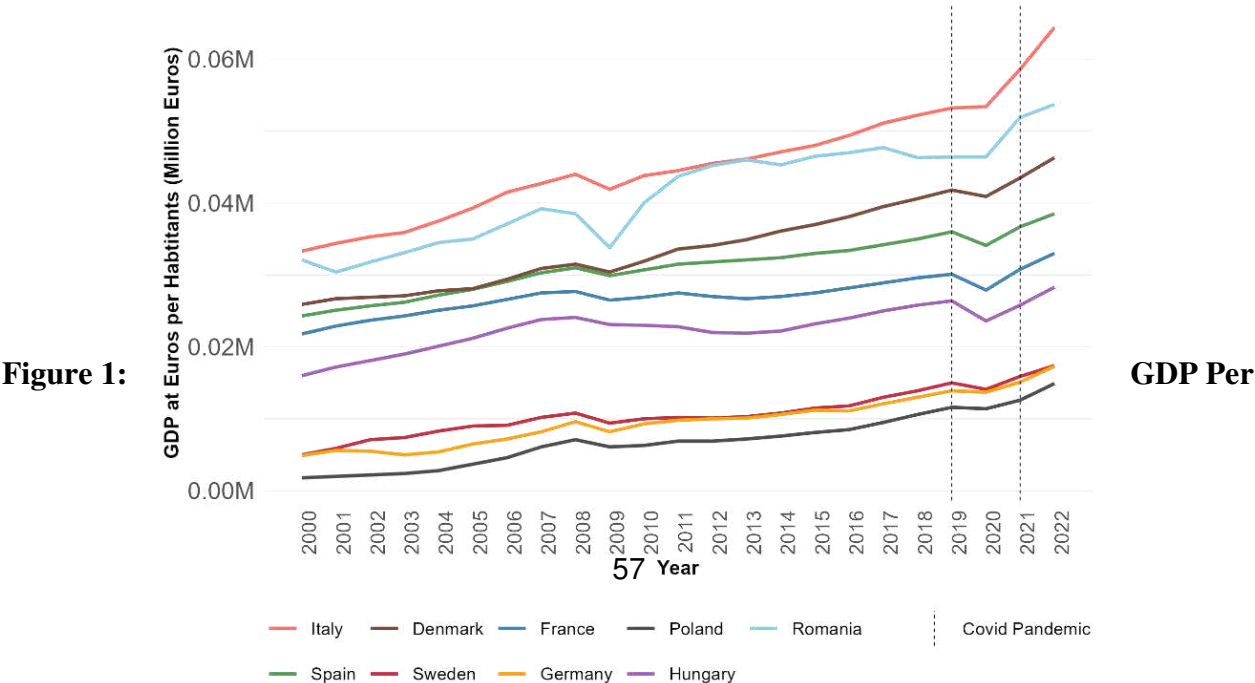
Furthermore, the she-cession underscores the importance in increasing the discussions surrounding pay transparency, wage reporting and anti-discrimination policies in order to minimize the gender pay gap and combat any inequalities in the workplace. Policies then should encourage the increase of women's representation in leadership roles, particularly in male-dominated sectors, which can challenge the gendered stereotypes surrounding leadership and pave the way for better gender parity in positions (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2017).

Chapter 2: The Covid-19 She-Cession

This chapter conducts a statistical descriptive analysis on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labor market outcomes across a selective number of EU member states. Initially, an exploration of how labor market results varied between men and women is set, identifying which sectors were the most affected. The objective of this analysis is to assess and understand whether and where women in the labor market faced greater adverse impacts compared to men. This identification takes into account variables such as sector of employment, education level and employment status. Additionally, this chapter includes reviews of existing literature in this field in order to illustrate how this analysis relates to the understanding of the adverse impacts of the pandemic on the economy and labor market outcomes for both women and men. The data that is used for this analysis is sourced from the Eurostat Statistics Portal, utilizing aggregated data by regions and countries.

2.1 Impact of Covid-19 on Women’s Employment in the EU

The pandemic presented itself as a health shock that impacted the global economy greatly. As illustrated in Figure 1, the GDP analysis across the various EU member states, reveals a notable decline in the growth rate following the pandemic immediately. The GDP is expressed in millions of euros per capita. The decline in the growth rate as evident, was substantial, which mirrors the decline that occurred during the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC).



Habitants

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The figure shows the percentage variation in industrial production volume for each country.

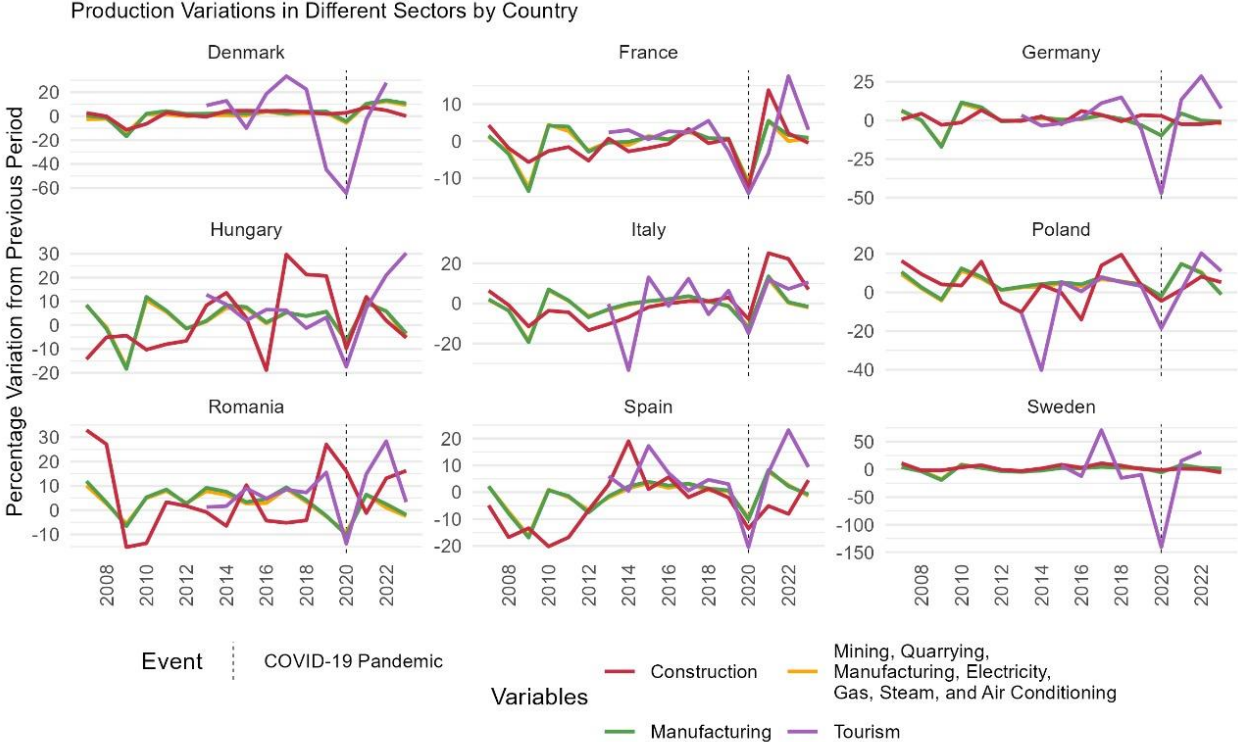
The results in the above figure are validated through scholarly findings where for example, the European Commission (2021) reported that there was an unprecedented contraction of 6.3% in EU GDP in 2020, which reflects the impact of the stringent lockdown measures and interruptions in the global supply chains. Comparatively, the contraction during the 2008 global financial crisis was 4.3%. Thus, the EU commission reports that the pandemic resulted in one of the steepest declines since the inception of the EU, which shows the severity of the pandemic's economics ramifications on the region.

Guerrieri et al. (2022) emphasizes that the dual nature of the pandemic in regard to both a demand and supply shock intensified the GDP decline. For the demand side, the impact was due to reduced consumer spending while the supply side was due to the halted productions which are both linked to the health restrictions that were set to combat the pandemic.

According to Baldwin and Di Mauro (2020), this compounded effect actually disproportionately affected the EU member states, where the member states reliant on tourism and services, such as Spain and Italy, showed GDP contractions that exceeded the EU average.

Figure 2 illustrates the variation in the sectoral production across different EU member states, with values that represent the percentage change from the prior period. The notable increase in production after the pandemic is due to the buildup of productive capacity that occurred witnessing the pandemic-related slowdown. Therefore, the witnessed average decline of about 10% in the production levels in comparison to year 2019, was due to the demand- and supply-side shocks, which included lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, and labor shortages.

Figure 2: Production Variations in Different Sectors



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The figure shows the percentage variation in production volume in different sectors for each country.

The post-pandemic recovery provided a resurgence in production levels as industries were able to adjust to new norms and as governments provide and implement recovery packages. An example of these recovery packages is the adoption of the European Commission’s Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) which played an essential part of revitalizing production capacities by focusing on stimulating green and digital transitions. The European Central Bank (ECB) states that this rebound was, however, uneven across member states and sectors especially. This is due to some industries being able to pivot toward digital solutions quicker or adapt quickly to the health regulations better than others. This was the case for high-tech industries, which includes

pharmaceuticals and technology, which outpaced in their recovery other sectors like construction and manufacturing.

In regard to the tourism sector, the data shows significant decline across all countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, with most of them being equally affected and showing slower recovery in comparison to industrial sectors. According to Gössling et al. (2021), this is due to tourism being closely tied to mobility and consumer confidence, which faced dramatic halts during this period due to strict lockdown measures and international travel restrictions. Rubery et al. (2021) further states that member states struggled to regain pre-pandemic levels of tourism activity due to continued health concerns and slower policy responses.

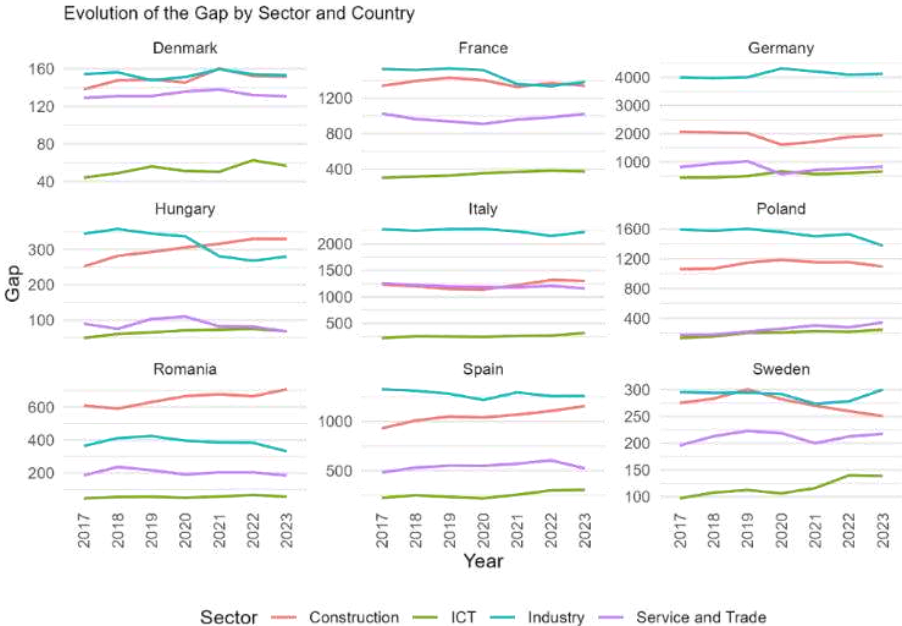
Moreover, this variation in recovery and impact was witnessed in sectors such as education and healthcare, not plotted due to data quality issues with missing values across all countries' time series, but ultimately are considered vital and essential during the pandemic. These sectors experienced mixed outcomes in production levels and recovery, with a significant reliance on national labor market policies and welfare support (Gössling et al., 2021).

The economic recovery of the member states also varied based on the structure of national economies. According to Guerrieri et al. (2020), countries with economies heavily dependant on tourism and other service-related sectors, as the case of Spain and Italy, experienced sharper declines in their productive and industrial outputs, while countries with more diversified economies, as the case of Germany, managed to mitigate part of the impacts. Hence, the interplay between the pandemic's sectoral effects and the structural dynamics, led to an average decline across all sectors, encompassing a long-term implication for the competitiveness of certain industries within the EU.

Ultimately, the post-pandemic recovery varied significantly between countries, with Northern European countries like Sweden and Denmark showing a quicker rebound compared to Southern countries like Spain and Italy, where the tourism sector's recovery was slower and more fragmented. According to Hale et al. (2021), Sweden and Denmark, experienced quicker rebounds due to factors such as their diversified economies, robust public health systems, and earlier easing of restrictions. In contrast, Spain and Italy witness economies that are heavily reliant on tourism and hospitality.

Figure 3 illustrates how the gender employment gap in male-dominated sectors evolved over time in various countries. In Spain, Denmark and Sweden, a notable increase within the industrial sector in the gender employment gap is notable, with Spain especially showing the highest rise, making it a pronounced case. The widening of the gender employment gap suggests that the industrial employment dynamics affect men and women disproportionately in these member states, driven by structural and sectoral factors.

Figure 3: Gender Gap Employment in Male-Dominated Sectors Over Time



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The employment rate is calculated as the ratio of the number of employed men (in thousands) aged 15 years or older in each sector to the economically active female population (aged 15 years or older) in the same sector.

The surge in the gender employment gap in these male-dominated sectors in Spain can be linked to several interrelated issues within these sectors. Firstly, the industrial landscape in member states witnessed significant changes due to economic restructuring, shifts to automation, and shifts towards technology-driven processes. These shifts and changes, often favor roles with higher positions, pay, experiences and skill sets, which are often male-dominated in these sectors. This exacerbated the employment gap since women are underrepresented in these high- pay and position roles (González et al., 2020).

Moreover, it is of popular criticism that Spain’s labor market policies fail to address the specific challenges that are faced by women, which includes inadequate access to affordable childcare

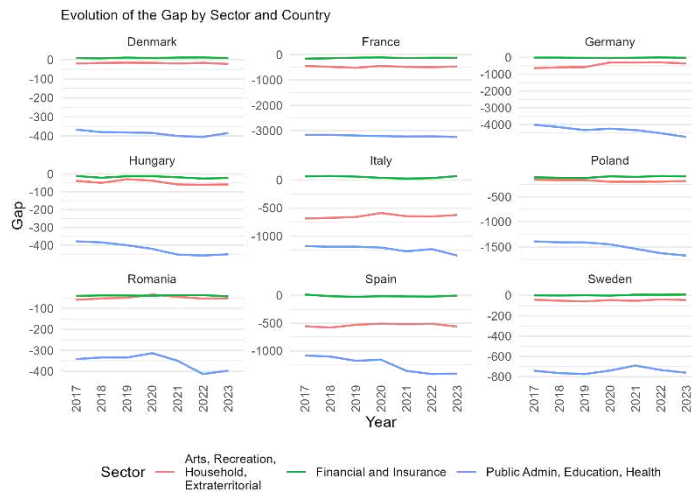
and flexible work arrangements. As a result to such failed policies, women are funnelled in lower-paying, and part-time positions, which widens the gender employment gap in these sectors (Buchmann & Gapenne, 2021).

Although Denmark and Sweden are often acclaimed for the progressive labor policies that they adopt along-side the revered levels of gender equality they pertain, the industrial sector still reflects a certain persistent level of gender disparity. Women in these member states are often overrepresented in lower-paying, part-time and precarious roles within male-dominated industries (Dahl et al., 2020). This sectoral segregation suggests that structural factors contribute to ongoing employment disparities despite the existence of progressive labor policies, as women still frequently encounter barriers to advancement into high-positioned roles in these sectors (Leira, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural, and societal norms play their part in the persistence of the gender employment gap as they reinforce traditional gender roles. Studies by England (2010), show that even as female labor market participation in male-dominated industries increased, women often still face the brunt of domestic responsibilities and struggles in work-life balance. As a result, the industrial sector employment in these aforementioned member states, reflect a broader economic context and underscore the need for targeted policies to address in particular the structural and social inequalities within the labor market.

Figure 4 presents a detailed analysis of the gender employment gap data, within sectors that are female-dominated, underscoring the notable impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women's employment. The Arts, Recreation, Household, Extraterritorial sector in Denmark, witnessed the employment gap of -15.7 thousand in 2020, worsening to -18.5 thousand in 2021. Similarly, France faced significant challenges in the same sector, with an employment gap of -446 thousand in 2020 that increased to -485.4 thousand in 2021. This result is indicative that, during the peak of the covid-19 pandemic and its initial aftermath, a significantly higher number of women were employed in these sectors compared to their male counterparts.

Figure 4: Gender Gap Employment in Female-Dominated Sectors Over Time



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The employment rate is calculated as the ratio of the number of employed women (in thousands) aged 15 years or older in each sector to the economically active female population (aged 15 years or older) in the same sector.

This data underscores multiple factors that contribute to this phenomenon, backed by scholarly and literary research. The first factor can be due to the sectors of Arts, Recreation, and Household are typically characterized by a higher concentration of female workers, which resulted in such sectors absorbing more of the female employment during a time when industries are facing layoffs and job losses.

According to Cameron (2021), the pandemic heightened the demand for arts and recreation field services due to individuals seeking artistic expression as a coping mechanism to the social isolation and home confinement from lockdowns. Thus, activities such as online fitness classes, virtual performances and DIY projects became of popular demand. Women, who traditionally made up a higher portion of such a workforce, stepped up into roles that required creativity and adaptability, which increased female employment.

However, the pandemic revealed the weaknesses within female-dominated sectors, since women in these sectors face less job securities and lower wages in their positions, making them particularly vulnerable to economic downturns. According to González et al., (2020), the increased employment in 2020 is a temporary reprieve, but as the pandemic continued so did the challenges of precarious work conditions that persisted in these sectors with limited opportunities for advancement.

Folber (2020), also highlights the critical aspect of gendered labor: the intersection of paid and unpaid labor work especially for women. The shouldered burden of unpaid care work limits the ability of women to pursue full-time employment or more secure and high-level job opportunities. Buchmann & Gapenne (2021), state that this unpaid responsibilities intensified the struggles of work-life balance for women in roles within sectors that provide essential services. Overall, the data from Denmark and France thus present a complex interplay between gender, sectoral employment dynamics, and the far-reaching impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which reveals a level of intertwined intricacy for the challenges faced by women in the labor market.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Public Administration, Education, Health sectors in France show a persistent gender employment gap, with a deficit of -3,207.7 thousand in 2020, which slightly widened to -3,224.9 thousand in 2021. This gap is a reflection of the overrepresentation of female employees in these essential fields that played a crucial role in the vital services provided to society. Despite maintaining employment status in these sectors, women experienced heightened job insecurities and career stagnation, especially in the medical frontline roles that faced extensive pressure (Collins et al., 2021). The increase in the service demand for these sectors led to heavier workloads and heightened stress levels for female on both the paid and unpaid front (Cohen et al., 2021).

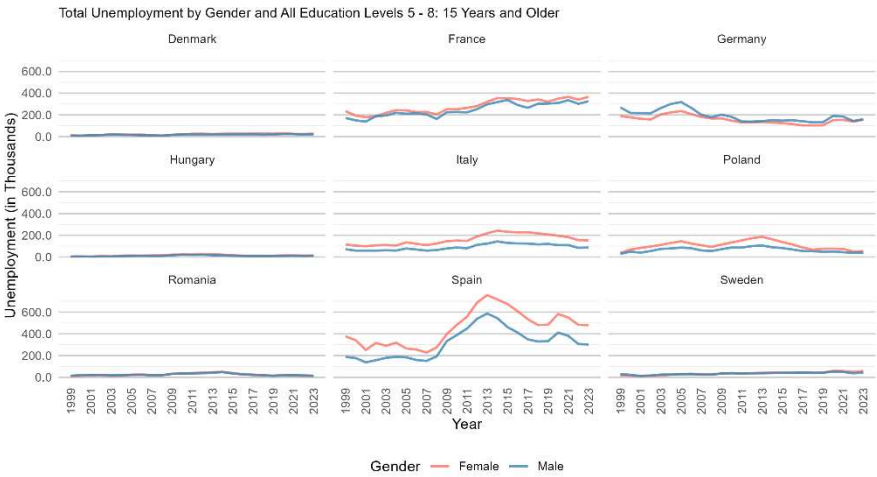
The labor market unemployment rates are segmented by education levels according to Eurostat, for individuals aged 15 and over. The notable trend is as follows:

1. Levels 0 to 2: Include individuals with no formal education or only primary level education (ISCED 0-2). Such Individuals are generally characterized with limited skills and qualifications, leading to higher unemployment and restricted access to better opportunities.
2. Levels 3 to 4: Include individuals with lower secondary to upper secondary education, including vocational training (ISCED 3-4). Such individuals face a competitive labor market with increasing demands for higher qualifications.
3. Levels 5 to 8: Include individuals with post-secondary education up to master's or doctoral degrees (ISCED 5-8). Such individuals experience lower unemployment due to their advanced skills and qualifications.

Scholarly research consistently shows that attainment of higher educational levels substantially reduces unemployment, especially for women. However, even highly educated women are challenged by structural barriers, including discrimination and gender norms, which limit vocational opportunities (Kahn, 2020). In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, research by Collins et al. (2021) states that it disproportionately affected women with lower education levels in sectors like retail and hospitality. In contrast, women with higher education levels in sectors as technology and healthcare faced lower furlough prospects, though they still experienced structural challenges.

Figure 5 presents the unemployment results for individuals classified at education levels 5 to 8. Therefore, it encompasses individuals with post-secondary education (ISCED 5), tertiary education (ISCED 6), and individuals who obtained a master’s degree or doctorate (ISCED 7-8). Analyzing the unemployment rates of these group reveals noteworthy trends, particularly for the case of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women with higher educational attainment.

Figure 5: Unemployment Over Time by Education Levels 5 - 8



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The Levels 5 to 8 include individuals with post-secondary education (ISCED 5), tertiary education (ISCED 6), and those who have obtained a master’s degree or doctorate (ISCED 7-8).

During the pandemic, many women of high levels in education were compelled to exit the labor market, this underscores the disproportionate effect of the crisis on educated women in comparison to educated men. This can be attributed to several interconnected factors. Firstly, while higher education is generally associated with lower rates of unemployment, the pandemic was a disruptive event to labor markets globally, which led to significant job losses even for

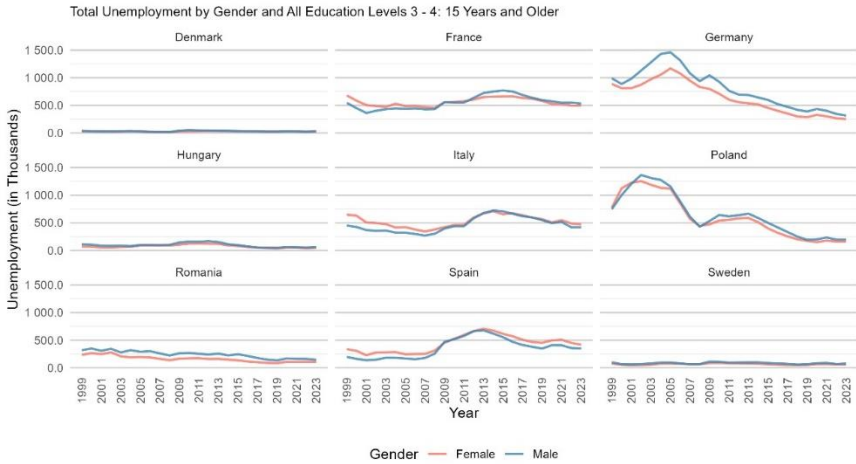
individuals with higher levels of education (Collins et al., 2021). Women, in particular, face additional unique challenges, as they heavily occupied sectors that were heavily impacted, with lower job security and higher precarious roles.

The increased burden of unpaid care work disproportionately affected these women, particularly those in dual-income households. With childcare options limited due to school and childcare institutes’ lockdowns, women faced an increase in their dual responsibility, juggling both remote work and heightened childcare (Alon et al., 2020). This dual burden led to inevitable burnout to many women, pushing many highly educated women to reduce their working hours or exit the labor market entirely to manage the new household demands.

The pandemic, therefore, exacerbated gender inequalities for women with higher education levels as well, with structural barriers and societal expectations about gender roles pressuring these women to prioritize family responsibilities over their professional ambitions, despite their high qualifications and career success (Kahn, 2020).

This Eurostat data further shows that unemployment rates for women with post-secondary and tertiary education also maintained higher levels than their male counterparts during the pandemic, revealing a wider systemic gender-based disparity. A complete opposite trend emerges when analyzing the unemployment rates for individuals with education levels of 0 to 2. This category encompasses individuals with low educational levels, including no formal education.

Figure 6: Unemployment Over Time by Education Levels 3-4



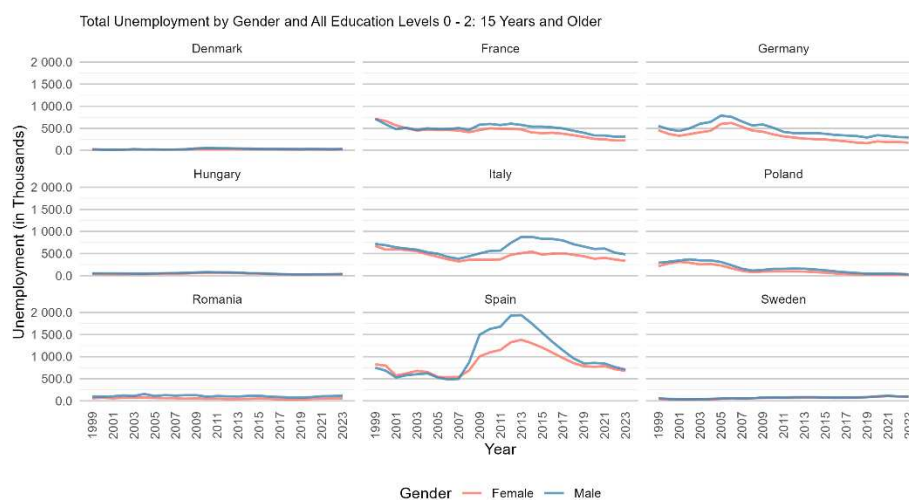
Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. Levels 3 to 4 include individuals with lower secondary to upper secondary education (ISCED 3-4).

During the pandemic, women with educational levels 3-4 also faced distinct challenges in the labor market, which contributed to a higher unemployment rate for women in this educational group in comparison to men. Individuals with 3-4 educational levels are often concentrated in specific sectors such as retail, hospitality, caregiving, and administrative roles, which are sectors that were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's economic disruptions. This is backed by studies such as the ones done by Alon et al. (2020) and EIGE (2021), which state that women with mid-level educational attainment are more likely to be employed in roles that require direct human interaction.

Additionally, it is witnessed that the structural labor market inequalities also exacerbated the vulnerability of women in such educational levels. According to Rubery and Tavora (2021), occupational segregation is a leading cause for this economic vulnerability, since women are often confined to lower-paying and less secure positions in these sectors. According to Sjöberg (2021), women at this education level are placed in precarious work arrangements, which were among the first to be cut during the pandemic. Ultimately, this explains why the unemployment rates of women in such educational levels spiked dramatically in countries like Spain and Italy, where the key employment sources for this demographic, such as tourism and hospitality, were hit the hardest.

In contrast to these countries, Denmark and Sweden show better resilience and efforts in mitigating the unemployment effects of the pandemic for this educational group. These efforts include wage subsidies, retraining programs, and robust social safety nets that helped mid-educated women from witnessing prolonged unemployment (European Commission, 2021). However, even with these efforts, the post-pandemic recovery was not able to close the gender gap due to the persisting structural undervaluation of roles that are typically held by women at this educational levels.

Figure 7: Unemployment Over Time by Education Levels 0 - 2



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.
Levels 0 to 2 include individuals with no formal education or those who have completed only primary education (ISCED 0-2).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the unemployment rates for individuals with low education levels followed a different pattern compared to those with higher educational attainments, since individuals with lower qualifications were typically employed in sectors like retail, hospitality, and low-skilled services. These sectors during the pandemic faced sharp increases in unemployment as they were severely disrupted (OECD, 2021). Due to their overrepresentation in the aforementioned sectors, women were particularly more vulnerable to job losses and furloughs during the economic crisis. However, men in the same lower-skilled role also experience high unemployment rates, though regional economic conditions and labor policies affected these outcomes (ILO, 2020).

The gender dynamics within this education group reveals its own distinct disparities. In certain countries, women with education levels in the 0 to 2 range face additional challenges which includes limited access to social safety nets and less opportunities for re-skilling or up-skilling (UN Women, 2020). Meanwhile, men in similar educational levels are more likely to find employment in sectors that were less impacted by the pandemic, such as construction and other types of manual labor that require physical strength women typically lack (Kucera & Roncolato, 2008).

To conclude on the matter, even in low education levels, significant gender disparities are witnessed. Both men and women in this group encounter substantial challenges, although the nature of these challenges are different in nature between the genders at this level and than those faced by individuals with higher education levels. Therefore, targeted policies must address the specific needs and challenges of low-skilled workers, particularly women, in order to ensure equitable assistance during and after the economic crisis.

2.2 Comparative Analysis with Previous Recession (2008 Global Financial Crisis)

The economic shock triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic differed in its impact in many areas when compared to previous recessions, such as the 2008 Global Financial Crisis for example. In terms of unemployment, the pandemic did not affect the labor market to the same extent as witnessed during the 2008 global financial crisis. Countries like Germany, Italy, and Romania maintained similar levels of unemployment gaps compared to previous years. In Sweden, however, the gap showed an increase in the years following the pandemic. This country then represents the strongest impact of the pandemic on the labor market outcomes for women.

Table 1: GDP Variation During the Recessions

Country	Global Financial Crisis - 2008 (%)	COVID-19 Pandemic (%)
Denmark	-4.7%	0.37%
France	-3.5%	-5.5%
Germany	-3.4%	-2.2%
Hungary	-12.9%	-6.3%
Italy	-4.3%	-7.8%
Poland	-14.5%	-1.4%
Romania	-14.0%	-1.7%
Spain	-4.1%	-11.8%
Sweden	-12.2%	0%

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The Figure shows the gender difference of unemployment for individuals 15 years or older for all educational levels.

Table 1 presents an overview on the percentage variation in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the selected European countries during two major economic recessions: the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, referred to as the "Bubble Burst Crisis," and the COVID-19 pandemic. The table displays the economic contraction experienced by each country during these periods. In the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, nations experienced negative GDP growth, with Hungary, Poland, and Romania experiencing the steepest declines. In contrast, during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries like Spain and Italy saw significant economic contractions, while Denmark and Sweden showed more resilience, with little to no GDP decrease.

This GDP variations during these crises highlights the different vulnerabilities and resilience abilities among European economies. Structural factors, governmental responses, and external dependencies, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes that each country's economy experiences. This provides critical insight into the long-term implications for policy and recovery strategies across Europe.

During the 2008 global financial crisis, Hungary faced one of the steepest declines in GDP as the country relied heavily on foreign debt and was vulnerable to external financial markets. The financial crisis led to a loss of investor confidence, alongside a rapid depreciation of the forint, which was exacerbated by structural weaknesses such as the dependence on foreign financing (European Commission, 2009; Kóczán & Mencinger, 2010). In contrast to Hungary, Poland exhibited a relative sense of resilience and was able to avoid the recession in 2009, due to the strong domestic demand and effective fiscal policies that boosted consumer confidence and was able to mitigate the economic downturn overall (OECD, 2011; Golinowski et al., 2010). Conversely however, Romania experienced substantial GDP contraction as it relied on foreign investment and structural inefficiencies, which resulted in increased vulnerability towards the financial crisis (International Monetary Fund, 2010; Gubina & Stoyanov, 2011).

The Covid-19 pandemic however presented distinct challenges in comparison to the 2008 global financial crisis. For Spain, this was particularly the case as it witnessed one of the most significant declines in GDP among other member states. This is due to the heavy reliance of Spain on sectors as tourism, which was heavily affected due to stringent lockdowns and travel ban measures that severely disrupted economic activities globally, with an 11% GDP contraction in Spain (Bank of Spain, 2020; Álvarez & López, 2021). Italy faced similar profound economic fallout, as the country was one of the first nations to be hit by Covid-19. The extended lockdowns

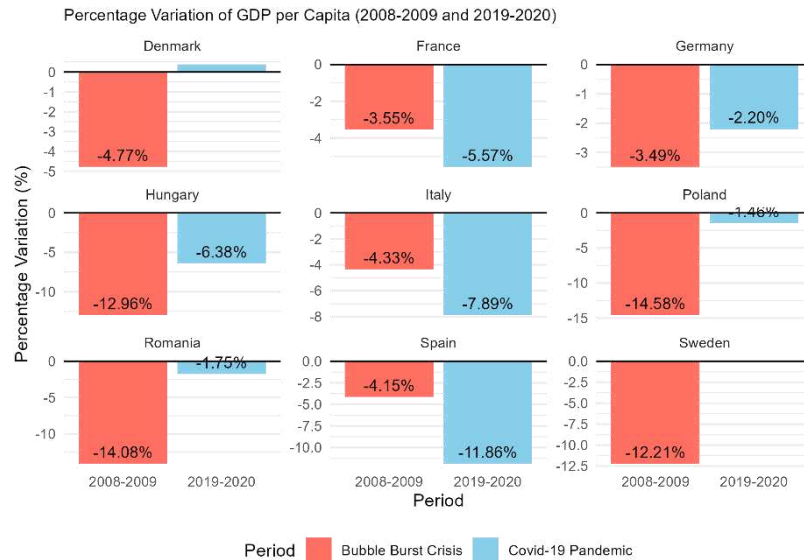
the nation faced disrupted both manufacturing and services sectors, leading to a 9.2% GDP decline (Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2021; Banca d'Italia, 2020).

A contrasting situation occurred in countries such as Denmark and Sweden that displayed resilience during the pandemic recession. For Denmark, this is attributed to the robust welfare state and substantial government support that helped cushion economic impact, resulting in a relatively mild GDP contraction in comparison to other member states, with only a 4.5%. (Danish Ministry of Finance, 2020). For Sweden, this can be attributed to the minimal lockdown measures that were adopted; this strategy, while controversial, allowed for economic activity to continue in relative normalcy, leading to a mild GDP contraction of 4.2% (Swedish National Institute of Economic Research, 2020; Lindström, 2021).

France experienced significant challenges economically during both 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. That is due to France's vulnerability to financial markets which decreased consumer and investment confidence, along-side severe impact on sectors like tourism and retail during the pandemic due to stringent lockdown measures. Additionally, Structural issues like high public debt and a rigid labor market, limited France's ability to respond effectively to these crises even with the government's robust social safety nets that provided some support, as they also contributed to challenges in reintegrating the workforce after lockdowns (Karamessini, 2020).

In contrast, Germany witnessed a more resilient economy due to its strong export-orientation and resilient industrial base which cushioned the impact of reduced global demands during the 2008 global financial crisis. Additionally, the country managed the Covid-19 pandemic through timely labor policies, such as the short-time work scheme (Kurzarbeit) that preserved jobs by allowing reductions in working hours. Moreover, Germany's diversified economy and lower public debts enabled substantial government support measures that minimized economic fallouts and facilitated recovery (Dustmann et al., 2021).

Figure 8: GDP Variation for the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and for the Covid-19 Pandemic



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The figure illustrates the percentage variation of GDP per capita during the 2008 global financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic for selected countries.

Figure 8 presents the impact of the two significant economic crises, the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the selected member states in the EU. The percentages shown illustrate the change in GDP from the previous period, presenting how each country’s economy was affected.

During the 2008 global financial crisis, nearly all the member states experienced significant economic contractions, which is notably the case for Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and Hungary, as they faced significant GDP declines, highlighting their vulnerability to global economic shocks. The aftermath of the 2008 global crisis did not only result in negative GDP growth but also exacerbated existing gender disparities across many sectors. Denmark, Romania, Italy, Poland, and France are of the member states that witnessed notable impacts in the gender gap, especially in employment and wages. This impact is due to several interconnected impacts, as these countries often have labor markets that are heavily reliant on sectors that are overrepresented by women, such as care and service industries, which were hit hard by the crisis following the initial phases, which led to job losses and wage stagnation for women (Collins et al., 2021). Additionally, structural inequalities, such as traditional gender roles and insufficient

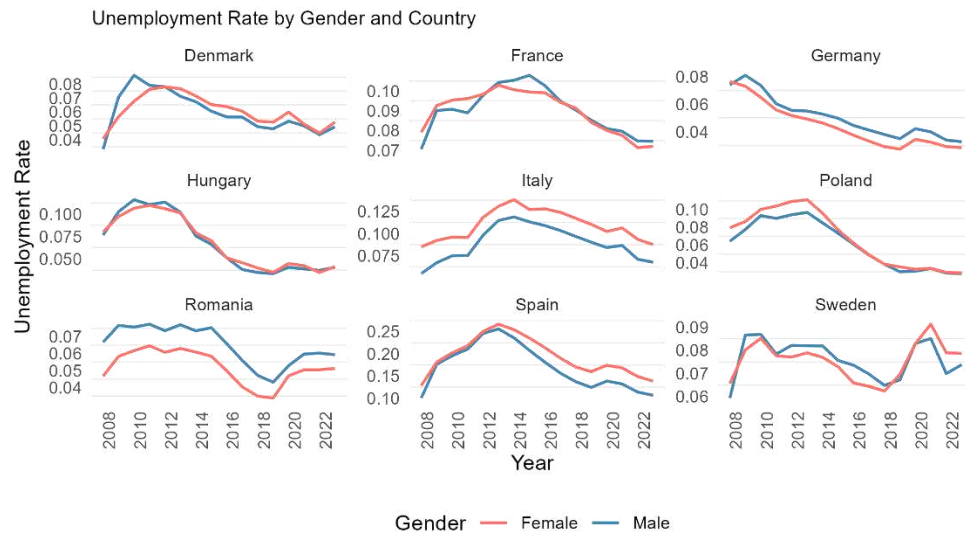
support for work-life balance, exacerbated this gender gap in the labor market during the 2008 global financial crisis (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

For Germany however, a unique case emerged where in the following years after the crisis, the gender gap did not expand, which suggests effective measures were taken to maintain gender equity in the labor market, despite the overall economic downturn it faced (Möller, 2014; OECD, 2017). This was due to the effective policy measures, such as targeted support for families and promotion of gender equity in the workplace. This indicates that pro-active policies, therefore, play a crucial role in sustaining gender equity in the face of economic disruptions.

In contrast, the Covid-19 pandemic presents a distinct set of challenges that affected member states differently. While the economic disruption was globally widespread, the extent of the effect varied, with Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and Hungary experiencing pronounced GDP fallout. As the pandemic affected disproportionately sectors that were overrepresented by women, the gender gap in employment and wage in those nations was further widened (Collins et al., 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021).

For Sweden, even as the strategy it implemented maintained economic activity and minimized lockdowns, the effects on gender gap were still significant, this is reflected by the nuanced interaction between the public health policy and economic outcomes. Women which overrepresent the caregiving and service sectors that are characterized by lower wages, part-time positions and less job security were significantly impacted regardless (Berg & Swedberg, 2020; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). This varied response in Sweden underscores the complexity in the relationship between economic policy and gender equity during times of crisis.

Figure 9: Unemployment Over Time by All Education Levels

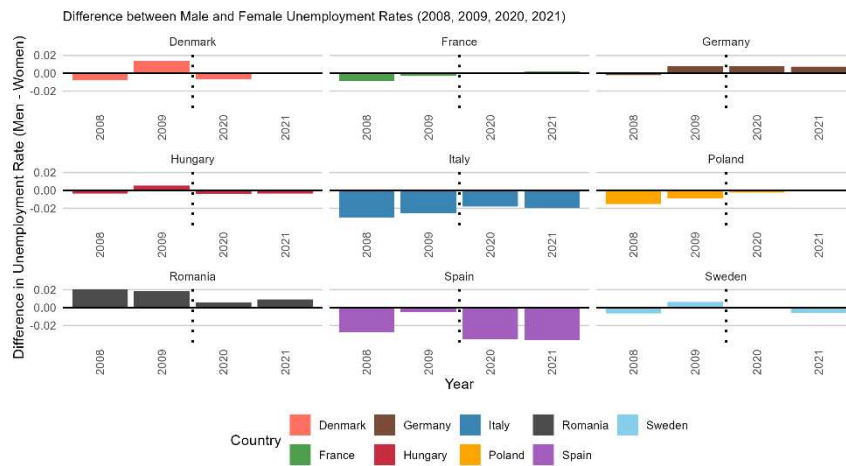


Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.
The Figure shows the gender difference of the unemployment rate for individuals 15 years or older for all educational levels.

Figure 9 provides a visual representation of the gender disparity in unemployment rates, with the bars above the baseline signifying higher unemployment rates for women when compared to men. The data indicates that the member states Spain, Italy, and Sweden experienced adverse effects regarding women’s unemployment during both the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic. This comparison between the two crises provides us with the important insight that the gender gap in unemployment is not a unique result of the crises, rather that these crises exacerbate and highlight pre-existing inequalities within labor markets.

During both crises, women were disproportionately affected which resulted in significantly higher unemployment rates in most of the countries analyzed. When considering Italy and Spain for instance, this disproportionate effect is due to women overrepresenting sectors as public services, hospitality, retail, and care services that faced job losses at alarming rates (Berg & Swedberg, 2020). This is a similar case for Sweden, while the overall labor market response was relatively robust, women still faced heightened job insecurity and unemployment since they are mainly concentrated in lower-paying, part-time or precarious roles, which made them susceptible to the economic downturns (Collins et al., 2021).

Figure 10: Unemployment Rate Difference between Men and Women for All Educational Levels

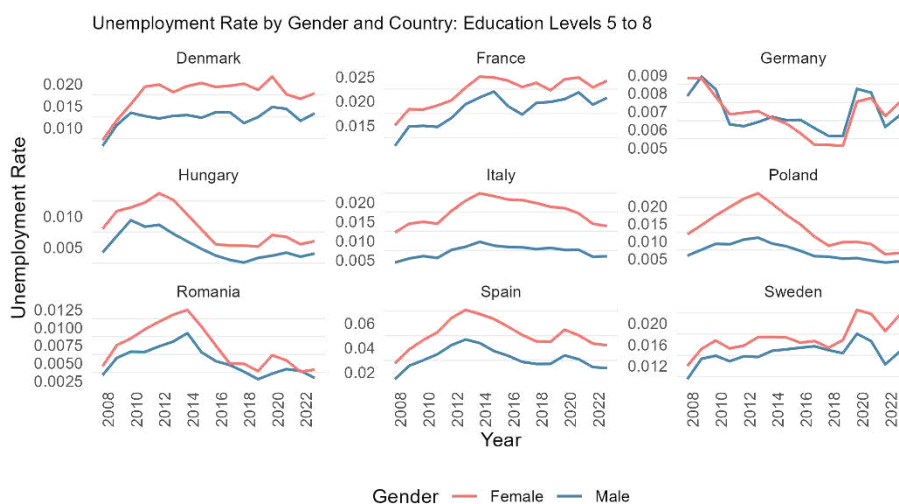


Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The Figure shows the difference of the unemployment rate between men and women for individuals 15 years or older for all educational levels.

For individuals with education levels 5 to 8, the gender difference in unemployment rate became increasingly pronounced during both of the economic crises, especially impacting women in this education levels. Women with higher educational attainment often find themselves in professional roles, however, are still mainly represented in sectors that are vulnerable to economic downturns such as public services, education, and healthcare. For unemployment gender disparity, this was especially the case in during the Covid-19 pandemic. In Sweden, the pandemic similarly revealed the vulnerabilities of women in these professional roles, which worsened the unemployment gap compared to the 2008 global financial crisis. The sectors and professional roles that women predominately occupied faced significant job losses with heightened competition for fewer available positions (Collins et al., 2021).

In Denmark, the trend is similarly concerning, as the gender unemployment began to widen during the pandemic and is not showing signs of recovery since then (OECD, 2021). The consistency in the increase of this gap indicates that there are persistent structural issues within the labor market despite the efforts done by the state, which continue to disadvantage women even with higher educational attainment. This lack of progress highlights the need for enhancements in access to higher and leadership roles, and the promotion of better job securities in vulnerable sectors (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

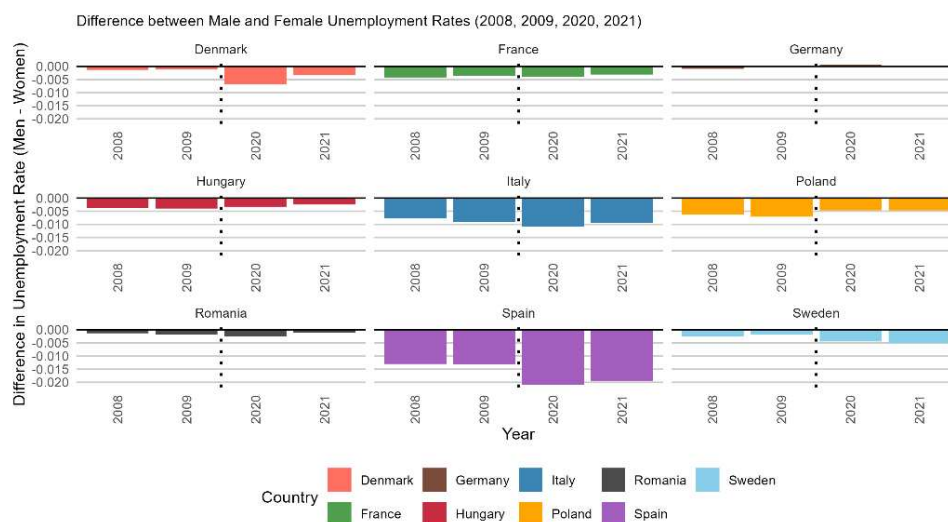
Figure 11: Unemployment Rate Difference between Men and Women for Educational Levels 5 to 8



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. **The Figure shows the gender difference of unemployment for individuals 15 years or older for educational levels 5 to 8.**

Notably in Spain, the unemployment rate for women in the education levels 5 to 8 reached alarming levels during the pandemic which mirrored the severity observed during the 2008 global financial crisis. This pattern can be due to several factors observed in the country, aside from the concentration of women in the hospitality, education, and healthcare sectors. During the 2008 financial crisis, women with higher education levels, still worked in support roles within industries hard-hit by the crisis like construction and finance, which made them particularly vulnerable to layoffs, as business sought to reduce its costs in the face of rapid declines in revenue (González, 2014; OECD, 2017). Moreover, in the case of the covid-19 pandemic, it was particularly the increased burden of unpaid work due to school and childcare facilities' lockdowns that reduced Spanish women's labor market participation, highlighting both structural and social disparities (Collins et al., 2021; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

Figure 12: Unemployment Rate Difference between Men and Women for Educational Levels 5 to 8



Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal. The Figure shows the difference of the unemployment rate between men and women for individuals with 15 years or older for the educational levels 5 to 8.

2.3 Short-term vs. Long-term Effects (rate of Unemployment before and during covid)

Table 2, Panel A presents the notable variation in the male unemployment rates across the member states, particularly for males with education levels 5-8. The key findings reflect the recovery trends and economic adjustments in the post-pandemic era.

Table 2 A: Unemployment Rate for Male with Educational Level 5 to 8 Before and After Covid-19 Pandemic

Country	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2018 - 2019 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2019 - 2020 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2020 - 2021 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2021 - 2022 (%)
Denmark	12.5	18.5	-2.8	-19.1
France	1.2	2.9	6.8	-11.6
Germany	0.1	45.7	-2.5	-23.5
Hungary	28.7	10.5	13.2	-15.5
Italy	4.0	-6.5	0.6	-23.9
Poland	-10.1	3.2	-13.3	-13.0
Romania	-27.7	28.4	18.0	-6.0
Spain	0.2	25.5	-9.3	-20.7
Sweden	-3.7	25.4	-7.7	-26.3

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The Table shows the male unemployment rate across the countries analyzed with the variation from the previous period 15 years or older for educational levels 5 to 8.

Germany and Sweden are particular cases, as they witness a substantial reduction in the male unemployment between 2021 and 2022, with a decrease of 23.5% and 26.3%, respectively. This reduction can be attributed to these member states' effective policy measures in response to the pandemic's disruptions. Policies such as wage subsidies and economic support programs that prioritized job retention, particularly for highly skilled workers and sectors viewed as essential in these countries. Thus, a strong rebound was witnessed in industries such as manufacturing and technology, which mainly employ highly educated male individuals and have telecommunication abilities, which helped mitigate the initial male unemployment spikes (Vandenbroucke, 2021).

For Spain, male unemployment surged by 25.5% between 2019 and 2020, due primarily to the economic disruptions caused by the pandemic on sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and construction where such higher-educated men are employed. Additionally, the uneven transition to remote work worsened the unemployment rates (González et al., 2021). However, unemployment rates declined by 20.7% between 2021 and 2022, due to the support of the European Commission's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the rebound of sectors due to telecommunication abilities especially in the case of higher-educated workers. The pandemic accelerated digitalization, creating new opportunities while reskilling initiatives helped reduce unemployment (Lewandowski et al., 2022).

In the case of Hungary, even as there was a notable increase in male unemployment between 2018 and 2019 of 28.7%, the member state witnessed a lateral 15.5% reduction between 2021 and 2022. This reflects the delayed impact from the pandemic and subsequent recovery as the demand for skilled labor rebounded. The delay is likely due to timing of lockdowns and the structure of the labor market, as some of the male-dominated sectors like manufacturing and construction, were initially more resilient (Gábos & Kertesi, 2021).

Romania faced high increase of 28.4% in male unemployment rates between 2019 and 2020, which is likely due to the pandemic's impact on several sectors, including construction and industrial production. However, a 6.0% recovery between 2021 and 2022 was initiated as the country adapted to the new economic conditions in the post-pandemic era, such as the gradual lockdown lifting, governmental initiatives that included wage subsidies and retraining programs,

and the digitalization and modernization of telecommunications (Bădescu, M., & Bădescu, D., 2021).

Italy also presented a large reduction in male unemployment rates. With a 23.9% drop between 2021 and 2022. This reflects a slow but effective recovery in the member state, particularly in the focus on revitalizing key industries such as education and healthcare, where many males of high education levels are employed. For Poland, male unemployment rates displayed marginal changes, indicating a relative stability in the labor market during the Covid-19 pandemic. For France, there was a moderate increase in male unemployment of 2.9% from 2019 to 2020, with minimal changes in subsequent years, thus showing a less volatile response to the pandemic's disruptions (Cammelli, A., & Echevarría, C., 2021).

However, the outlier is Denmark, which experienced a rise in male unemployment during the same period, but the increase was relatively moderate when compared to other countries. This reflects the degree of resilience in Denmark's labor market due to the robust welfare systems which provided support for the sectors affected (Lewandowski et al., 2022)

This table reveals that the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on male unemployment of levels 5 to 8 varied across the EU member states significantly. Countries like Germany, Sweden and Italy achieving substantial reductions through effective policy measures such as wage subsidies and essential sector support. In contrast, Spain, Hungary, and Romania experienced initial surges in the unemployment rates but had substantial recovery due to digitalization and governmental initiatives. Lastly, Poland and France, showed stability or minimal changes, and Denmark's moderate increase in unemployment highlighted resilience in its labor market due to robust welfare systems.

In Table 2 Panel B for female unemployment rates, presents varied scenarios across the member states throughout the pandemic period. Germany stands out as it witnessed a dramatic rise in female unemployment, increasing by 47.7% from 2019 and 2020, which emphasizes the adverse effects of the pandemic on working women. In contrast, Romania shows significant fluctuations, with an increase of 57.2% in female unemployment between 2019 and 2020, which is followed by a significant decrease of 29.4% from 2021 to 2022. However, Poland presents a concerning picture, with a minimal increase of 1.2% initially however followed by a steep decline of 31.8% from 2021 and 2022. While some countries have made robust recoveries in female

unemployment rates in post-pandemic era, the data exposes persistent challenges faced by women in the workforce during this period.

Table 2 B: Unemployment Rate for Female with Educational Level 5 to 8 Before and After Covid-19 Pandemic

Country	Female Unemployment Rate Variation 2018 - 2019 (%)	Female Unemployment Rate Variation 2019 - 2020 (%)	Female Unemployment Rate Variation 2020 - 2021 (%)	Female Unemployment Rate Variation 2021 - 2022 (%)
Denmark	-6.9	16.1	-18.6	-5.9
France	-6.3	10.0	1.5	-8.1
Germany	-1.0	47.7	2.5	-12.7
Hungary	-2.6	35.7	-4.3	-17.4
Italy	-4.9	-1.8	-7.4	-15.8
Poland	11.9	1.2	-6.7	-31.8
Romania	-20.8	57.2	-11.8	-29.4
Spain	-0.9	21.9	-8.3	-13.4
Sweden	9.3	33.6	-3.2	-14.9

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The Table shows the female unemployment rate across the countries analyze with the variation from the previous period 15 years or older for education of all levels 5 to 8.

Germany stands out with a significant rise in female unemployment of 47.7% between 2019 and 2020, which is primarily attributed to lockdown measures that impacted female-dominated service sectors, of which employed women in precarious positions, regardless of education attainment, revealing a structural disparity. The introduction of the Kurzarbeit program primarily, helped to mitigate this impact, of which Germany witnessed a 12.7% decrease in unemployment by 2021-2022 as businesses reopened and job retention strategies took effect (Dauth et al., 2021). In Romania, the unemployment rate surged up to 57.2% between 2019 and 2020, mainly due to the significant job losses in sectors as hospitality and retail in the country, which predominantly hired women. The decline of 29.4% in subsequent years is attributed primarily to the reopening of the economy and certain governmental support measures such as wage subsidies, which facilitated the reintegration of women into the labor market (Katz & Margo, 2021).

For Sweden, there was a 33.6% rise in female unemployment during the covid-19 pandemic, which is mostly pertains to the challenges faced by educated women in healthcare and hospitality due to international travel bans. However, a subsequent decrease of 14.9% between 2021 and 2022 suggests recovery as these bans eased and the pressure within the healthcare sector subsided, however ongoing attention to structural vulnerabilities in the Swedish labor market is necessary (Jalaguier & Matti, 2022). As for Hungary, it witnessed a 35% increase due to the pandemic's economic downturn, particularly in hospitality and retail sectors, where women are predominantly employed and in precarious positions. The labor market recovered however, during 2021 and 2022 as the unemployment rate declined to 17.4% due to improved economic conditions and governmental policies supporting women's employment (Bujnowski et al., 2023).

In Spain's case, the unemployment rate rose by 21.9% during the pandemic due to its impact on female-dominated sectors, precarious conditions, and the increase in childcare responsibilities. However, the recovery efforts led to a subsequent 13.4% decrease in unemployment from 2021 to 2022, as businesses reopened and support for workforce reintegration and participation increased (Calvo & Rojas, 2023). Poland displayed a more modest increase of 1.2% in female unemployment during the pandemic, which indicates relative resiliency in the labor market for women and the dominant reliance on industrial sectors. The decrease of 31.8% subsequently between 2021 and 2022 can be attributed to a strong economic rebound and swift recoveries in the education and healthcare sectors (Wyszyńska & Bartosiewicz, 2022).

France and Italy both witnessed moderate increases of only 10% and smaller fluctuations, which indicates some degree of stability in the labor market for highly educated women. France's recovery is primarily linked to the robust welfare systems, while for Italy it can be linked to safety social nets and businesses' gradual reopening (Fouquet & Senechal, 2023; Gazzetta Ufficiale, 2022). For Denmark, the female unemployment rate increased to 16.1%, a milder rise compared to the other member states, largely due to the country's strong welfare systems that provide support and job retention during the pandemic (Lewandowski et al., 2022).

Overall, the trend for female unemployment rates of 5-8 education levels during the pandemic highlights gender disparities and structural vulnerabilities across the EU. While some of the member states, such as Germany and Romania, experienced dramatic fluctuations with subsequent recovery strategies, other member states such as Poland and Denmark, maintained relative stability. These findings underscore the need for targeted policies to address such gender

disparities and to enhance overall, the labor market resilience in the face of future economic downturns.

Next, **Table 3 Panel A** presents male unemployment rates variation for individuals with educational level of 0 to 2, both before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Notably, some of the member states witnessed significant fluctuations. For instance, Germany saw the largest spike in unemployment during the pandemic with 20.2% increase between 2019 and 2020, followed by a recovery. France witnessed a contrasting trend, with substantial decrease in male unemployment rates of 13.9% during the same period. Poland experienced significant fluctuations, with a sharp drop of 17.9% between 2021 and 2022. However, Romania stands out as an outlier, experiencing extreme rise in unemployment rates of 33.8% between 2020 and 2021, making it the most volatile among the nine member states.

Table 3 A: Unemployment Rate for Male with Educational Level 0 to 2 Before and After Covid-19 Pandemic

Country	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2018 - 2019 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2019 - 2020 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2020 - 2021 (%)	Male Unemployment Rate Variation 2021 - 2022 (%)
Denmark	-8.7	11.1	-8.5	-4.4
France	-9.7	-13.9	-2.1	-9.4
Germany	-10.8	20.2	-4.8	-9.3
Hungary	-8.4	8.3	-0.7	5.8
Italy	-7.2	-5.8	1.5	-15.7
Poland	-23.8	-3.9	10.7	-17.9
Romania	-1.2	12.6	33.8	2.8
Spain	-12.69	2.72	-3.63	-10.82
Sweden	3.75	22.48	5.05	-9.53

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The Table shows the male unemployment rate across the countries analyzed with the variation from the previous period 15 years or older for educational levels 0 to 2.

In the case of Germany, the unemployment rate for men of 0 to 2 education level attainment surged to 20.2% between 2019 and 2020 due to the pandemic effect on construction and manufacturing sectors which employ a high proportion of low-skilled workers under precarious

positions. However, a recovery of 9.3% drop by 2022 was driven by economic rebound and government investments in infrastructure and green technologies (Hijzen & Venn, 2022). For France, the unemployment rate decreased by 13.9% between 2019 and 2020, reflecting the success in labor policies such as the partial activity scheme (*activité partielle*), which enabled businesses to retain their workers. This trend continued by a 9.4% drop by 2022, as the economy gradually reopened (INSEE, 2022).

For Poland, a robust pre-pandemic economy led to a significant decline in unemployment between 2018 and 2019, however, the pandemic caused a 10.7% rise in unemployment by the year 2020, which was reversed with a 17.9% decline in 2022 due to the flexible labor policies and governmental subsidies (OECD, 2022). In the case of Romania, extreme fluctuations were witnessed with a rise of 12.6% from 2019 to 2020, followed by a staggering increase of 33.8% between 2020-2021. This can be linked to the heavy reliance on the hospitality and retail sectors, along-side the high informality and weak social safety nets (Păunescu & Oancea, 2021). In Spain, unemployment rose by 2.7% between 2019 and 2020, especially in sectors as tourism and hospitality, but a strong recovery followed as a 10.8% decrease by 2022, due to governmental support measures (González & García, 2021).

Sweden experienced a rise in unemployment during the pandemic up to 22.4%, as the pandemic heavily impacted manufacturing and services sectors, which was then mitigated by a 9.5% drop by 2022 primarily due to strong welfare policies (Månsson, 2021). In Hungary, there was a moderate increase of 8.3% during the pandemic, which reflects the structural weaknesses in the state. This unemployment rate continued to rise slightly between 2021-2022 which is attributed to slower recovery (Bokros & Krekó, 2022).

For Italy, a unique case was witnessed, where there was a decline in unemployment of 5.8% during the pandemic, followed by further decline to 15.7% between 2021-2022 due to primarily the effective wage subsidies and strong post-pandemic economic activity (Telesca, 2022). Concluding with Denmark, a 11.1% rise in unemployment in 2020 was followed by an 8.5% decline in 2021 and 4.4% in 2022 due to governmental short-time work schemes (Madsen, 2022). The varied response between member states across Europe underscores the role of governmental policies and economic structures in the long-term impacts of the pandemic on labor markets.

Table 3 B: Unemployment Rate for female with Educational Level 0 to 2 Before and After Covid-19 Pandemic

Country	Female Unemployment (%) Rate Variation 2018 - 2019	Female Unemployment (%) Rate Variation 2019 - 2020	Female Unemployment (%) Rate Variation 2020 - 2021	Female Unemployment (%) Rate Variation 2021 - 2022
Denmark	3.34	14.4	-12.2	-10.4
France	-11.1	-13.9	-6.8	-12.1
Germany	-9.7	28.3	-7.1	-1.2
Hungary	-8.6	6.2	-4.6	-4.4
Italy	-7.4	-9.5	4.6	-10.2
Poland	-0.5	-0.1	-29.3	20.6
Romania	20.4	40.3	20.8	8.0
Spain	-9.7	-0.3	-1.3	-9.8
Sweden	16.6	8.0	21.8	-13.2

Source: elaborated by the author using the General and Regional Statistics Table from the Eurostat Portal.

The Table shows the female unemployment rate across the countries analyzed with the variation from the previous period 15 years or older for educational levels 0 to 2.

The unemployment rates of women with 0-2 educational attainment during the pandemic and after varied significantly across member states which reflects both sectoral vulnerabilities and governmental intervention in/effectiveness. In Romania, female unemployment rates saw a significant increase to 40.3% between 2019 and 2020, which highlights the long ongoing challenges women in low-skilled job face, especially in sectors such as retail and hospitality. This trend is similar to Germany's, which experienced a sharp increase in female unemployment of 28.3% between 2019 and 2020, followed by a relative recovery of 7.1%, which indicates that women in the low-wage and low-skilled sectors were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's economic downturn.

In contrast, Denmark and France showcased resilience in their labor markets for women with lower educational attainments. Denmark initially recognized a 14.4% increase in female unemployment between 2019 and 2020, but such an increase was followed with a 12.2% decrease between 2020 and 2021 and another subsequent decrease of 10.4% in 2022, which reflects effective labor market policies that mitigated the pandemic's impact on low-wage

vocations (Schmid & Weishaupt, 2022). In the case of France, recovery was demonstrated with a notable 13.9% decrease in unemployment between 2019 and 2020, with a further 12.1% decrease between 2021 and 2022, likely due to the effective governmental measures that support women in vulnerable sectors (Boulin & Hoffmann, 2023).

For Sweden, a significant rise was witnessed during the pandemic of 21.8% between 2020 to 2021 but was subsequently reduced by 13.2% in the following year, due to robust social safety nets and gender-equality policies (Nyman & Sundström, 2022). Italy saw similar rebounds, as female unemployment fell to 10.2% between 2021 and 2022, as sectors like hospitality and tourism reopened and governmental initiatives supported women in low-skilled jobs such as wage subsidies and targeted employment programs for women (Basso & Bonacini, 2023). Spain experienced a minor fluctuation and change in female unemployment at that level during that pandemic, followed by a steady recovery with a 9.8% decrease between 2021 and 2022, indicating the effectiveness of its labor market policies, such as Spain's *ERTE* (Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo) scheme, which allowed businesses to temporarily reduce workers' hours or suspend contracts while providing government wage subsidies for individuals in precarious positions (Fernández-Macías & Muñoz de Bustillo, 2022).

In the case of Hungary, female unemployment increased by 6.2% during the pandemic, which was followed by a slow and modest recovery, which points to structural labor market issues that maintain their effect on women disproportionately. These issues include persistent gender wage gaps, limited opportunities for career advancement, and the lack of supportive labor policies for women in low-skilled jobs (Koltai, 2022; Pálné Kovács, 2021). Poland witnessed high volatility, with little to no changes in unemployment between 2019 and 2020 which was followed by a 29.3% drop between 2020 and 2021 and a subsequent sharp increase of 20.6% between 2021 and 2022 indicating a short-term recovery as sectors like retail and hospitality reopened. This reflects the precarious nature of female employment in the low-skill and low-wage sectors such as lack of long-term support mechanisms for low-skilled workers, combined with gender disparities in the labor market (Lewandowski & Lipowska, 2022).

Overall, this analysis indicates that female unemployment rates among those with lower educational attainments of 0 to 2 levels are overly sensitive to sectoral exposure as well as governmental policy responses. Countries that implemented such robust market interventions such as France and Denmark record faster recoveries, while those with weaker support

mechanisms such as Romania and Hungary, face longer-term challenges. Additionally, sectoral dependencies and the impact of caregiving burdens on women during the pandemic played a large role in the pandemic's influence on unemployment trends for women of these educational levels.

Chapter 3: Long-term Feminization and Covid-19

This chapter provides an analysis on how the pandemic intensified pre-existing gendered labor dynamics, which impacts both domestic responsibilities and professional employment patterns. Therefore, this chapter delves into the pandemic's amplification of unpaid care work along with examining the historical trends that shape gender roles within households. Beyond the domestic sphere, this chapter highlights the most affected sectors by the influx of female workers pre-pandemic and outlines the lasting impact on such sectors as the EU moves towards the post-pandemic era. Lastly, this chapter considers how the labor market dynamics shifts varied across demographic lines, revealing diverse outcomes for women based on multiple factors, like age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status within the EU labor market. Overall, the aim is to provide a comprehensive overview of the pandemic's role in reshaping and reinforcing the gendered labor structures, examining both the immediate and long-term implications on women's labor within and outside the home.

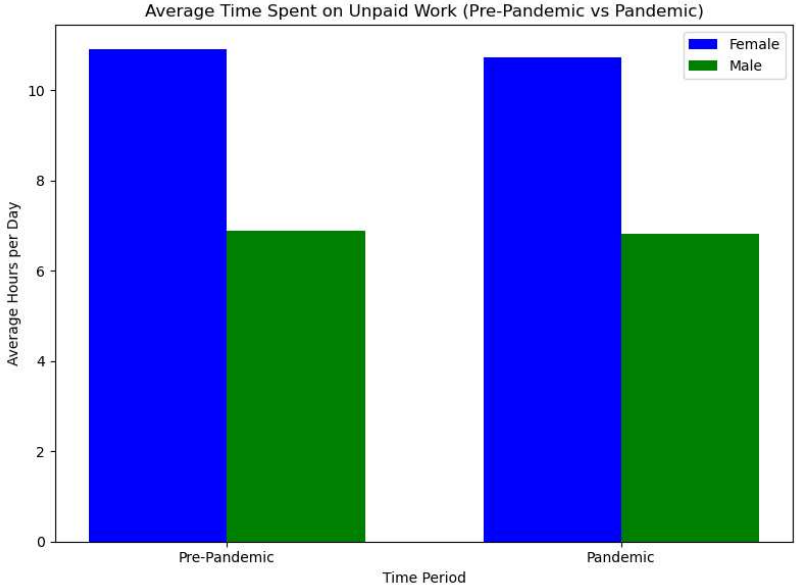
3.1 Intra-household Feminization

Figure 13 illustrates the average daily hours spent on unpaid work by gender between the nine member states in the EU, comparing them to pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. The data on unpaid work, such as household and childcare responsibilities, was sourced from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as surveys from Eurostat and OECD were unavailable due to their non-continuous nature. As initially the analysis included each of the nine member states individually, the UNSD dataset however lacked sufficient size to provide robust results for each one separately as it would risk introducing bias, setting it as a data limitation for this section. Consequently, the decision is to have all countries studied together in order to produce a more comprehensive insight.

Prior to the pandemic, women are seen to dedicate significantly more time, exceeding 10 hours daily, to unpaid work which contrasted men who averaged around 6 hours. However, during the pandemic, this gap narrowed slightly as men were found to increase their hours spent on unpaid

work, while women only experienced a minor reduction. Such a shift suggests a potential rebalancing in the EU of household responsibilities, with men then taking on a larger share of domestic tasks during the pandemic lockdowns, although eventually, women continues to bear the larger portion of the unpaid labor.

Figure 13: Changes in Average Daily Hours Spent on Unpaid Work by Gender: Pre-Pandemic vs. During Pandemic.



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Surveys on Unpaid Work. The chart compares the average hours per day spent on unpaid work by gender before and during the pandemic.

The observed shifts in unpaid labor during the pandemic for each of the nine member states can be contextualized separately through scholarly literature for better explanation. For Italy, pre-existing and persisting social gender roles play an essential role in women shouldering the larger brunt of household responsibilities. The pandemic slightly shifted these dynamic, as men took on more domestic tasks, however this shift was not sufficient to balance gendered division of unpaid work, especially in the face of increased childcare as schools went into lockdowns. While men contributed, cultural norms continued to set women as the primary caretaker, reinforcing traditional domestic expectations. Additionally, the lack of robust social caregiving structures exacerbated these challenges, as many families rely on women to fill the gaps left by inadequate welfare support (Mangiavacchi, et al., 2021).

This case is similar within Spain, as men's contributions to unpaid labor only modestly increased. However, these adjustments and pre-pandemic gradual shifts in traditional gender roles are not sufficient to change the persistent Spanish cultural norms. School lockdowns merely placed additional childcare responsibilities with women taking on the majority of it. The inadequate social support and welfare structures made additionally, made it difficult for families to balance such increased demands in unpaid labor (Arntz, Yahmed & Berlingieri, 2020). France also reflects similar dynamics, as the existing social support systems proved insufficient, highlighting the need for more comprehensive welfare structures to alleviate the pressures on families (Le Feuvre, Oppenchain & Pajardi, 2021).

In the case of Poland, a stark gendered division in unpaid labor is exhibited, as there are strong social expectations for women being the primary caregivers. The school lockdowns placed additional burdens on Polish families, and even though men contributed slightly, women often took on the lead in managing both childcare and household responsibilities. The lack of social caregiving structures and social welfare policies both limited support for families, especially for women during the pandemic (Domínguez-Folgueras & Módenes, 2020). In Romania and Hungary, similar entrenched gender norms dictate that women should take on a significant portion of unpaid work, even as men increased their involvement only marginally. These traditional expectation restricted substantial changes in domestic roles, along-side the lack of adequate welfare systems that further exacerbated the burdens of childcare amidst lockdowns (Voicu & Tufis, 2021; Fodor & Balogh, 2021).

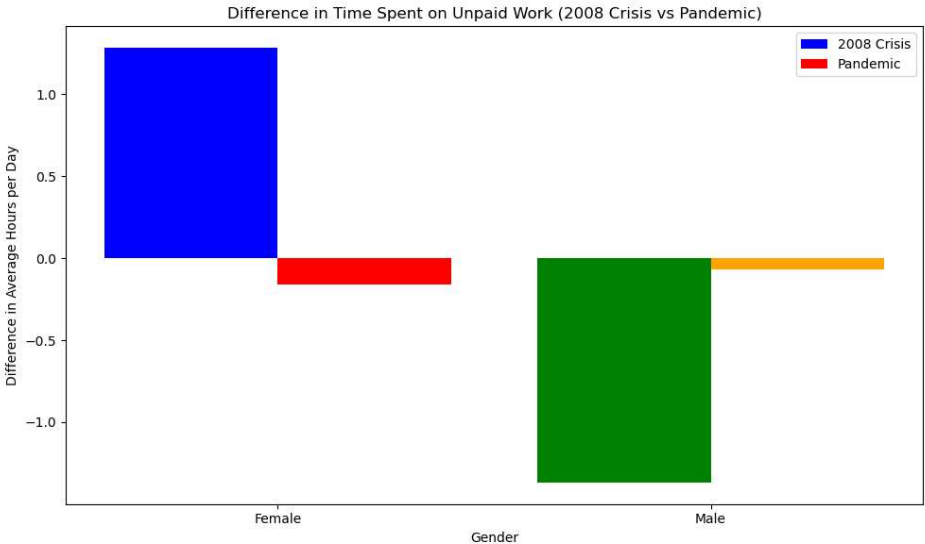
Germany also presents a nuanced case in the analysis of unpaid labor dynamics during the pandemic. Historically, German women have carried the significant burden of unpaid work. However, during the pandemic there was a modest increase in men's contributions to such unpaid labor, lending a shift in traditional gender roles. However, the gaps in social caregiving structures and welfare systems, met with the substantial increase in childcare during lockdown measures, did not address fully the increased demands that were place on families during the crisis. This case illustrates that even with strong social policies, and minor shifts in cultural expectations are not sufficient shift the labor dynamics, as women still faced a larger portion of the childcare responsibilities (Kreyenfeld, and Hank, 2020).

Denmark stands out for its high level of gender equality, particularly in the case of household labor distribution. During the pandemic, men increased their share of domestic labor due to more

time spent at home. Additionally, Denmark’s gender equality policies, such as parental leave and flexible work arrangements, facilitated the increase of childcare burdens. Limitations however were still present in such comprehensive welfare systems and persistent social constructs, as women still shouldered a larger portion of domestic labor (Blaskó & Papadimitriou, 2020).

Lastly, Sweden demonstrates one of the most balanced in regard to the distributions of unpaid labor in the EU, which is supported by both progressive gender equality and family policies. During the pandemic, Swedish men’s contributions to unpaid work increased appropriately, which aligned with the country’s egalitarian ideals. While the closure of schools necessitated additional childcare responsibilities which women primarily managed, Sweden's robust welfare system however, provided relief. Regardless, the overall reliance on women for unpaid caregiving tasks maintains a prospective gap that still exists in support structures and social constructs, particularly in times of crisis (Duvander & Johansson, 2020).

Figure 14: Comparison of Gender Differences in Unpaid Work Hours: 2008 Financial Crisis vs. COVID-19 Pandemic



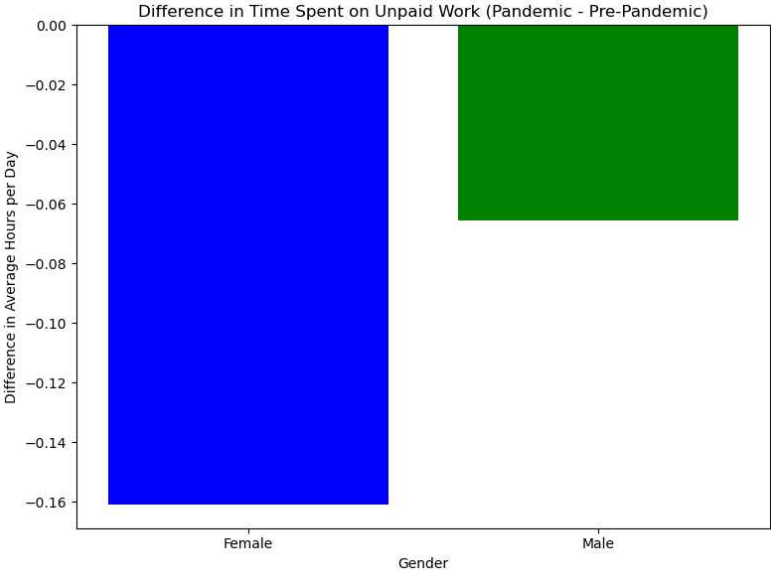
Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Surveys on Unpaid Work. The table compares the differences in unpaid work hours between genders during the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting shifts in responsibilities and involvement during these two significant periods.

Figure 14 compares the unpaid work hours between genders based on its division during the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, presenting significant trends in household labor dynamics. During the 2008 global crisis, women were faced with a notable increase in unpaid

work, averaging at about an additional 1.28 hours. Such a rise is due to the heightened domestic responsibilities as women absorbed the fallout of economic challenges in the longer-term due to layoffs in the public sectors from austerity measure and a focus on male employment in recovery efforts (Bianchi et al., 2022). Conversely, during the pandemic women experienced a slight decrease of about 0.16 hours in unpaid work, likely due to the increase in male involvement in household tasks due to remote work and lockdown conditions. However, women still bore the majority of the responsibilities, faced with an increase in childcare responsibilities, highlighting the persistence of cultural norms surrounding gender roles and the lack of adequate welfare policies (Collins et al., 2021).

For men, unpaid work presented a more substantial drop of about 1.37 hours in 2008 compared to a decline of about 0.07 hours during the pandemic. This suggests that while men's involvement in unpaid labor remained limited, the pandemic provided opportunities for greater engagement due to remote work arrangements. Overall, this analysis underscores that there are enduring inequalities in household labor. Although the pandemic showed slight changes in such male participation, the persistent nature of gendered expectations continued to influence the dynamics of unpaid labor which suggests that more equitable distributions of responsibilities remain a challenging goal.

Figure 15: Change in Daily Time Spent on Unpaid Work: Pandemic vs. Pre-Pandemic Levels



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Surveys on Unpaid Work. The bar chart highlights changes in unpaid work hours by gender, comparing pandemic levels to pre-pandemic averages and suggesting shifts in household responsibilities.

Figure 15 represents the difference spent on unpaid work between the gender during the pandemic and the pre-pandemic era. The data shows that women's unpaid work had decreased by around 0.16 hours per day during the pandemic, while for men it decreased to around 0.07 hours. This trend of unpaid work hours can suggest that despite increased domestic responsibilities due to lockdowns, school closures and social distancing, both genders experienced a slight reduction in their unpaid work hours. Such a reduction can be attributed to the shift towards remote work thus potentially more equitable distribution of household responsibilities between the genders within their households (Collins et al., 2021; Bianchi et al., 2022).

However, the data and further literature indicate that while remote work allowed men to participate more actively in household tasks, this minor redistribution of responsibilities is not sufficient to redirect pressure from women as they continued to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid labor. This can be attributed to the persistence of traditional gender norms, specifically around women being the primary caretakers (Hook & Wolfe, 2024).

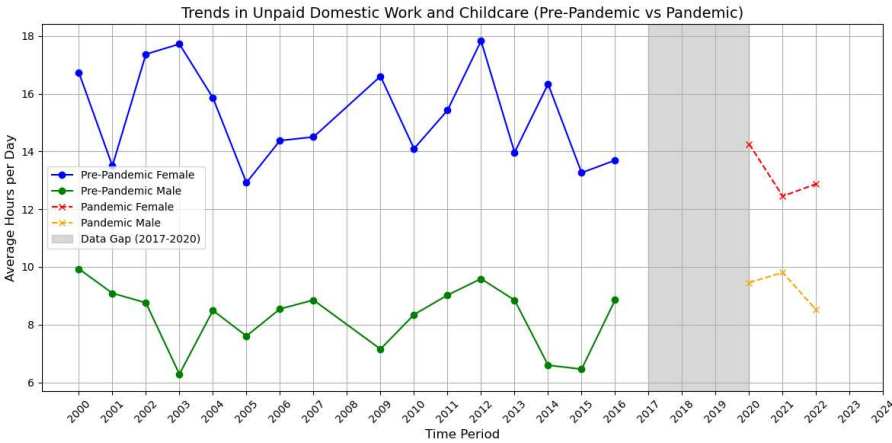
In the case of Italy and Spain, women experienced a significant rise in unpaid domestic work during the 2008 global financial crisis, which averaged an increase of about 1.28 hours. This trend ultimately reflects the traditional gender roles that place the majority of domestic responsibilities on women (Bianchi et al., 2022). Although both countries saw a minor decrease of 0.16 hours in women's unpaid work during the Covid-19 pandemic, which indicates a slight shift in male participation, the entrenched cultural norms ensure that women still carry the bulk of household labor (Collins et al., 2021).

Additionally, countries like Poland, Romania, and Hungary exhibited similar patterns during both crises. In Poland and Romania, women's unpaid work rose to about 1.28 hours during the 2008 global financial crisis, with a marginal decrease of about 0.16 hours during the pandemic, reflecting the limited male involvement and entrenched societal norms (Folbre, 2021). Hungary mirrored this trend, showing a significant increase in unpaid work during the 2008 global financial crisis and only a small reduction during the pandemic, indicating the persistent burden on women in managing household responsibilities (Budig & Folbre, 2022).

Denmark, France, and Germany however showed varied trends. In Denmark, women's unpaid work increased during the 2008 global financial crisis but decreased slightly during the pandemic, due to the progressive policies promoting gender equality (Smith et al., 2020). Similarly, France saw a small increase in unpaid work during the 2008 global financial crisis, with a slight decrease during the pandemic due to men's domestic involvement increase, though traditional roles are persistent (Sullivan, 2022). In Germany, women faced an increase in unpaid work during the 2008 global financial crisis, with minimal change during the pandemic, which highlights the ongoing challenges in balancing domestic responsibilities and the need for stronger support systems (Gornick & Meyers, 2003).

Lastly, Sweden stands out with its more favorable results. Women experienced an increase in unpaid work during the 2008 global financial crisis, but the pandemic saw a minimal decrease of about 0.16 hours, suggesting that gender equality policies positively impacted the distribution of unpaid labor. Swedish men took on more household responsibilities, which reflects the country's commitment to egalitarian family structures, although challenges remain for women in managing unpaid work (Evertsson & Neramo, 2004).

Figure 16: Trends in Unpaid Domestic Work and Childcare by Gender: 2000–2024 (Pre-Pandemic vs. Pandemic)



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Surveys on Unpaid Work. The line chart illustrates trends in unpaid domestic work and childcare hours for men and women, emphasizing persistent gender disparities and intra-household feminization across economic downturns and the pandemic.

Figure 16 represents the trends in unpaid domestic work and childcare which reveals continuous gender disparities in unpaid labor from the year 2000 to 2024, and thus underscoring the ongoing

feminization of domestic care work within households. Throughout such a period, women are seen to have shouldered more unpaid domestic responsibilities than men, a pattern that was represented through both the 2008 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, even as recent years have shown a slight narrowing of this gap. The overall take, therefore, is that the long-term trend of intra-household feminization of unpaid work remains a persistent issue. Despite the recent economic and social changes, with incremental improvements in male participation, women continue to perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid labor. Achieving true gender equality within households remains a challenge, even with shifting labor dynamics and greater societal awareness (Collins et al., 2021; Bianchi et al., 2022).

4.2 Extra-household Feminization

This section includes a comprehensive analysis and examination of the feminization of specific labor market sectors through the focus on long-term trends in extra-household feminization in the pre-pandemic years which involves the analyzation of how the representation and roles of women in various sectors have evolved over time, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, involves the focus on post-pandemic trajectory of which explores how the pandemic has affected the feminization trends within these sectors, highlighting any included shifts in workforce dynamics, employment patterns and the overall impact on women's roles in the labor market.

For this section, the LFSA (Labor Force Survey) series was utilized from Eurostat, which provides a robust dataset on the labor force participation, employment rates and sector-specific data across the European Union. However, a key limitation of this study is the exclusion of the data from Germany, which restricts the ability to assess the extra-household feminization trend of one of the thesis's economically influential countries. Thus this limitation may affect the generalization of the findings to the broader EU labor market. Nonetheless, valuable insights are offered by the LFSA data for an in-depth view of feminization trends across the EU, from structural to sectoral impacts of the pandemic on women's employment.

Table 4: Gender Employment Gaps Pre- and Post-Pandemic by Country and Sector

Country	Sector (NACE)	Female Pre	Male Pre	Female Post	Male Post	Pre Gender Gap	Post Gender Gap
Denmark	Accommodation	29.99	34.69	27.49	31.97	-4.69	-4.48
Denmark	Admin & Support	34.54	38.97	37.41	39.91	-4.43	-2.49
Denmark	Agriculture	11.09	26.56	11.21	24.92	-15.47	-13.71
Denmark	Education	91.60	59.63	91.27	63.85	31.97	27.42
Denmark	Finance	21.93	27.82	22.72	29.63	-5.89	-6.91
Denmark	Health	251.81	57.17	258.50	56.35	194.64	202.15
Denmark	Info & Comm	20.70	45.07	24.20	50.80	-24.37	-26.59
Denmark	Manufacturing	54.90	137.24	58.23	140.21	-82.34	-81.99
Denmark	Professional	42.08	56.92	44.77	57.42	-14.84	-12.65
Denmark	Public Admin	46.79	44.61	54.31	44.01	2.19	10.31
Denmark	Transport	17.61	59.51	17.21	58.43	-41.90	-41.21
Denmark	Wholesale	93.57	130.88	94.84	133.50	-37.31	-38.66
France	Accommodation	299.94	291.68	300.19	289.87	8.26	10.33
France	Admin & Support	332.25	339.23	338.81	353.80	-6.98	-14.99
France	Agriculture	123.09	305.13	122.90	298.01	-182.04	-175.11
France	Education	810.72	399.58	897.80	429.81	411.13	468.00
France	Finance	321.95	234.47	314.17	255.54	87.78	78.63
France	Health	1875.95	513.0	1875.95	513.0	1362.95	1362.95
France	Info & Comm	178.85	344.2	178.85	344.2	-166.35	-166.35
France	Manufacturing	568.28	1333.0	568.28	1333.0	-764.72	-764.72
France	Professional	427.92	521.5	427.92	521.5	-97.58	-97.58
France	Public Admin	805.75	698.8	805.75	698.8	106.95	106.95
France	Transport	251.04	637.6	251.04	637.6	-386.56	-386.56
France	Wholesale	898.66	1041.0	898.66	1041.0	-142.34	-142.34
Hungary	Accommodation	58.29	44.18	58.29	44.18	14.11	14.11
Hungary	Admin & Support	41.49	53.24	41.49	53.24	-11.75	-11.75
Hungary	Agriculture	36.61	95.90	36.61	95.90	-59.29	-59.29
Hungary	Education	71.69	51.73	71.69	51.73	19.96	19.96
Hungary	Finance	31.30	23.48	31.30	23.48	7.82	7.82
Hungary	Health	150.45	37.79	150.45	37.79	112.66	112.66
Hungary	Info & Comm	21.73	54.61	21.73	54.61	-32.88	-32.88
Hungary	Manufacturing	209.55	369.6	209.55	369.6	-160.05	-160.05
Hungary	Professional	63.43	513.49	63.43	513.49	-450.06	-450.06
Hungary	Public Admin	131.18	115.49	137.53	104.08	15.69	33.46
Hungary	Transport	43.96	136.45	43.70	131.77	-92.49	-88.07
Hungary	Wholesale	171.59	146.37	176.92	159.79	25.22	17.13
Italy	Accommodation	393.47	375.37	353.91	345.67	18.10	8.24
Italy	Admin & Support	315.49	283.96	314.05	280.65	31.53	33.40
Italy	Agriculture	141.77	347.51	144.39	359.83	-205.74	-215.44
Italy	Education	775.75	247.29	774.89	251.94	528.46	522.95
Italy	Finance	183.89	233.82	189.46	215.11	-49.93	-25.65
Italy	Health	816.05	348.08	821.46	332.81	467.97	488.65
Italy	Info & Comm	109.28	250.49	125.15	273.24	-141.22	-148.09
Italy	Manufacturing	631.34	1785.35	650.99	1792.06	-1154.01	-1141.07
Italy	Professional	406.36	427.44	412.39	438.99	-21.08	-26.60
Italy	Public Admin	307.35	519.62	285.95	487.59	-212.27	-200.64
Italy	Transport	149.69	523.67	146.87	532.70	-373.98	-385.83
Italy	Wholesale	742.91	1035.31	734.35	990.21	-292.40	-255.86
Poland	Accommodation	144.50	73.12	136.10	76.36	71.38	59.75
Poland	Admin & Support	117.15	153.59	130.54	154.82	-36.44	-24.28
Poland	Agriculture	63.43	513.49	63.43	513.49	-450.06	-450.06
Poland	Education	51.12	170.71	455.91	480.40	-119.79	-119.29
Poland	Finance	52.89	104.92	65.51	47.97	-12.62	-56.98
Poland	Health	28.73	127.23	369.84	401.50	-241.07	-272.77
Poland	Info & Comm	19.18	219.83	-74.75	-100.65	90.65	81.47
Poland	Manufacturing	37.62	1234.96	-633.52	-597.34	596.34	560.02
Poland	Professional	22.17	177.69	11.09	44.47	11.08	33.22
Poland	Public Admin	66.53	311.02	39.83	55.51	26.70	26.70
Poland	Transport	46.74	531.39	-362.48	-384.65	365.65	337.91
Poland	Wholesale	91.10	549.48	150.75	141.62	-358.38	-358.38
Romania	Accommodation	0.59	59.58	20.21	21.01	58.99	58.80
Romania	Admin & Support	0.80	107.50	-47.73	-56.70	106.70	106.90
Romania	Agriculture	36.80	408.52	-156.15	-171.73	371.72	371.72
Romania	Education	76.22	56.90	120.75	119.33	14.55	14.55
Romania	Finance	0.88	30.63	32.21	30.26	-31.33	-31.33
Romania	Health	29.59	49.51	157.02	180.08	-127.43	-127.43
Romania	Info & Comm	6.95	105.59	-43.47	-48.64	98.64	98.64
Romania	Manufacturing	420.87	564.57	397.49	530.60	-143.70	-133.11
Romania	Professional	82.64	61.74	86.24	61.34	20.90	24.91
Romania	Public Admin	100.31	158.89	101.65	164.02	-58.58	-62.36
Romania	Transport	47.04	260.70	49.38	280.89	-213.66	-231.50
Romania	Wholesale	387.37	320.90	439.60	344.04	66.47	95.56
Spain	Accommodation	487.05	445.06	435.22	410.96	41.99	24.26
Spain	Admin & Support	330.17	269.18	352.42	289.94	60.99	62.48
Spain	Agriculture	116.61	353.10	111.23	349.85	-236.50	-238.61
Spain	Education	541.00	252.97	580.26	273.15	288.03	307.11
Spain	Finance	130.93	139.98	147.01	143.28	-9.05	3.73
Spain	Health	722.95	213.77	817.72	238.11	509.18	579.61
Spain	Info & Comm	101.02	235.30	119.79	266.01	-134.28	-146.22
Spain	Manufacturing	384.60	1027.40	404.17	1024.00	-635.57	-619.84
Spain	Professional	283.76	284.87	310.77	308.04	-1.11	2.73
Spain	Public Admin	363.95	459.45	390.98	468.66	-95.50	-77.68
Spain	Transport	118.05	487.36	135.33	511.17	-369.32	-375.84
Spain	Wholesale	817.18	858.21	822.16	856.54	-41.03	-34.38
Sweden	Accommodation	46.06	43.08	37.19	37.12	2.97	0.07
Sweden	Admin & Support	58.01	70.59	53.85	72.58	-12.58	-18.73
Sweden	Agriculture	13.95	38.40	13.59	38.25	-24.45	-24.66
Sweden	Education	250.66	88.05	246.42	89.63	162.61	156.79
Sweden	Finance	29.20	29.47	33.84	35.39	-0.27	-1.55
Sweden	Health	338.41	91.15	322.62	98.11	247.26	224.51
Sweden	Info & Comm	40.78	103.75	52.34	125.45	-62.97	-73.12
Sweden	Manufacturing	76.87	231.46	77.83	224.63	-154.59	-147.24
Sweden	Professional	112.77	140.32	123.51	157.97	-27.55	-34.46
Sweden	Public Admin	131.79	92.79	150.33	100.21	39.00	50.12
Sweden	Transport	33.32	111.97	27.84	100.22	-78.65	-72.38
Sweden	Wholesale	133.46	175.27	122.83	168.68	-41.82	-45.85

Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The table displays gender employment gaps across various sectors by country, comparing pre- and post-pandemic levels, with positive values indicating higher male employment and negative values indicating higher female employment.

Table 4 presents the gender gap in employment (men minus women) across various sectors across the eight available member states before and after the pandemic. A positive value implies that more men are employed than women, while a negative value implies that more women are employed than men. The gender gap in employment across various sectors within the EU underscores the persistent gender disparities and subtle shifts that follow the covid-19 pandemic.

In Hungary, the transport sector remains male-dominated with a gap decreasing only slightly from -92.49 pre-pandemic to -88.07 post-pandemic. Such a persistence is consistent with research indicating that transport, along-side manufacturing remains a male-dominated field due to its association with physically demanding roles and traditional masculine norms. However, the

Information and Communication sector has experienced a reduction in the male advantage post-pandemic, indicating a gradual shift towards greater gender equity within the industry. In the public administration sector, however, a shift from a small gender gap (15.69) pre-pandemic to a wider gap of 33.46 post-pandemic, suggests an increase in female employment in administrative roles, which is likely influenced by expanded public health and administrative responsibilities during the pandemic (Addabbo et al., 2021).

In Italy, the manufacturing sector shows a stable, male-dominated gap from -1154.01 pre-pandemic to -1141.07 post-pandemic, this underscores the sector's historically male-centered labor structure, where the physical demands and high-tech skills are linked to masculine norms. Contrastingly, the health sector which already saw a gender gap favoring women from 467.97, witnessed further growth in female dominance post-pandemic to 488.65, which indicates a continued reliance on women in healthcare along-side healthcare roles amidst heightened demand and continued link of care services to feminine traits. Similarly, the education sector remained female-dominated, with an increased gap from 528.46 to 522.95, a trend consistent across many EU countries where women continue to occupy the majority of educational roles (Crespo et al., 2023).

In Spain, the health sector has seen a significant increase in female employment from 509.18 to 579.61 post-pandemic, which reflects women's vital role in healthcare during the crisis and the persistence of care-work linkage to feminine norms. In contrast, the manufacturing sector remains predominantly male-dominated, from -635.57 to -619.84 post-pandemic thus posing a slight reduction. This indicates ongoing structural barriers and traditional gender roles that continue to limit women's participation in manufacturing (Döring & Horvath, 2022).

Poland's employment trends show increased male dominance in agriculture, with a widening gender gap from -145.60 pre-pandemic to -150.06 post-pandemic. This trend aligns with the studies indicating that agriculture along-side manufacturing in Eastern Europe is heavily male-dominated due to physical-intensive tasks linked to masculine norms. In education, however, there is an observed increase in the female-dominated gap from 455.91 to 480.40 post-pandemic, which is likely due to the expanded teaching opportunities within the virtual learning environment. Meanwhile, Poland's transport sector experienced a growing male dominance post-pandemic from -362.48 to -384.65 post-pandemic, which is due to structural obstacles and masculine norms that deter female entry into the sector (Addabbo et al., 2021).

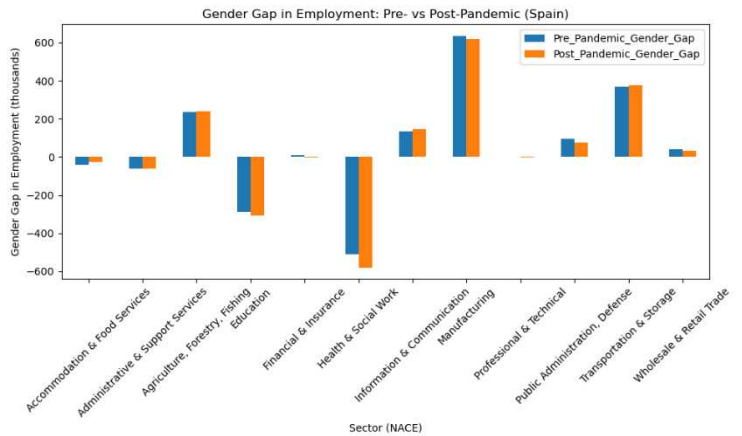
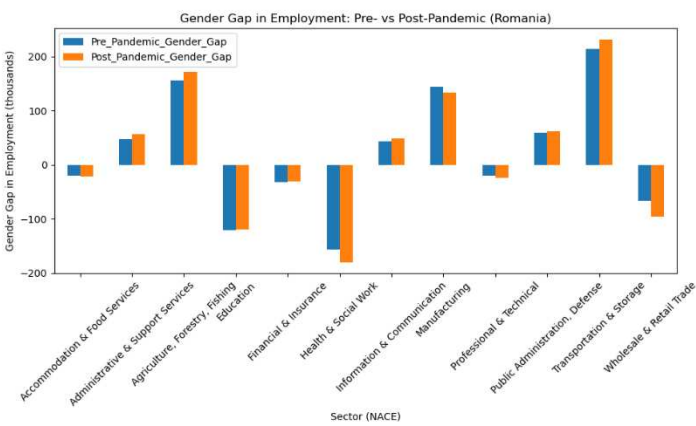
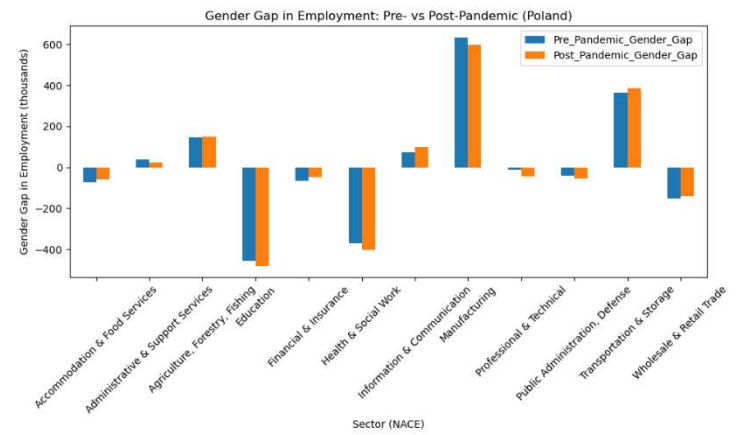
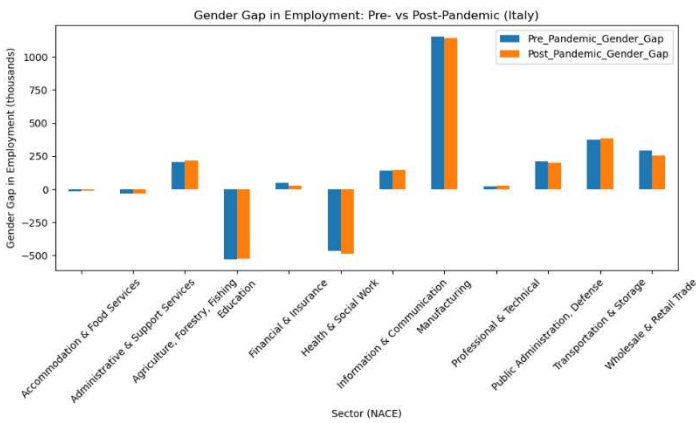
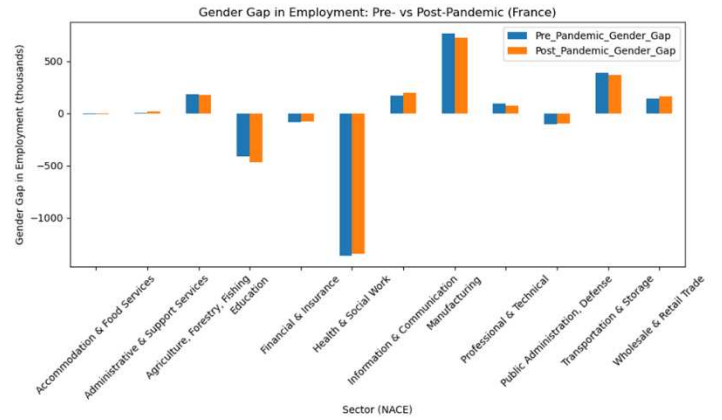
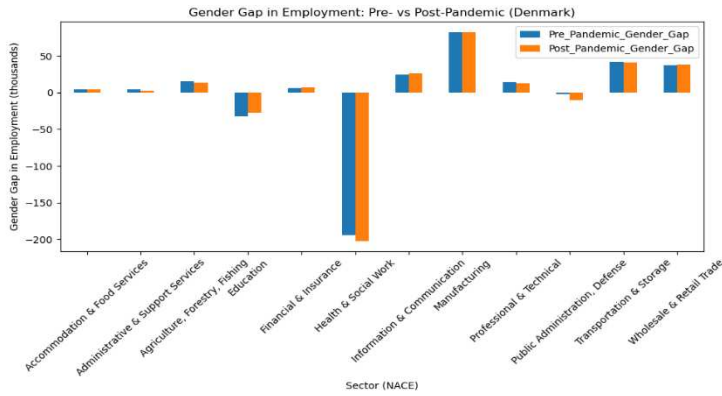
In Romania, the health sector gap favoring women increased significantly, from 157.02 to 180.08 post-pandemic, which indicates the expanded demand for healthcare workers and the substantial female representation in this field. The Romanian manufacturing sector, however, showed a stable male dominance with a slight decrease from -143.70 to -133.11, which reflects minimal change in gender dynamics in an industry which is characteristically resistant to female entry. This also points to enduring structural barriers in male-heavy industries (Döring & Horvath, 2022).

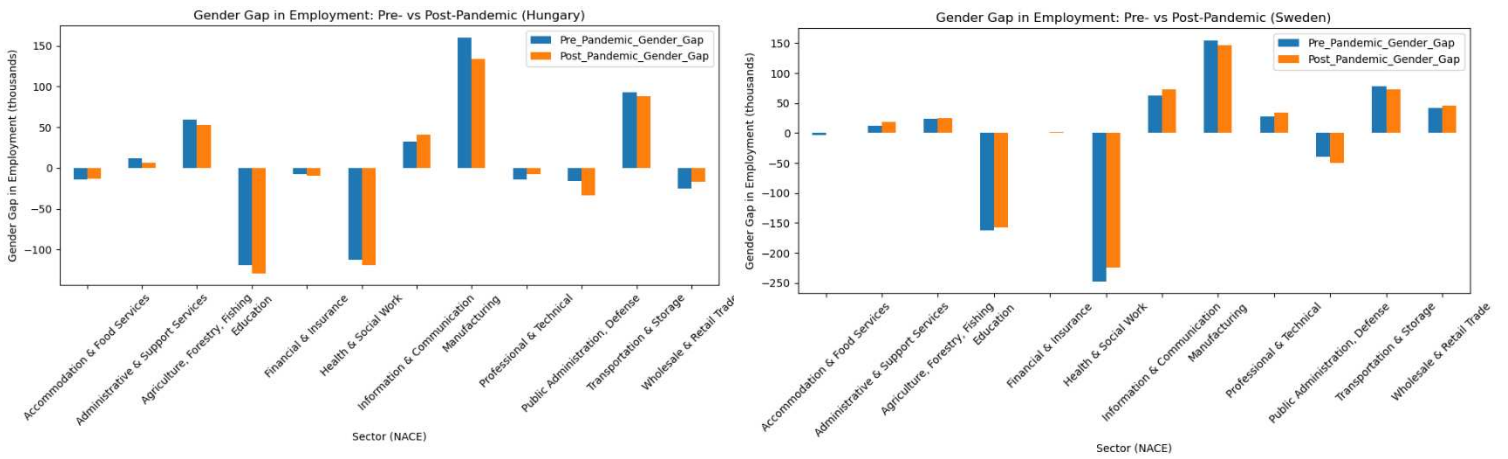
For Denmark, there is an observed increase in female employment in the health sector, with the gap widening from 194.64 to 202.15 post-pandemic. which reflects on Denmark's robust investment in healthcare and social support roles, which have historically employed a higher proportion of women. Conversely, the wholesale sector in Denmark remained male-dominated, with a small post-pandemic shift from -37.31 to -38.66. This slight increase indicates that post-pandemic economic recovery has primarily benefited sectors dominated by male workers (Christiansen & Andersen, 2022).

In France, the female dominance in the health sector remained high, with a slight decrease from a pre-pandemic gap of 1362.89 to 1346.61. This sectoral trend underscores France's reliance on female health labor despite workforce adjustments in the post-pandemic era. Meanwhile, male dominance in manufacturing persists, with only a slight improvement in the gender gap from -765.18 to -724.53. This indicates that the entrenched gender roles in France's industrial field poses a challenge for overcoming the structural labor divisions (Rouban & Dufresne, 2023).

Finally for Sweden, the education sector's gap favoring women widened marginally from 162.61 pre-pandemic to 156.79 post-pandemic, which reinforces the country's commitment to gender inclusivity in teaching roles. this phenomenon of extra-household feminization is also particularly pronounced in sectors like health and social work. Sweden's manufacturing sector however, remained male-dominated, with a slight decrease in the gender gap from -154.59 to -147.24, which illustrates the continued barriers that restrict female entry in male-heavy industries. Additionally, the professional and technical sectors in Sweden exhibit a consistent pattern of male dominance both pre- and post-pandemic (Fagan et al., 2023).

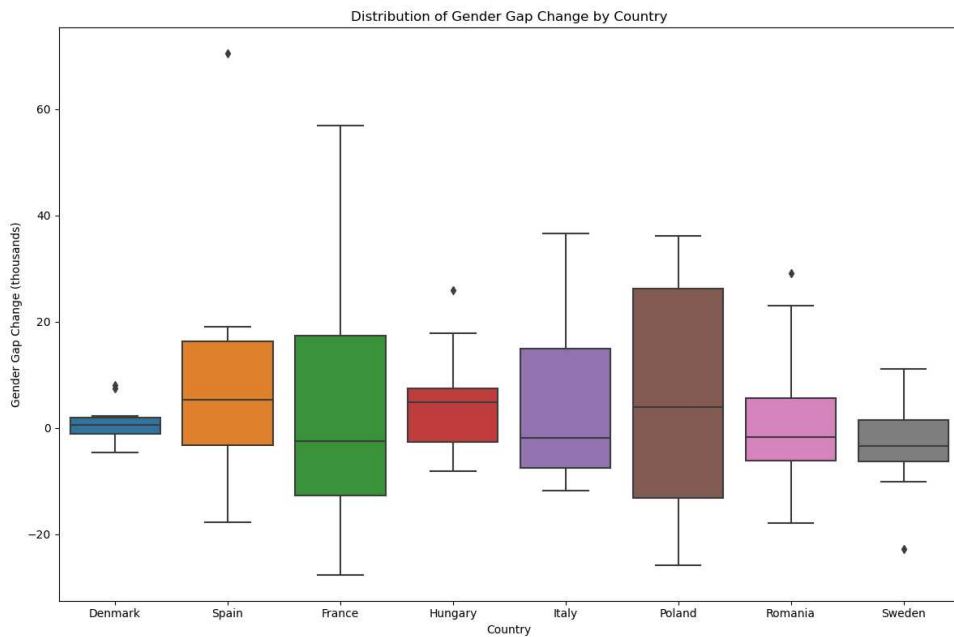
Figures 17 A-H: Comparison of Gender Gaps Across Sectors: Pre- and Post-Pandemic Analysis





Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The chart compares the gender gap (men minus women) across various sectors before and after the pandemic, highlighting changes in participation rates, with specific observations on sectors such as "Health & Social Work," "Manufacturing," "Education," and "Financial & Insurance."

Figure 18: Distribution of Gender Gap Changes by Country: A Box Plot Analysis



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from the Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The box plot illustrates the distribution of gender gap changes (men minus women) by country.

Figure 18 illustrates that countries such as France, Italy, and Poland exhibit a wider variability in their gender gap changes, which suggests a complex landscape as the impact of the pandemic varied significantly across different sectors. This variability is indicative of the pandemic's differential effects on the labor market, as some sectors experience an expansion of the gender gap in favor of men while others for women.

In contrast, Denmark and Hungary present more clustered distributions, which indicates that the gender gap changes across sectors were more uniform and thus less volatile. Such modest shifts in the distribution of employment between men and women in these member states is a more stable labor market response to the pandemic, with little movement towards either of the extremes of the gender gap spectrum. This stability may be attributed to the existing policies and societal norms that support gender equality, of which are effective in mitigating the adverse effects of the pandemic on women's employment.

Overall, the mixed variability observed in countries like France, Italy, and Poland contrasts the more consistent trends seen in Denmark and Hungary, which suggests the need for targeted policy interventions that address the specific challenges faced by women in different sectors. Therefore, understanding these variations can inform future efforts to promote gender equity in the labor market, particularly in the ongoing economic recovery from the pandemic.

3.3 Intersectionality in Labor Market Dynamics

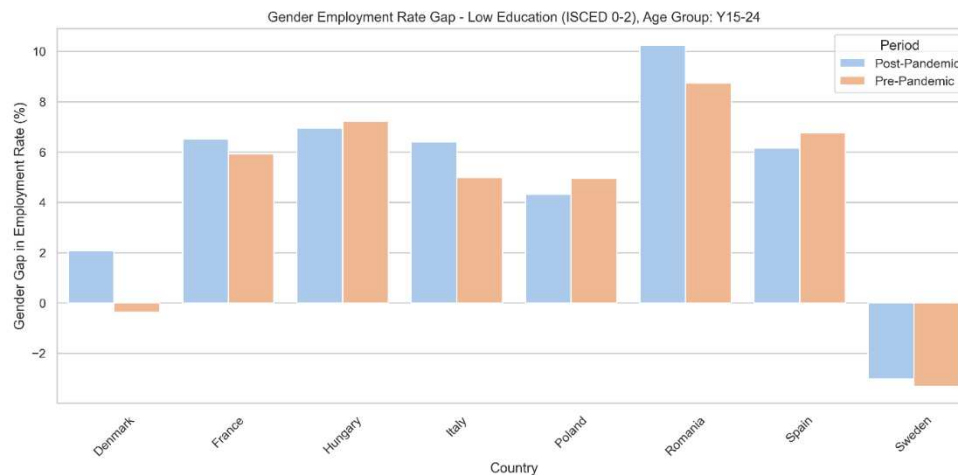
The concept of intersectionality here offers a foundation for understanding the varied experiences of women in the labor market, especially in the EU, where the different demographic factors intersect to shape the labor outcomes. While generally, the trends of gender inequality are understood, the layered challenges that are faced by women who belong to multiple marginalized groups are oftentimes overlooked. For example, women of different ethnicities, educational backgrounds, age groups, or migration statuses will encounter other unique forms of discrimination and structural disadvantages that influence their labor outcomes.

This section will analyze such intersectional impact by examining the labor market dynamics for women across different education levels and age groups in the aforementioned member states- Germany as a limitation-comparing them to men both in the pre-and post- pandemic era. The LFSA (Labor Force Survey) series is utilized from Eurostat to explore how education intersects with gender which affects employment outcomes, job stability, and career progression for women compared to men. By doing so, the extent of which gender labor disparities persist, diminish, or intensify will be illustrated, especially as the Covid-19 pandemic reshaped economic and employment conditions. By illustrating such, the analysis can highlight the gendered educational inequalities that require targeted policy interventions within the EU.

Low Education (ISCED 0-2)

1- Age Group Y15-24:

Figure 19A: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

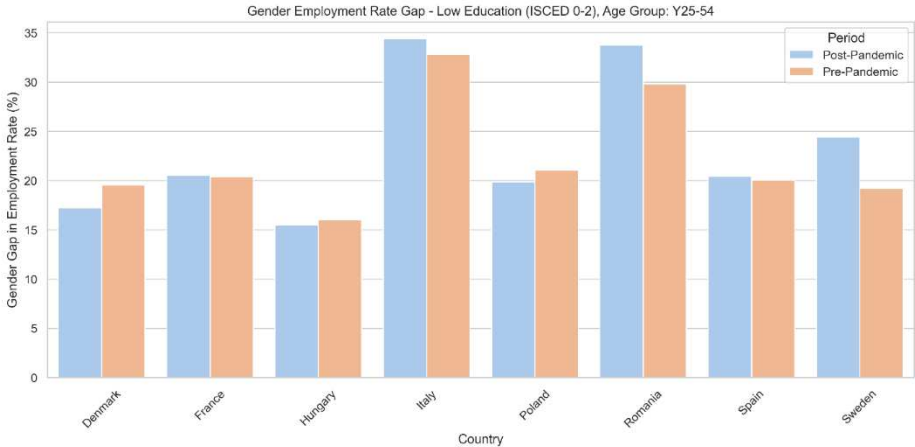
The results that regard the gender employment gaps among the low education groups highlights a significant trend in the context of post-pandemic recovery especially. In France and Romania, the gender gap is narrower among this education level at the age group of 15-24 which indicates that men and women experience similar labor market outcomes. Denmark and Sweden exhibit a near gender equality between the genders, which reflects the success of the comprehensive welfare systems in the Nordic countries. Research by Harkness (2021) states that the strong social safety nets and policies that are aimed at work-life balance are a main contributor to this minimized gap among the young workers.

The post-pandemic increase in the gender employment gap among these groups can be attributed to several interrelated factors. The recovery of male-dominated sectors like construction and finance outpaced the female-dominated sectors such as retail and hospitality, resulting in slower job recovery for women (Pacheco, 2022; Rădulescu, 2022). Additionally, the intensified caregiving burdens disproportionately affected women's labor market participation (Collins et al., 2021). The rise in the precarious employment for women also further exacerbated such gender disparities in employment, especially for low-educated women that face greater job insecurities (Rubery et al., 2020). Finally, the persistent cultural norms at that education level typically

prioritize women for family responsibilities which shows the complexity of gender dynamics in the labor market during the post-pandemic recovery.

2- Age Group Y25-54:

Figure 19B: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

In this age group, the gender gaps in employment rates are more pronounced, as men significantly are seen to more likely be employed than women, this is especially the case in Romania and Italy. For Romania, this can be due to the cultural norms and labor market structures, as the traditional gender roles often go on to dictate the employment opportunities (Rădulescu, 2022). For Italy, this can be attributed to the challenges that women face in relation to job availability and the undervaluation of their labor, particularly in service and care, which are also further exacerbated by lack of supportive policies in the country (Pacheco, 2022).

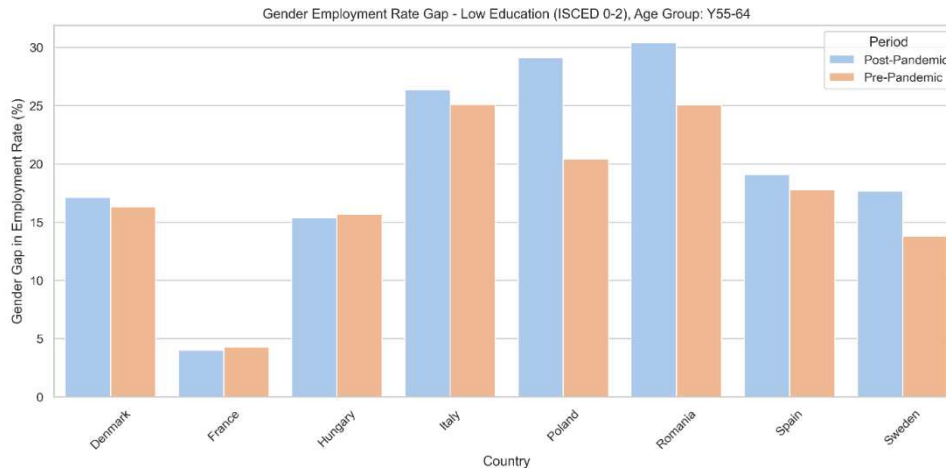
However, France and Denmark present a more moderate gap, with little change in the post-pandemic era. This can be attributed to the strong welfare system and gender-responsive policies that help mitigate disparities in the gender employment rates (Harkness, 2021).

Overall, the presence of the gender gap among middle-aged individuals with lower education levels points at systemic issues, particularly in the case of market segmentation and the undervaluation of feminine labor in service and care, which continue to limit women’s employment and recovery (Rubery et al., 2020). Therefore, better targeted policy interventions

are required in order to address these structural barriers and to promote gender equality in the labor market for this demographic group.

3- Age Group Y55-64:

Figure 19C: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

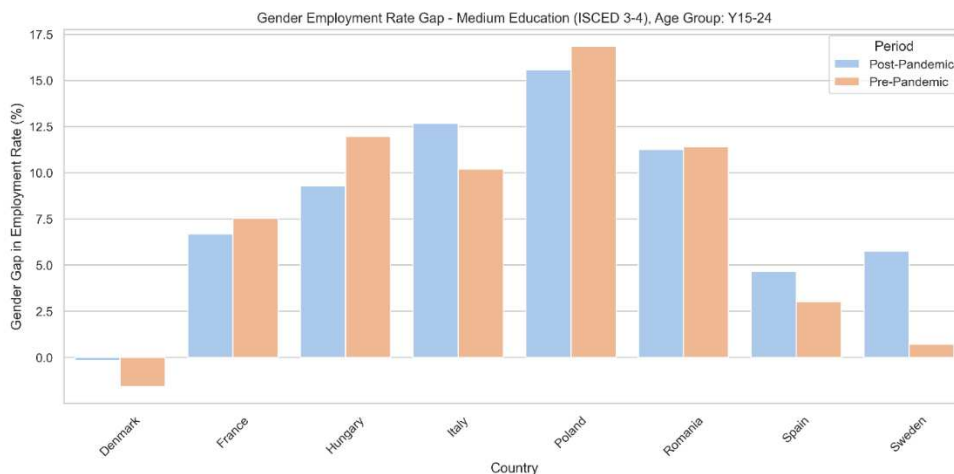
In this age group a significant employment gap trend persists, especially in the case of Poland and Romania, with men having a higher employment rate than women, even in the post-pandemic era. Research indicates that in these countries, older women often face multiple barriers in regard to their employment prospects, which are seen as ageism, persistent generational gender discrimination and norms, and a lack of proper access to training and re-skilling workshops (Rădulescu, 2022; Pacheco, 2022).

However, in Denmark and Sweden, there is a smaller gender gap in comparison, which suggests that there are better integration programs for the older workforce in low-education levels. This is due to the comprehensive labor market policies and social safety nets that can facilitate the continued employment of older workers, including the required initiatives for re-skilling and gender equality promotion in the workplace (Harkness, 2021). Therefore, national policies and cultural attitudes toward age and gender in the labor market are essential for employment dynamics within the labor market for older workers.

Medium Education (ISCED 3-4)

1- Age Group Y15-24:

Figure 19D: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

For this young age group at medium education levels, there is a witnessed employment gap evident across the countries. In Poland and Romania for example, the gap is notable as young men are significantly more likely to be employed in comparison to women in a competitive job market, due to the underlying structural inequalities and societal norms in these countries that can hinder women's labor market participation particularly in male-dominated sectors (Rădulescu, 2022; Pacheco, 2022). Additionally, a lack of support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs and targeted training, along-side insufficient availability of childcare services further exacerbate the difficulties faced.

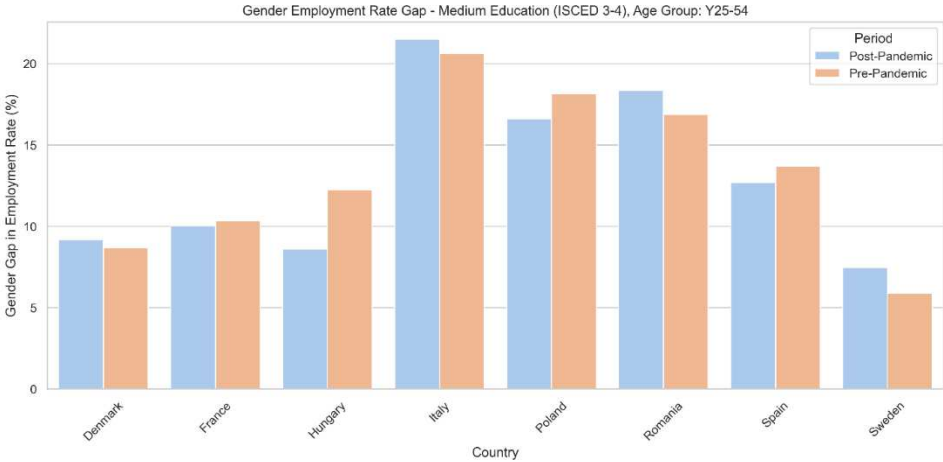
However, Denmark and Sweden witness minimal gaps in comparison, which suggests an almost equal employment rate for young men and women at this education level. This is indicative of the effective welfare policies and labor market practices that support gender equality and enhance opportunities for youth in their competitive job markets (Harkness, 2021).

Additionally, Spain does experience a slight reduction in this employment gap in the post-pandemic era, which indicates a progress is made in addressing gender disparities due to targeted

policies that are aimed at increasing youth employment and supporting women in the workforce. However, Italy shows minimal change in their gaps in the post pandemic era, which suggests the entrenched gender norms’ persistence and the continued economic effects on women. Overall, such a trend can illustrate the lack of national policies, lack of job opportunities and cultural attitudes in the country.

2- Age Group Y25-54:

Figure 19E: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

At the age group of 25-54 at this education level, the gender gap is also notably pronounced, especially in countries like Italy and Romania, as men dominate the higher employment rates. In Italy, this can be due to the traditional gender norms and roles and societal expectations, which have historically influenced the barriers to accessing equal job opportunities for women, alongside the competitiveness of this job market in comparison to minimal job opportunities available (Pacheco, 2022). Despite a slight reduction in this gap in the post-pandemic era, the challenges of the undervaluation of female labor, along-side the precarious positions and low-paying opportunities, gender disparities continue to be a significant issue in this country.

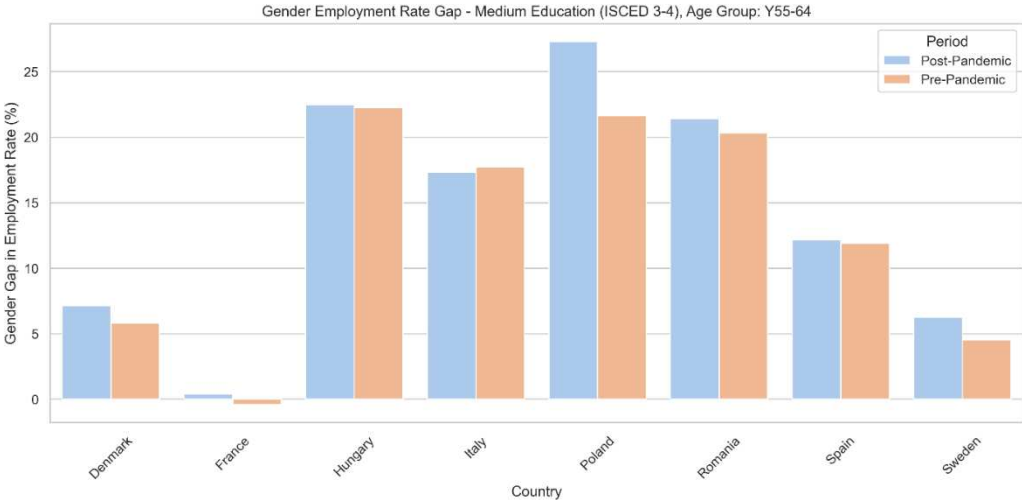
Similarly, Romania shows a substantial gender gap with men dominating the employment rates. This can be attributed to structural issues in the country, which includes limited access to affordable childcare and ingrained cultural norms in regard to gender roles (Rădulescu, 2022). Although the post-pandemic era provided some gap recovery, the recovery was not uniform in all

sectors, which left women at a disadvantage in sectors particularly hit by the pandemic, such as retail and hospitality.

In contrast, Sweden shows one of the lowest gender gaps in this age group, which reflects the effective workforce integration initiatives for both the genders. The country’s comprehensive welfare policies and gender responsive labor market strategies, along-side the work-life balance support foster an environments where women can actively participate in this competitive market (Harkness, 2021). Overall, systemic approaches to gender equality in the workplace can significantly mitigate employment disparities and promote equal opportunities which highlights the need for targeted interventions for individuals at this education level and age group.

3- Age Group Y55-64:

Figure 19F: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

In the age group of 55-64, a substantial gender gap in employment is especially evident in Poland and Romania, as men are more likely employed than women. In Poland, the similar context occurs of ageism, persistent generational gender discrimination and a lack of access to skill training initiatives that can enhance employability at that age (Pacheco, 2022). Romania mirrors such a pattern, with structural obstacles and socio-economic factors playing the major role of perpetuating such gender disparities. The undervaluation of women’s work historically, along-

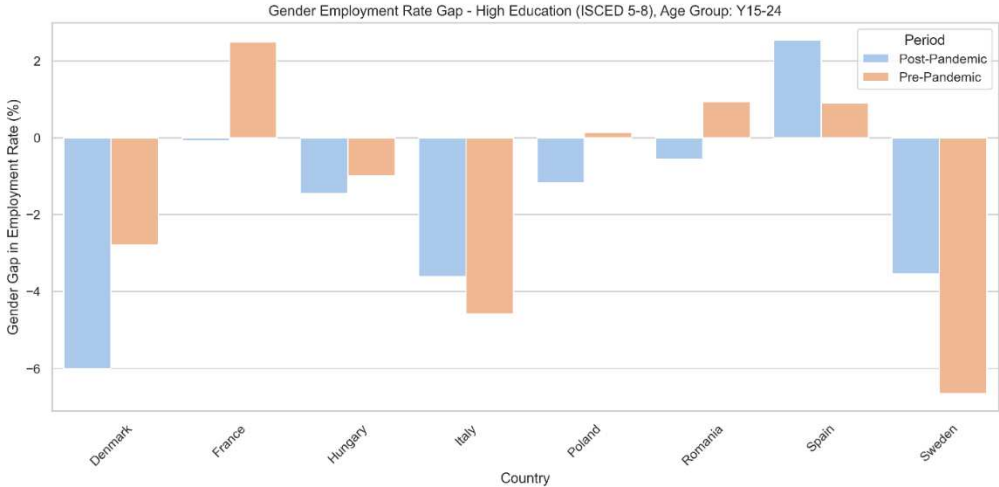
side the limited support of re-skilling older individuals seeking employment exacerbate these challenges faced by older women.

In contrast, countries like Denmark, France and Sweden go on to display small gaps in employment at this age. Such can be linked to robust welfare systems and policies that promote gender equality and support the continued participation of older individuals in the workforce (Harkness, 2021). An example is Denmark’s lifelong learning and retraining programs and Sweden’s strong parental leave policies and flexible work arrangements. This indicates the importance in policy frameworks and cultural attitudes in promoting such gender equity in the labor market for individuals at this age.

High Education (ISCED 5-8)

1- Age Group Y15-24:

Figure 19G: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

In this age group with individuals with high education levels, there is a notable difference among countries as many witness that young men at this higher level of education exhibit significantly higher employment rates when compared to young women, with this disparity widening in the post-pandemic era in countries such as Denmark and Italy. This increase can be attributed to several factors, including the quicker recovery of male-dominated sectors that rebounded

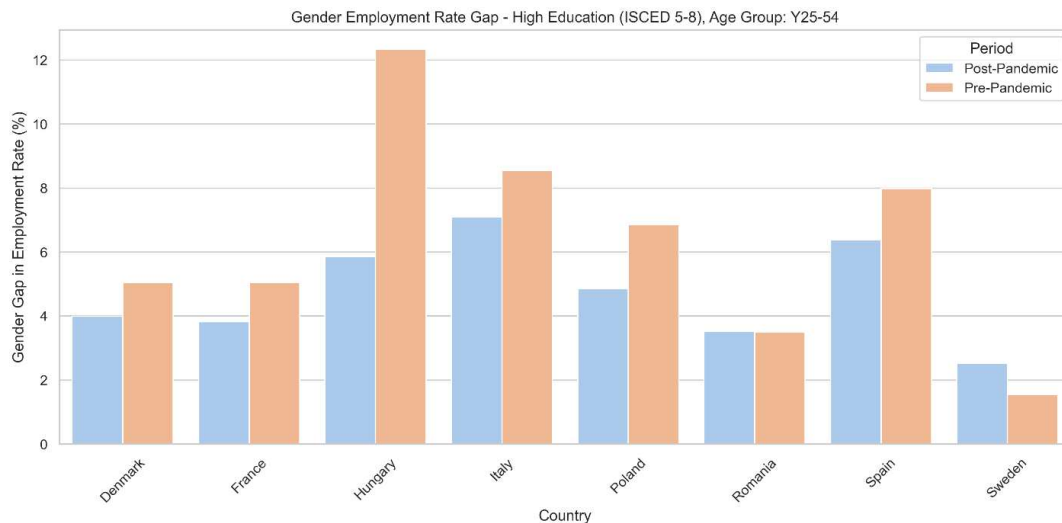
smoother from the pandemic in comparison to industries where young women are more concentrated, such as hospitality and retail (Pacheco, 2022). Additionally, the persistent stereotypes around gender roles and the societal expectations in these countries can further restrict these young women's opportunities in the labor market, which limits their career prospects (Harkness, 2021).

In Contrast to these countries, Poland and Spain show a positive trend, where there is a narrowing in the gender gap in the employment of young individuals, which indicates that the employment rates for young women increased relative to young men in the post-pandemic era. The factors that contribute to this shift include the targeted policies aimed at supporting young women's employment and the enhanced access to educational and vocational programs, along-side a greater societal focus on gender equality in the workplace (EIGE, 2022).

In Sweden, a unique situation shows that the gender gap was negative in the pre-pandemic era, which means that young women had a higher employment rate compared to young men. However, this trend softened during the post-pandemic era which suggests that young women experienced higher challenges posed by the pandemic, particularly in sectors, deemed as female-dominated, such as hospitality. Overall, such trends highlight the impact of the pandemic on gender employment dynamics especially for young individuals with high educational attainment, along-side the importance of the policy efforts to promote gender equity in the labor market across many contexts.

2- Age Group Y25-54:

Figure 19H: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

In the age group of 25-54 with high education levels, there is a notable disparity in the employment rates between men and women which are seen to persist across the various European countries. For example, Hungary witnessed the highest pre-pandemic gender gap between the countries, a trend which is seen to continue in the post-pandemic era. This persistence in the gap and gender disparity can be due to the entrenched gender roles and labor market practices that favor male employment in this country, along-side with the insufficient support systems for women in their workforce participation (Pacheco, 2022).

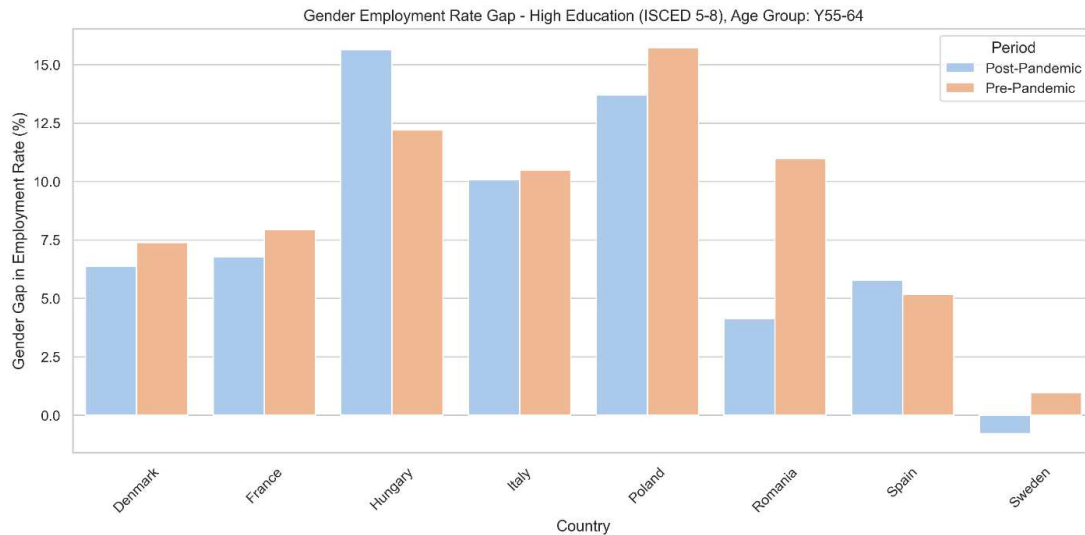
In contrast, Denmark, France, and Spain show a slight reduction in the gender gap which is promising for a positive trend towards closing the employment gap between men and women of this age group. The effective policies promoting gender equality in the workplace, along-side the parental leave initiatives and flexible work arrangements are significant contributors to this improvement in women's labor market participation (Harkness, 2021).

While for Italy, there is a witnessed narrowing in the gap, where men still hold significantly higher employment rates in comparison to women. Such a persistent disparity in the country can be linked to structural issues, like the prevalence of traditional gender norms and the limited access to affordable childcare, which remain a challenge for women's ability to fully participate in the labor market (Rădulescu, 2022).

Conversely, Sweden exhibits one of the smallest gender gaps for this age group, which reflects the near-equal participation of men and women in the labor force. This is due to Sweden's strong welfare policies, the robust support for work-life balance and pro-active measures to promote gender equality within the workplace (EIGE, 2022). Overall, such findings show the varying degrees of gender equality in employment among these countries, which underscores the need for targeted interventions in order to address persistent disparities in the labor market.

3- Age Group Y55-64:

Figure 19I: Gender Employment Rate Gap by Age Group and Education Level: Pre- and Post-Pandemic



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure compares the gender employment rate gap across various age groups and education levels before and after the pandemic, showing shifts in employment disparities influenced by demographic and educational factors.

In the age group of 55-64 with high education levels, there are significant gender gaps which are particularly pronounced in countries like Poland and Romania. Even though this gap decreased in the post-pandemic era, ongoing challenges are still significant for women in the labor market which include ageism and entrenched gender norms that go on to prioritize male employment (Pacheco, 2022). In the case of Poland for example, limited access to training and re-skilling programs and the lack of workplace flexibility contribute to the barriers and difficulties older women encounter in securing employment (Rădulescu, 2022).

In contrast, Denmark, France, and Sweden show smaller gaps in employment rates, which can also be due to the robust welfare policies and supportive labor market environments that Nordic countries foster for greater gender equality, as it enables both older men and women to participate equally in the workforce (Harkness, 2021). An example can be seen in Sweden, where there is commitment to lifelong learning and retraining programs that integrate older workers into the labor market, which mitigates the impact of both age and gender on the employment outcomes (EIGE, 2022).

Despite such improvements, gender disparities remain persistent for older highly educated individuals, which reflects the complexity of the factors that influence employment in this demographic. The cultural expectations that surround caregiving responsibilities and the undervaluation of women's work still continue to affect older women in their labor market

participation which requires targeted interventions that address both age and gender barriers, thus promoting gender equality and supporting the workforce integration of older individuals.

Overall, the analysis of employment rate gaps across age groups and education levels reveals a consistent trend of men having a higher employment rate when compared to women, this is especially the case among older age groups and individuals with lower educational attainment. The impact of the pandemic provides mixed results for the employment gap, as some countries witness a reduction in the gender disparity as women's employment rates catch up to that of men's while others seem to show minimal changes in the gaps, which highlights the complexity of the interplay between structural factors that influence the gendered employment outcomes in the post-pandemic era, and the importance of better holistic gender targeted interventions and initiatives.

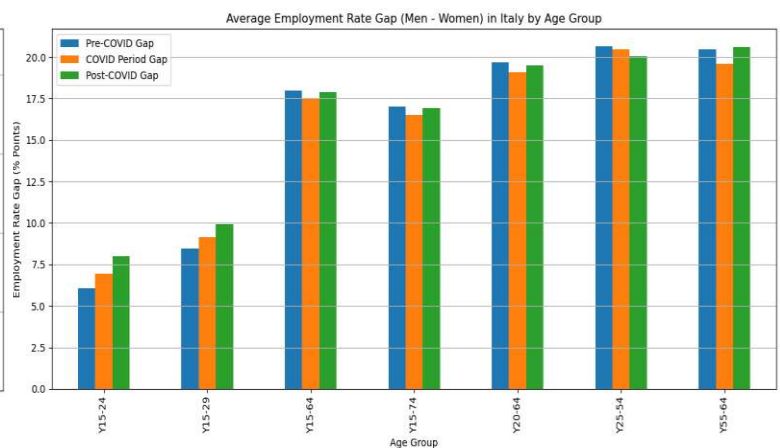
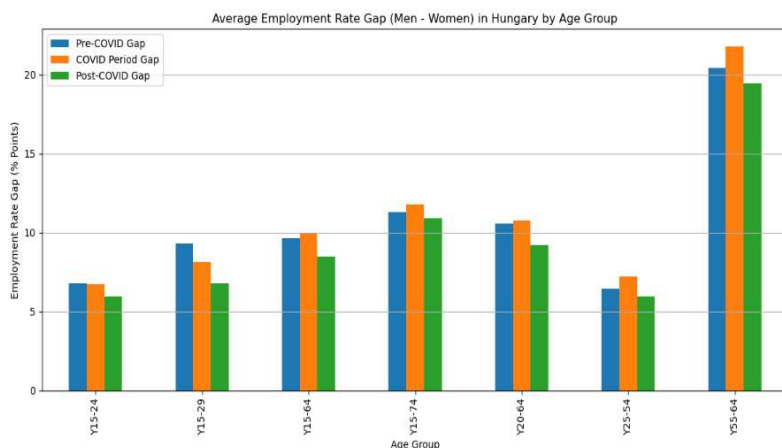
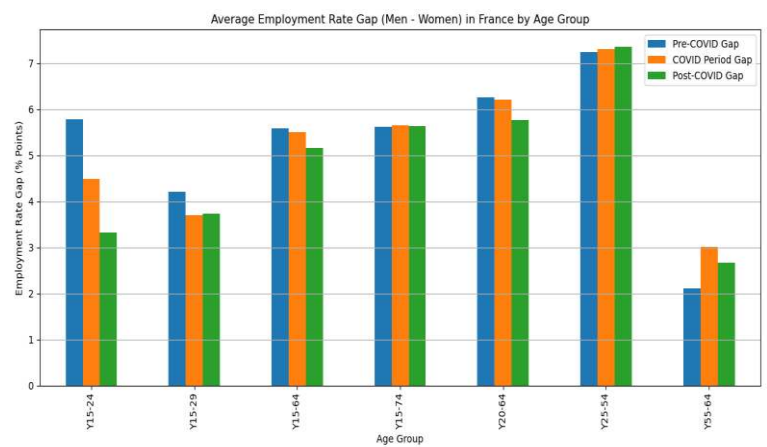
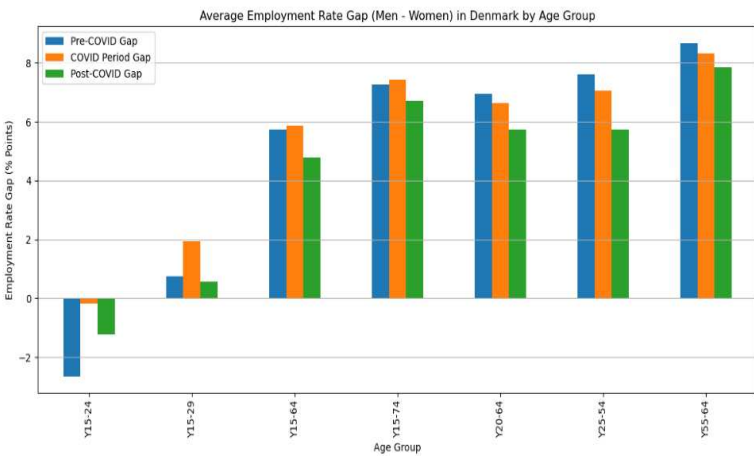
Chapter 4: Future Implications Post-Covid

This chapter explores the long-term outlook on women's employment and gender equality prospects as the economy recovers and enters the post-pandemic phase. Therefore, a forward-looking analysis of how the Covid-19 pandemic has reshaped the labor market dynamics, particularly for women, is provided along-side what such reshaping means for women's economic participation as recovery efforts are unfolded. This chapter then examines both the challenges and opportunities presented as economies across the European Union work to regain stability and growth. The first section provides analysis on the post-Covid employment trends for women, focusing on the average employment gap between men and women by age group, reviewing the shifts in labor demand, workplace practices and anticipated trends as the economy continues to recover. The second section delves into the role of the European Union, by evaluation the current and proposed policies that are aimed at rectifying the gender disparities that were exacerbated by the pandemic, such as the targeted support for the female-dominated sectors that were hit the hardest, along-side the enhanced work-life balance and gender equality initiatives. Lastly, the chapter ends with the section underscoring the critical role of gender equality in achieving a robust economic recovery, as policies that support women's economic participation can foster both economic growth and resilience. Therefore, this chapter explores there future implications and importance of entrenching gender consideration in the post-Covid recovery strategies in order to set a stronger and more equitable economy in the face of future economic downturns.

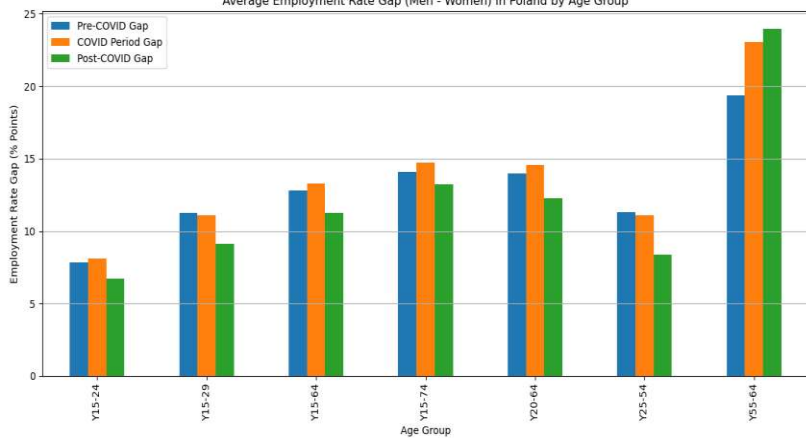
4.1 Post-Covid Employment Trends

There are notable shifts in the employment trends for women in the EU in concern to the Covid-19 pandemic that are revealed, particularly in regard to the persistent employment gap between men and women. A comprehensive analysis is set for the post-Covid employment trends, focusing on the average employment gap between men and women across various age groups. By doing so, an examination is then revealed on how the changes in labor demand and workplace practices have affected this gap, along-side an exploration of projected trends as economic recovery continues to unfold. The Eurostat Labor Force Survey (LFS) data is used to review pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic employment patterns for the aforementioned member states, with Germany as a limitation, which allows a closer look at regional and demographic variances within the EU. Therefore, this section provides the Covid-19 pandemic's immediate impacts and long-term implication for gender parity in employment in the EU, which provides insight for policymakers and researchers in regard to fostering inclusive recovery.

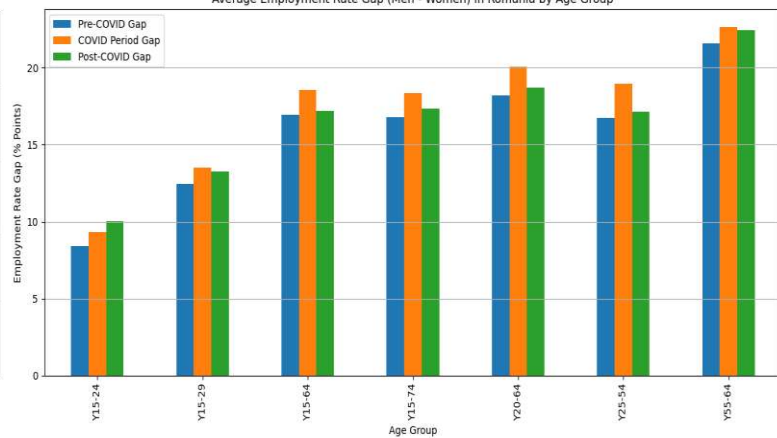
Figures 20A-H: Average Employment Rate Gap (Men - Women) by Age Group: Pre-, During, and Post-Pandemic.



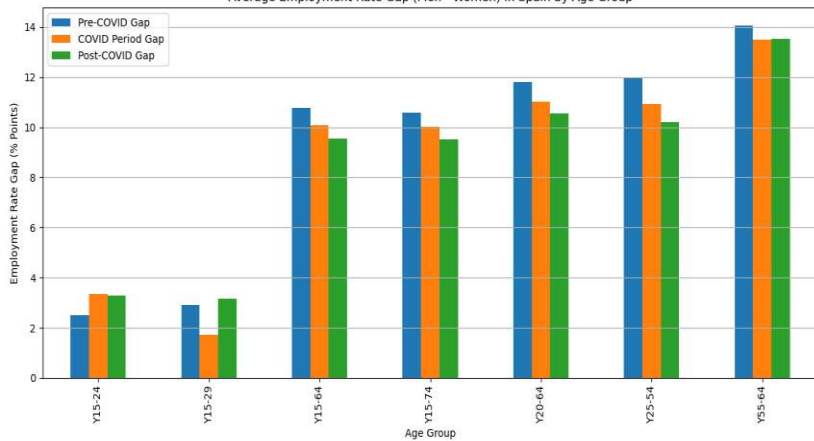
Average Employment Rate Gap (Men - Women) in Poland by Age Group



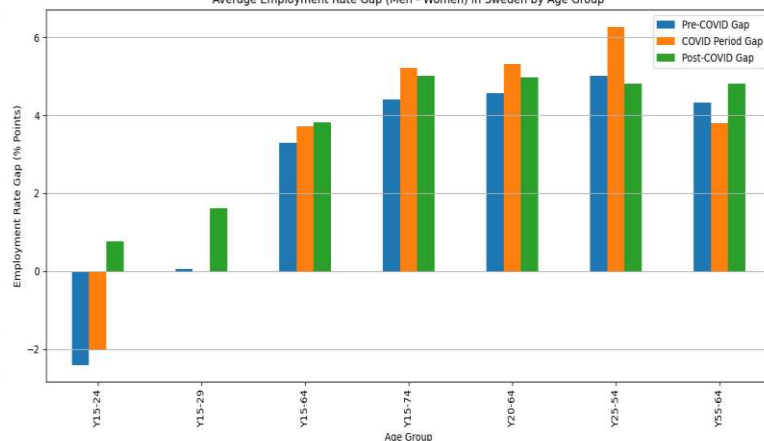
Average Employment Rate Gap (Men - Women) in Romania by Age Group



Average Employment Rate Gap (Men - Women) in Spain by Age Group



Average Employment Rate Gap (Men - Women) in Sweden by Age Group



Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The figure shows the average employment rate gap between men and women across different age groups, highlighting shifts in gender disparities in employment before, during, and after the pandemic.

For Denmark, a mild narrowing in the gender employment gap can be seen in the post-covid era, particularly for the older age groups, which suggests that the country has set efforts for progress toward a more gender equal labor market. This aligns with the research done by Blau and Kahn (2022), which note that the Nordic countries generally benefit from policies that aim to support parity between the genders, such as the parental leave and work-life balance initiatives. However, the graph and data do show a persistent employment gap that favors men across most age groups, especially for younger workers. This can be linked to the gender division of labor, where women are often overrepresented in precarious and part-time positions which are more vulnerable during economic downturns (Alon et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Denmark's high female labor participation is indicative of stronger recovery in the post-pandemic era, but the gender gap in employment may be a longer-term issue as it requires deeper structural interventions from the state.

For France, the consistency in the positive gender gap across all the age groups, especially for older individuals, reflects the structural inequalities that affect women's participation in the workforce. While France is often considered a progressive welfare state, it still faces challenges

in closing the employment gap, especially for older women, as suggested by Folbre (2021). The author states that older women, which are often overrepresented in caregiving roles, experience challenges disproportionately in the face of re-entering the workforce or maintaining stable employment in precarious roles. The slight decrease in this gap for younger individuals in the post-Covid era does point however to improvements focal on younger generations, such as the efforts by the state to support youth employment and shifts in how work is distributed across gendered lines. Nevertheless, the slow narrowing of the gender gap, especially for the older generation, does suggest the need for targeted interventions and initiatives such as re-skilling programs and more age inclusive policies.

In Hungary, there is a witnessed stable trend in the gender gaps, with minimal reduction for this gap during the Covid-19 period, which indicates a relatively rigid labor market in terms of gender equality. The economic structure in this state is heavily influenced by the traditional sectors where men are overrepresented, such as manufacturing. The persistence in this employment gap, especially for older generations, reflects a continued undervaluation of female-dominated sectors like caregiving and education. The lack of robust social safety nets in the country along-side historical structural gaps, indicate longer term struggles in narrowing the employment gap, which can trap women in low-wage and precarious roles.

Similar to Hungary, Romania's minimal change in the gender gap post-Covid, especially for the older workers, suggests that there are deep structural issues that affect women's labor participation. The pandemic may have lead to the exacerbation of the gendered employment vulnerabilities, especially in sectors where women are overrepresented, such as education and service. Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020) suggest in their research that this is particularly in the case of Eastern European countries where less generous welfare policies can have more pronounced gender disparities in their employment outcomes, especially for older women who are less likely to return to employment, especially when there is less targeted re-skilling initiatives and stronger historical gender norms surrounding household responsibilities.

In the case of Italy, there are witnessed substantial gender gaps, especially for older workers, which is explained by the historical gender roles that are persistent in the Italian labor market where women face challenges in entering or maintaining their presence in the workforce due to social norms and insufficient childcare infrastructure. According to Bertogg and Koos (2021), the reliance on part-time and informal work within the country, which is disproportionately set onto

women, contributes to the persistence in the gender employment gap. Despite the positive development in the post-Covid era, the gender gap persistence points to the deep-rooted structural barriers that prevent women from achieving equal employment rates with men.

In the case of Poland, there is a witnessed slight decrease in the employment gap for younger workers in the post-Covid era, which suggests some improvements due to policies that encourage youth employment and possible changes in gender norms in the labor market. However, the persistence in this gap for older workers signals an age-based discrimination and caregiving responsibilities that continue to limit women's labor force participation (Collins et al., 2021). Deal Boca et al. (2020) also suggest that in Poland, the caregiving responsibilities disproportionately affect women, which leads to higher likelihood of exiting the workforce or reducing working hours, especially in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns.

For Spain, there is a slight narrowing of the gender gap in the post-Covid era, especially for younger workers which aligns with the broader trends that are observed in the EU, as younger women seem to have benefits from the shift towards remote work and more flexible labor market conditions. However, the disparity evident in the older workers highlights ongoing challenges for older women, especially as they are bearing the bigger brunt of caregiving responsibilities that restrict their abilities in staying employed, especially during the pandemic (Hupkau & Petrongolo, 2020).

Sweden shows a relatively low gender gap, particularly for younger workers, which reflects the effectiveness of Sweden's gender equality policies, additionally to the telecommuting abilities and flexible work practices that provide opportunities for women to stay employed during the pandemic without the increase in caregiving responsibilities leading to decreased working hours or labor market exits (Shockley et al., 2021). The neutral post-Covid impact on Sweden also suggests that its unique approach to combat the virus and its robust welfare policies, such as paid parental leave and subsidized childcare, helped maintain gender equity in the labor market. Nevertheless, the slightly positive gender gap in the older age group of workers indicates that even in such a progressive welfare state, there are room for improvements in the case of achieving complete gender parity.

As the results show, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the employment gaps varies across the presented countries, with some of them witnessing slight reductions in the gap while others show more stable trends. The gendered division of labor and sectoral employment trends play a

critical role in the results here. For example, women are more likely to work in sectors such as healthcare and education, which during the pandemic were either overwhelmed or disrupted (Alon et al., 2020). However, in the Nordic countries like Sweden and Denmark, where their gender equality policies are stronger, the impact on gender gaps is lesser, and the recovery is seen to be relatively quicker, especially in younger workers. These results suggest that while some countries did show modest improvements in the gender gap, the recovery from the pandemic is still seen to be prolonged for women, especially in older workers. This is relevant to the research by Blau & Kahn (2017), who argue that long-term structural changes are necessary means to close the gender employment gap. Additionally, policies such as subsidized childcare, flexible work arrangements, and training programs for older women can significantly reduce the gendered impact of future economic downturns.

As a conclusion, the gender employment gap in the EU shows trends towards a more modest narrowing in some countries in the post-Covid era, but these trends are not uniform due to factors such as regional differences, sectoral concentration, caregiving responsibilities, and labor market flexibility. As countries witness economic recovery, the long-term structural barriers women face should be addressed to make sure that any progress made during the pandemic is not reversed. This will thus require targeted policy interventions, especially in sectors where women are overrepresented, in order to support women's continued participation in the labor market and to ensure gender parity in employment outcomes.

Summary Table: Employment Rate Gaps by Country, Age Group, and Period: Pre-, During, and Post-Pandemic Analysis.

This table provides detailed statistics on employment rate gaps by country, age group, and period. Across most countries, older age groups (especially 55-64) consistently show larger employment gaps in favor of men. Younger age groups generally show smaller gaps, and in some cases, gaps are even negative, suggesting a more balanced or female-favored employment rate in these groups. The impact of COVID varies by country, with some showing slight reductions in gaps post-COVID, while others maintain stable disparities.

This analysis indicates that while some countries have made progress in reducing the gender employment rate gap, particularly in younger age cohorts, older age groups still reflect significant disparities, with the COVID-19 pandemic having limited impact on reversing or closing these gaps in many cases.

Country	Age Group	Pre-COVID Gap	COVID Period Gap	Post-COVID Gap
Denmark	Y15-24	-2.64	-0.16	-1.23
Denmark	Y15-29	0.75	1.93	0.37
Denmark	Y15-64	5.74	5.87	4.50
Denmark	Y15-74	7.26	7.43	6.20
Denmark	Y20-64	6.96	6.61	5.24
Denmark	Y25-54	7.61	7.05	5.74
Denmark	Y55-64	8.68	8.33	7.28
France	Y15-24	5.78	4.49	3.32
France	Y15-29	4.22	3.71	3.74
France	Y15-64	5.59	5.50	5.16
France	Y15-74	6.62	5.65	5.63
France	Y20-64	6.06	6.22	5.76
France	Y25-54	7.24	7.31	7.36
France	Y55-64	2.11	3.01	2.66
Hungary	Y15-24	9.82	8.17	6.79
Hungary	Y15-29	9.34	9.06	8.03
Hungary	Y15-64	11.29	11.78	10.92
Hungary	Y20-64	10.63	10.78	9.93
Hungary	Y25-54	6.47	7.21	7.01
Hungary	Y55-64	20.41	18.80	18.35
Italy	Y15-24	6.07	6.91	8.09
Italy	Y15-29	8.47	8.47	9.22
Italy	Y15-64	17.99	17.47	17.98
Italy	Y15-74	17.92	16.50	16.93
Italy	Y20-64	16.82	15.85	16.02
Italy	Y25-54	20.45	20.58	20.07
Italy	Y55-64	20.44	19.88	20.52
Poland	Y15-24	11.23	11.09	11.04
Poland	Y15-29	12.79	13.65	11.26
Poland	Y15-64	14.06	14.71	13.25
Poland	Y20-64	13.36	14.54	12.22
Poland	Y25-54	11.30	12.65	10.65
Poland	Y55-64	19.37	23.07	21.87
Romania	Y15-24	8.42	9.30	10.01
Romania	Y15-29	12.83	12.91	13.37
Romania	Y15-64	16.91	18.53	17.52
Romania	Y15-74	16.17	17.87	17.86
Romania	Y20-64	18.32	20.00	18.69
Romania	Y25-54	21.55	22.98	22.19
Spain	Y15-24	2.51	3.36	3.15
Spain	Y15-29	5.02	5.26	5.19
Spain	Y15-64	10.89	10.07	9.56
Spain	Y15-74	10.58	10.02	9.51
Spain	Y20-64	10.32	10.37	9.82
Spain	Y25-54	11.55	10.49	10.22
Spain	Y55-64	14.06	13.94	13.25
Sweden	Y15-24	2.69	3.00	1.61
Sweden	Y15-29	0.06	-0.23	-0.82
Sweden	Y15-64	4.85	5.22	5.01

Source: Elaborated by the author using data from Eurostat Labor Force Survey Analysis (LFSA). The table shows the average employment rate gap between men and women across different age groups, highlighting shifts in gender disparities in employment before, during, and after the pandemic.

5.2 The Role of EU Policy

This section of the chapter includes a literature analysis regarding the current EU policies that are proposed in order to address the gender inequalities that were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic's economic downturn. Due to both time and data access constraints, this analysis will be based on secondary sources that regard EU policies functions in order to review the key EU initiatives, especially the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the Work-life Balance Directive and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). Thus, this section will analyze the effectiveness and limitations of these particular initiatives in supporting the overall gender equality in the EU labor market and consequently will highlight the successes and gaps in the EU policy responses and underscore the areas where any additional measures are required in order to truly mitigate gender disparity in the long-term for employment and the overall economic participation of women.

Historically, the European Union is regards gender equality as one of its fundamental principles and has embedded it within its foundational treaties and policy frameworks. Beginning with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the EU introduced the principle of equal pay for equal work and also laid the groundwork for a legal framework in order to reduce the gender inequalities in the labor market. This commitment was later on further solidified with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, where the EU incorporated gender equality into their broader objectives and emphasized on the importance of including gender consideration across all policy areas. Later, the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 was introduced, which deepened the commitment to gender equality by formally recognizing the need to combat any social exclusion and discrimination across all genders (Jacquot, 2017).

The EU's gender equality policies emphasize on their efforts of closing the employment and wage gaps, increasing the female workforce participation, and ensuring the existence of fair working conditions in the female-dominated sectors. For example, the Gender Equality Strategy of 2020-2025 reiterates such efforts through its focus on improving the work-life balance challenges, addressing gender-based violence, and promoting equality in decision-making and leadership roles. This all reflects on the EU's long-term dedication to create an equitable labor market and its ongoing adaptation to any contemporary challenges that impact overall gender equality (Rubery, J. et al., 2020).

An Overview of the Key Policies Addressing Gender Inequality

The EU introduced a number of policies that aim to address any gender inequality, especially in the case of their exacerbation by the pandemic. These policies were created to not only reduce the existing gender disparities in the EU labor market, but to also improve on the status and labor conditions of the female-dominated sectors and to promote better work-life balance conditions, which are all ultimately important for the EU's recovery from the pandemic. As mentioned above, the central mechanisms that were set by the EU in order to achieve these goals are the RRF, ESF+ and the Work-Life Balance Directive. Each one of these mechanisms plays an important role in mitigating the pandemic's effects on women, especially in their employment and the overall structural disparity in the labor market across the EU member states.

Firstly, the RRF is regarded as a financial instrument that was established by the EU in order to support the member states' recovery from the pandemic's economic crisis. The RRF allocates its funds to the national recovery plans with a budget of approximately 800 billion euros, where these national recovery plans go on to foster economic growth and recovery, set better structural reforms and better resilience in the face of any future crises. Most importantly however, is that a significant portion of these RRF funds are focused on the sectors that were the most affected by the pandemic, which are the female-dominated sectors such as healthcare, education, hospitality, social care, and retail (Sabatini, 2021).

According to Cipriani (2023), through these focused fundings for female-dominated sectors the RRF investments have the potential to benefit women by strengthening these sectors, addressing the job insecurities surrounding these sectors, and improving their working conditions. An example of that can be the healthcare and social care sectors, where the RRF investments are being used to fund the covid-19 induced digital transformations, capacity building and workforce support initiatives.

Cipriani (2023) adds that by targeting these areas, the RRF can be successful in addressing immediate recovery requirements in these female-dominated sectors but can also be successful in working towards long-term gender equality in the labor market by improving women's economic stability and supporting the valuation and recognition of women's work in these essential sectors. Ultimately the RRF investments can then reduce the gender gaps in employment and enrich the economic resilience of these sectors in the face of future crises.

Another significant instrument for the EU is the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which is essentially a policy tool that is designed to promote social inclusion, reduce poverty, and improve employment opportunities, with a particular focus on addressing gender inequality. The ESF+ is therefore recognized as the EU's largest fund which is aimed at tackling the inequalities within the labor market where the investments from the fund support initiatives that create jobs, reduce unemployment, and improve on the employability of vulnerable groups, especially women. Additionally, the fund also focuses on addressing the gender-based risks of job insecurity and precarious work, which were exacerbated by the pandemic, especially in sectors like hospitality, retail, and caregiving (Bohle & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2022).

According to Cunningham and Cavaillé (2022), the ESF+ invested significant resources to promote women's access to better quality jobs, to upskill the female workforce, and to support gender-sensitive employment policies. Specifically, the ESF+ invested resources to enable women in entering sectors with higher job security and achieving leadership roles, along-side the support for gender pay gap initiatives and policies. Additionally, the ESF+ fund investments support social innovation projects, especially in female-dominated sectors, which work on achieving greater economic independence for women.

Lastly, the EU adopted the Work-Life Balance Directive in 2019, and it is considered a cornerstone of the EU's gender equality efforts and strategy. This Directive is designed to foster greater gender equality in regard to caregiving responsibilities and flexible work arrangements by addressing the disproportionate caregiving burdens that women shoulder on their own, particularly in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, where these burdens were significantly increased. The Directive therefore works to introduce new provisions for parental leave, flexible work arrangements and hours, and telework in order to create a more equitable division of labor both in the workplace and within the household between the genders (Sever, 2021).

According to Drobnič et al. (2023), the most significant provision of the Work-Life Balance Directive is the introduction of the minimum standards for paternity and parental leave, this aims to encourage fathers to take on a more active role in caregiving responsibilities, which can reduce the gendered division of labor that places the majority of the responsibilities onto women. The directive also pushes further the introduction of flexible work arrangements in organizations, which include the right for workers to request telework options and provide flexible hours that are crucial for parents, especially for working mothers and in times of crises. Their research

suggests that the implementation of these measures has the potential to positively impact women's participation in the workforce since they make it easier for women to balance their careers and caregiving duties that were especially straining on them during the pandemic. Through these efforts, the EU can reduce gender pay gaps by improving women's overall career participation and advancement opportunities.

In regard to country specific responses, thus in addition to EU-wide policies, individual member states implemented tailored measures to counteract the she-cession, including furlough schemes, subsidies, and reemployment programs aimed at alleviating gender-specific impacts. Beyond the RRF, several national recovery plans in countries like Sweden and Germany integrated gender-sensitive strategies to enhance job opportunities and address economic disparities for women. Germany focused on increasing women's participation in STEM by bolstering funding, education, and training, resulting in more job opportunities in high-demand fields and reducing pandemic-related economic disparities for women (Kuhlmann & Annink, 2023).

On the other hand, Sweden adopted a progressive stance, expanding policies to close the pay gap and facilitate women's re-entry into the labor force. Enhanced childcare services and funding for job re-training in pandemic-affected sectors, like hospitality and retail, helped mitigate adverse impacts on Swedish women, with Sweden's welfare policies, including parental leave and childcare provisions, further supporting gender equality during the crisis (Magnusson & Nordenmark, 2023).

In France, furlough schemes prioritized female-dominated sectors, especially hospitality and retail, which were heavily impacted by the pandemic. Wage subsidies helped retain women in the labor force, but the temporary nature of this support left many vulnerable to job loss after the subsidies ended (Fagnani & Letablier, 2020). Germany also introduced subsidies for childcare providers and education sectors to help women balance professional and caregiving responsibilities during school and childcare closures. However, these efforts faced challenges in sectors where remote work was not feasible, leaving many women in precarious situations (Kuhlmann & Annink, 2023).

Denmark emphasized flexible work arrangements and expanded parental leave as part of its response, encouraging fathers to take on caregiving responsibilities to reduce the gendered burden on women (Bloksgaard & Rostgaard, 2021). Danish furlough schemes also protected jobs in female-dominated sectors like healthcare and education; however, the effectiveness of these

measures hinged on sustained economic recovery, and structural inequalities in caregiving persisted, necessitating further interventions.

Poland expanded childcare support and introduced skill-building programs, particularly in healthcare and digital sectors affected by furloughs and labor shortages. These programs, partially funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), faced limitations due to uneven access for marginalized women, especially in rural areas or with lower educational qualifications. Similarly, Italy introduced skills and retraining programs to aid women's re-entry into the labor market, though marginalized groups, including migrants and women with less education, faced access barriers that limited these programs' effectiveness (Heinen & Wóycicka, 2023).

Across the EU, furlough schemes played a vital role in maintaining employment during the pandemic, but their gendered impacts varied. In Spain, for instance, furlough schemes in female-dominated sectors such as hospitality and tourism, allowed many to retain jobs during the crisis. However, after the withdrawal of support, these sectors struggled to recover fully, leaving many women unemployed (Mariscal, 2023).

EU Policy Effectiveness and Limitations

As presented, the EU's response to tackle the gender inequality in the labor market through the RRF, ESF+ and Work-Life Balance Directive represents an ambitious attempt at addressing the pandemic's exacerbated gendered impacts. However, while these policies did actually yield to certain positive outcomes, they also had their limitations, especially in meeting the structural challenges within the female-dominated sectors and in achieving long-term gender equality.

The RRF and ESF+ did successfully direct funds to sectors such as healthcare, education, and caregiving, where they channeled resources towards the recovery and modernization in these sectors which eventually boosted job creation and improved working conditions. However, the alignment between these funds and the specific needs of these sectors remains questionable. For example, while the RRF did invest in healthcare which provided essential financial support for the sector, it still fell short in terms of addressing the systemic undervaluation of healthcare labor. Research by Rubery and Rafferty (2022) shows that despite the increased funding, structural reforms in regard to the working conditions, wages and job security remained very limited, which led to the persistence of gender pay gaps and the undervaluation of women's work in healthcare and social work.

Furthermore, while the ESF+ did boost job creation, this job creation did not always lead to secure, full-time positions. Studies by Smith (2023) suggest that many of the jobs that were created remained concentrated in temporary and contract-based roles, which does not always provide the required stability that women in these sectors look for. The focus on ‘flexible’ job creation in the ESF+ framework may have accidentally reinforced precarious work conditions in these sectors instead, where women already faced significant barriers in their career progression and economic security (Cipriani, 2023).

While these EU targeted interventions did aim to address the overrepresentation of women in part-time and precarious roles in order to mitigate the imbalance between the genders, women in sectors like retail, hospitality and caregiving still continue to face higher rates of job insecurity. Daly and Rake (2022) add that while the ESF+ for example, aimed to support women’s access to employment as mentioned, the measures implemented were not set to tackle the root cause of women’s eventual precarious conditions in their employment, such as the lack of access to full-time positions, limited career opportunities and low wages.

Recent analysis by Chzhen et al. (2022) shows that while the ESF+ did promote the employment re-entry and skill-building programs, these initiatives often prioritized the rapid workforce integration over the long-term job quality and security. Therefore, women in precarious roles did benefit from the short-term employment opportunities, but without any assurance of stable and higher-paying positions.

Verloo and Walby (2023) ultimately state that the limited scope of these programs to address the structural labor market inequalities will inevitably draw in criticism from scholars that argue that without more profound labor market reforms, women will continue to be disproportionately affected by job insecurity, especially in economic downturns.

Sever (2021) states in his research that the Work-Life Balance Directive was successful in providing the minimum standards in paternity and parental leave and the right to request flexible work arrangements, which overall enhances the support for working parents which can ultimately mitigate the disproportionate caregiving responsibilities that women often shoulder. However, its potential in achieving long-term change in gender equality remains undecided and uncertain. While the directive does push for shared caregiving arrangements, many EU member states continue to lack the sufficient childcare infrastructure required for the success of these

arrangements, which ultimately limits the directive's effectiveness in practice (Williams & Brennan, 2023).

Additionally, studies by Mills and Ilie (2023) raise some doubts about the effectiveness of the Work-Life Balance Directive's long-term impact on gender equality in the workplace. While flexible arrangements do theoretically support the work-life balance, they can also have a reinforcing impact on the gendered caregiving expectations where women will more likely than men go on to reduce their working hours or seek telework options due to their domestic obligations. This will ultimately lead to repercussions for women's career advancement and income, since women will end up facing fewer opportunities for promotions and wage growth.

Furthermore, Drobnič et al. (2023) restate that as long as public services and childcare structures' availability is limited, the directive's impact on actual equitable career progression between the genders will remain constrained.

In some country specific examples, for instance in Spain, the RRF investments improved on infrastructure, planned, and provided additional training, and enhanced working conditions for women, including conditions pertaining to mental health. As a result of this investment, better roles and new jobs were established in nursing and caregiving sectors, providing expanded job security, and better working conditions for women. Despite these investments' advancement, other sectors such as social care and education, received less support, resulting in uneven benefits for women across different fields (Mariscal, I., 2023). This highlights the need for a better comprehensive sectoral funding strategy to avoid marginalizing women in under-paid and undervalued professions.

In the case of Denmark, the work-life balance directive steered into action the expanded parental leave policies, promoting a less biased distribution of caregiving duties between men and women (Bloksgaard, L., & Rostgaard, T., 2021). France effected flexible working arrangements, boosting a healthier work-life balance, especially for women, and increasing female job satisfaction and workforce participation. Nonetheless, the implementation of the directive still had its challenges, especially when faced with rooted cultural norms and economic constraints in some EU countries, particularly in the Southern region, which hinders full implementation (Fagnani, J., & Letablier, M. T., 2020).

In the case of the European Social Fund (ESF), women's employment is supported through training programs in Poland for the purpose of improving on job placement for Polish women. While in Italy, the ESF supports better childcare services for the purpose of improving on Italian women's workforce participation. However, uneven funding distribution and the challenges in reaching marginalized women, such as those from minority or low-income backgrounds, ultimately limited the overall desired impacts. There is a need, therefore, for more comprehensive funding strategies and improved monitoring to ensure that the ESF initiatives do effectively support all women in their employment (Heinen, J., & Wóycicka, I., 2023).

Future Policy Recommendations

While the RRF, ESF+ and Work-Life Balance Directive initiatives did achieve some progress in gender equality within the EU labor market, further actions are required in order to enhance the effectiveness of these policies and to improve on the resilience against any future economic disruptions.

The underrepresentation of women in STEM fields can actually perpetuate the occupational segregation and economic vulnerability of women, since STEM roles generally offer greater job stability and higher pay. Research by Makarova et al. (2023) shows that scholarships, grants, and mentorship programs are effective in increasing women's presence in STEM, and while the European Commission's Gender Equality strategy does aim for increasing female representation in stem, further investments in STEM education and early-career support is required, especially for women to be able to advance in these fields.

Davaki (2022) suggests that in order to actually diversity the STEM workforce, incentives like employer tax breaks should be initiated for hiring female STEM graduates, along-side including additional funding for STEM programs in prioritizing women and creating supportive workplace cultures for better long-term effective increase in women's STEM participation.

As mentioned, the lack of affordable childcare can significantly impact the effectiveness of policies and the overall achievement of gender equality in the EU, since women are more likely to still assume the primary caregiving role which limits their full-time employment opportunities (Chzhen et al., 2022). Therefore, efforts to provide expanded and affordable childcare options for women would support their workforce participation and economic resilience as these childcare options would enable more individuals to stay active in the workforce during crises.

Research by Köppen et al. (2023) indicate that member states with comprehensive childcare support witnessed higher female workforce participation and quicker post-pandemic recovery in comparison to other member states. The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy suggests the inclusion and initiation of bettered comprehensive childcare policies, which for example can including subsidies, private sector incentives, and equal parental leave policies.

However, an actual uniformity of application across all EU member states remains a challenge, with countries like Sweden and Denmark offering strong childcare support, whereas southern EU states still struggle with funding and access (Lundberg & Thévenon, 2023).

As mentioned, while the ESF+ did evidently contribute to job creation, a focus on the job quality is essential to achieve economic resilience and gender equality in female-dominated sectors such as healthcare and social care (Rubery & Rafferty, 2022). Verloo and Walby (2023) suggest in their research the requirement for policies that strengthen worker protections, establish minimum wage standards, and support career development in these sectors.

Furthermore, structural reforms to address the undervaluation of care and female-dominated work are also recommended. For example, Bohnet (2022) suggests that wage increases for public sector roles and standardized protections for care workers are crucial in order to mitigate gender disparities in wages and job security. Additionally, collective bargaining and adequate funding for female-dominated sectors would further enhance workers' overall economic stability (Gottfried, 2023).

While the Work-Life Balance Directive did demonstrate some progress in addressing caregiving responsibilities as mentioned, the future policies should in return incorporate more flexible provisions that go on to cater diverse family needs. Moreover, flexible work options that are coupled with robust childcare and eldercare systems, can significantly alleviate the caregiving burdens that are significantly set onto women and promote better gender equality in career advancement (Bianchi et al., 2022).

Drobnič et al. (2023) state that experts actually advocate for policies that normalize flexible work for both genders, not just women, in order to avoid reinforcing the traditional care norms and to reduce stigma surrounding caregiving over-all. The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy also emphasizes on fostering balanced work-life practices for both. Lastly, enhanced

support for remote work and caregiving leave options also aid in creating a more inclusive labor market for women.

5.3 Gender Equality and Economic Recovery

This section focuses on the critical role of gender equality in fostering a better and resilient economic recovery where equitable policies in the EU can actually contribute to sustainable economic growth and overall social stability. Through numerous research, it can be confidently stated that as member states recover from economic downturns, especially in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, their adoption of inclusive recovery strategies that prioritize gender equality, especially in the female-dominated sectors that were heavily impacted by the crisis, is essential for promoting better economic resilience in the face of any future downturns.

Therefore, it can be concluded that addressing gender disparities in the labor market does not only benefit women's economic security and professional opportunities, but it also strengthens the overall economic productivity and innovation of the EU member states. Due to both time and data access limitations, this section will be a literature-based review, drawing on secondary sources in order to examine how gender equality in the labor market can evidently shape better economic recovery efforts and their overall long-term effects.

As stated by Bénassy-Quéré et al. (2022); Rubery and Fagan (2023) in both studies, the integration of gender considerations into economic policy can enhance productivity, innovation, and overall welfare. Studies by the European Institute for Gender equality (2022), indicate that closing gender gaps in labor force participation could increase the EU's GDP by nearly 10% by 2050. Additionally, gender-inclusive policies in the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Finland are linked to higher rates of innovation, as these countries consistently ranked in the top five of the Global Innovation Index, which is partly due to their focus on equal labor participation and inclusive policies (European Commission, 2022).

Rubery (2023) states that for the EU, gender inequality is a long recognized and significant obstacle to the overall economic resilience of a country, this was highlighted substantially during the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, overall gender inequality in the labor market is estimated to cost the EU economy around €370 billion annually, or 2.5% of its GDP (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).

The EU's economic structure relies on the undervaluation of women's labor in certain sectors, which leaves economies vulnerable to shocks that disproportionately affect the female-dominated sectors. For an example, the overrepresentation of women in sectors such as healthcare and education, which were heavily impacted, contributed to the weakened response capacity of the member states since these sectors faced staffing shortages while also dealing with increased demand and financial strain. According to Eurostat (2021), women represented approximately 76% of the healthcare workforce and 73% of the education workforce in the EU. The author emphasizes that economies with higher gender equality, and therefore a more diverse labor force, will have more adaptive responses to economic disruptions.

According to Rubery and Fagan (2023), in order to create a more resilient economy that is less vulnerable to sectoral or demographic shocks, a diversified labor market is essential. This is because economies with more gender-equitable labor markets recover faster, as they are not reliant on specific industries or groups within the workforce that may be disproportionately impacted by an economic downturn.

Moreover, the concentration of women in precarious, part-time, and lower-paid employment does not only exacerbate their vulnerability during a recession, but also hinders broader economic recovery. As women face reduced access to stable income and social protection schemes in these precarious positions, their spending power is also reduced which affects aggregate demand and slows down recovery in key sectors of the economy. The economic contraction resulting from these inequalities was amplified, with women's lower disposable income contributing to a 2.2% drop in household consumption during the pandemic, particularly in consumer sectors reliant on discretionary spending (Borghans et al., 2023).

The authors further expand on how such gender employment disparities limit the broader potential of the labor market since as there is a failure to fully utilize the skills and capabilities of women, particularly in leadership positions and high-skilled sectors that are essential for post-downturn recovery and long-term economic growth.

Backing up these statements, Ferrant & Thim (2023) argue that economic recovery is not solely determined by fiscal stimulus measures, but also by how equally these resources are being allocated and whether women are being provided with the necessary support to return to the labor market. They reiterate that without addressing gender disparities, the economy continues to be

weakened by the underutilization of a significant portion of the labor force, particularly in key sectors such as healthcare, education, and the service industry.

Furthermore, the EU's gender-sensitive plans, for example the European Commission's allocation of resources to promote women in STEM, represent an effort to address gendered vulnerabilities. However, Smith and Fodor (2023) note that these measures require long-term and sustained investments to truly bolster actual economic resilience. The failure to address the structural causes of gender disparities as well, will continue to undermine the EU's ability to recover in the face of future downturns.

Additionally, Elson (2022,) states that policies that focus on equalizing opportunities and outcomes for women, where they address issues such as wage disparity, vertical labor segmentation and job security, can reduce the gender disparities that lead to the underutilization of resources, especially in female-dominated sectors. The author also states that better gender parity in economic decision-making roles can enhance policy responses and improve governance outcomes, especially in regard to public spending and welfare distribution.

Ultimately the case of investing in gender equality, is then an economy's efforts to tap into previously underutilized human capital. However this does not only include increasing the number of women in the workforce, but also ensuring that women will have equal access to opportunities for skill development, leadership positions, and career progression. With a more diverse labor pool there is improved problem-solving and decision-making processes, driving innovation and economic productivity (Bénassy-Quéré et al., 2022).

Such is also noted by the OECD (2022), where gender diversity in leadership positions is seen to result in better organizational performance, with firms led by women reporting higher profitability and productivity. According to OECD data, companies with at least 30% women in leadership roles are witnessed to be 15% more likely to experience above-average profitability. Additionally, increasing gender diversity in management correlates with a 6% increase in net profit margins.

Furthermore, Ruppanner et al. (2021) show in their study on the long-term effects of gender inequality, that disparities in regard to labor market access and earnings contribute to an enduring gender wealth gap, which ultimately weakens a household's resilience during economic shocks. This is especially evident in the case of single mothers and women in low-income households,

who face compounded vulnerabilities both during and after economic downturns. They conclude that the persistence of gendered economic inequalities makes it more difficult for women to recover, which hinders the wider economy's ability to bounce back from recessions.

According to Borghans et al. (2023), the incorporation of gender equality efforts within the EU's recovery measures will in the long-term encourage women's participation in all sectors of the economy, especially in higher-value industries such as finance and STEM, which will potentially drive future growth and innovation. In their research, they authors state that as women are empowered to participate equally in the economy, countries will experience higher GDP growth rates, improved economic stability and increased resilience to future economic downturns. The Closing of the gender employment gap by 2025 could add up to €320 billion to the EU economy annually, which illustrates the immense potential of gender-inclusive policies in boosting economic resilience and social cohesion (EIGE, 2023).

Furthermore, according to Rubery (2023), a more equitable distribution of resources and wealth from gender-inclusive policies can have a cascading effect on economic stability since it strengthens the consumer base. Women tend to invest a significant portion of their income and wealth into the welfare of their families, which improves social stability and enhances the overall societal well-being. Additionally, gender inclusive policies evidently advocate for better social stability and cohesion, since societies will be better equipped to withstand economic shocks and reduce the risk of political and social unrest (Ferrant & Thim, 2023).

Additionally, the economic empowerment of women can lead to sustainable development outcomes, especially in regard to poverty reduction and climate resilience. Women are more likely to invest in sustainable and community-oriented activities. Therefore, by empowering women to participate in economic recovery efforts, especially in green and sustainable industries, countries have the potential to create a more resilient and forward-thinking economy that is better equipped at handling challenges such as climate change and future crises (UN Women, 2023)

EU policies that promote women's participation in high-growth sectors such as digital and green industries, do evidently help in building a more robust economy that is able to adapt to global economic shifts. For example, women that are empowered to lead in sectors like renewable energy and digital technology, help industries to not only experience faster growth but to also contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future (EBRD, 2023).

Conclusion

Key Literature Findings

To conclude on the literature findings for this study, the research highlights and shows initially how the economic downturns went on to disproportionately impact women more than men due to the pre-existing gendered inequalities in the labor market. The research gathered for this literature study points out that women within the EU tend to witness a disproportionate share of the job losses, wage cuts and reduced work hours during economic downturns, which is largely due to the structural segregation in the labor markets.

Evidently, through the research gathered, such segregation is referred to as both horizontal and vertical labor market segregation which often lead to the overrepresentation of women in vulnerable, low-paying sectors and roles, which are often the first to experience cuts during economic crises. Additionally, this segmentation goes on to limit career advancement for women, which exacerbates wage gaps and undermines their long-term economic stability.

Along-side such findings, the literature shows that the intersectionality of gender, race, and age goes on to compound these disparities, with minority women facing even harsher economic challenges in downturns. The literature also points out the undervaluation of unpaid labor for women, which significantly contributes to women's economic vulnerability.

Moreover, the "man-cession" effect in the witnessed previous recessions, such as the Great Recession, the Eurozone Crisis, and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, primarily impacted male-dominated sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and finance. In contrast, women's employment in public sectors was more stable initially, but these sectors later faced budget cuts due to austerity measures. Overall, historically, recessions show that the male-dominated industries recover more quickly due to better financial resources, whereas the female-dominated sectors, which often involve face-to-face interaction and part-time or lower-wage roles, face slower recoveries.

The literature findings also introduce the concept of feminization, which refers to women's increasing involvement in both paid (extra-household) and unpaid (intra-household) labor. Within this concept of feminization, the literature introduces intra-household feminization, which refers to the persisting burden of unpaid household labor that women continue to carry, even as they participate more in paid employment. This "dual burden" ends up compromising their career

prospects and their overall well-being. The literature also introduces extra-household feminization, which involves an increase in women's participation in the labor force of which, however, is then met with their concentration in lower-status, lower-wage sectors like healthcare, education, and social services, which goes on to hinder their economic mobility and contributes to gendered divisions in the labor market.

Moreover women remain underrepresented in high-paying roles and male-dominated fields and are more likely than men to end up in precarious, part-time employment. Along-side this, the organizational and societal biases continue to reinforce the idea that caregiving is a female responsibility, which negatively impacts women's professional growth.

Besides, the literature points out that this long-term feminisation trend was initiated due to the legal reforms and cultural shifts (aforementioned feminist movements) which helped increase women's participation in the labor market. However, what impacted these intra- and extra-household feminization trends is firstly, the fact that many women were seen to be directed into these lower-paying, service-sector jobs due to the structural shift from a manufacturing-based to a service-based economy that was witnessed in the EU.

Secondly, the research underscores the gender segregation in education which leads to the concentration of women in what is deemed as 'feminine' fields such as healthcare and education, while men concentrate more and dominate the STEM fields. This underrepresentation of women in STEM fields goes on to further perpetuate gender inequality in both education and eventually the labor market.

Finally, research points out that globalization plays its part in the amplification of gender inequalities since it led to shifts in production and the growth of the service sectors that disproportionately employ women in low-wage and precarious work. Therefore, structural labor market shifts, education segregation and globalization all collectively shape the long-term feminization trend in the labor market within the EU, which opens opportunities for women but on the other hand also reinforces gender inequality due to the undervaluation of these feminized sectors.

The Covid-19 pandemic triggered a 'she-cession' as it disproportionately impacted women in sectors such as healthcare, education, retail, and social care, since female employment is highly concentrated in these sectors, deeming them as female-dominated sectors. Ultimately, the

literature points out that the pandemic caused significant job losses and exceptional economic hardship for women due to its unique lockdown and social distancing measures, which mainly affected these female-dominated sectors.

The reason female-dominated sectors faced extensive job losses and expectational economic hardships is due to their reliance on face-to-face interaction and the prevalence of part-time and precarious work in their fields. The healthcare sector, even though it faced contrasting effects which included increase in demand, female workers still faced challenges through health risks and emotional strain, while roles in education, retail and tourism witnessed mass layoffs due to limited institutional and governmental support in the face of decreased demand, along-side austerity measures.

Lastly, the unprecedented lockdown measures that were implemented during the pandemic led to the closures of schools and childcare facilities, which ended up placing onto women the disproportionate burden of the increased caregiving responsibilities. Due to this, women found it challenging to balance their professional and household responsibilities which led to them decreasing their working hours or ultimately exiting the workforce completely.

The recovery for women in these aforementioned sectors was slower compared to male-dominated industries like manufacturing and finance, which recovered more quickly due to government support and the adaptability of remote work. Therefore, the pandemic highlighted the long-standing structural inequalities in terms of the insufficient social protections in the female-dominated sectors. Male-dominated sectors were able to benefit more from remote work and governmental recovery programs, while women in vulnerable roles faced prolonged financial security and job displacement.

Furthermore, research points out that the geographical impact of the she-cession was not unanimous, but that it varied across the EU, as it was influenced by each member state's economic structures, social policies, and cultural norms. The Northern European region which is characterized by countries with strong welfare systems, like Sweden and Denmark, was better equipped in their efforts to mitigate the pandemic's effects, while the Southern and Eastern European region, with countries such as Italy, Spain, Romania, and Poland witnessed severe economic consequences due to weaker social protection systems, and higher female labor market structural vulnerabilities. Thus, member states with robust family-friendly policies and progressive gender equality frameworks were proven to be more resilient in the face of the

pandemic, while others struggled due to limited childcare services and informal work arrangements for instance.

The covid-19 pandemic underscored and deepened the gendered inequalities in the EU labor market, which affects the long-term trends in the labor market feminization. Since women bore the major brunt of job losses and unpaid caregiving responsibilities, the pandemic therefore magnified the structural vulnerabilities and ultimately reinforced traditional roles. Through these impacts however, the pandemic also heightened the awareness and attention of the challenges that women historically faced in the labor market, especially in the case of work-life balance and the structural persistence in precarious and insecure roles.

Looking ahead, the pandemic can actually act as a catalyst for better progressive shifts in societal expectations surrounding gender roles and potentially lead to a more balanced distribution of unpaid labor and a greater participation of women in the labor market. Ultimately then, this ‘shecession’ serves as its own critical juncture, which demands robust and holistic policy frameworks in order to ensure that gender parity becomes a central pillar of the EU labor market recovery and resilience efforts.

Assessing the role of EU policy measures during the pandemic’s recovery phase provides insight on the effectiveness of the EU in addressing gender inequalities that were exacerbated by the pandemic. Due to time and data access limitations, the assessment draws on secondary sources. Key policies such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), and the Work-life Balance Directive are achieving moderate but essential strides in supporting female-dominated sectors and improving women's economic stability. However, challenges are seen to persist and further targeted measures are necessary to address the root causes of gender inequality, such as low wages, limited full-time positions, and constrained career opportunities.

Additionally, through secondary sources, this chapter highlights the importance of gender equality in fostering resilient and sustainable economic recovery in the face of future downturns. Gender-inclusive policies can enhance economic resilience, especially in female-dominated sectors, which were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Moreover, addressing gender disparities can boost productivity and growth, improve organizational performance through female leadership, and support economic recovery by

promoting women's participation in high-growth sectors like STEM and green industries. Ultimately, empowering women does not only help in fully utilizing the workforce's capabilities and contributing to greater economic resilience and growth, but also in achieving better social cohesion.

While the short-term benefits of gender inclusive and equal policies in post-pandemic recovery is evident, further future research is still required to cover and assess the long-term economic impacts and potential for these policies within the EU. Evidently, recent research supports that gender-inclusive policies promote resilience and growth, but longitudinal data on sustained effects over multiple economic cycles is still limited. Studies that span into post-pandemic developments over a longer timeline can better capture trends in productivity and labor diversification.

Furthermore, since gender inclusivity efforts eventually unfold at the organizational level, future research that can explore the role of the partnerships between private sector initiatives and public-private in promoting gender equality is required. Therefore, by analyzing how companies and industries align with EU recovery strategies, research can reveal the effective approaches for encouraging private-sector commitment to gender equity.

Lastly, comparative studies across the EU member states can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of different policy approaches for achieving gender equality in the recovery process. Comparative analyses of EU member states are seen to be still ongoing, but the variability in economic structures, policy designs, and social dynamics means that assessing the barriers to their effective application is required. Therefore, this assessment in future research can help refine the EU strategies to better foster gender equality in the labor market and ensure that recovery efforts are equitable among all demographics and all member states.

REFERENCES

1. Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441-464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206286970>
2. Adams-Prassl, A., Boneva, T., Golin, M., & Rauh, C. (2020). Inequality in the impact of the coronavirus shock: Evidence from real-time surveys. *Journal of Public Economics*, 189, 104245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104245>
3. Adăscăliței, D., & Guga, Ș. (2021). Labour market inequalities in post-communist Europe: The gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis. *European Societies*, 23(1), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1828060>
4. Albelda, R. (2009). Gender impacts of the 'Great Recession' in the United States. *Feminist Economics*, 15(3), 19-39. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700903004530>
5. Albelda, R. (2009). Unemployment and underemployment: The impact of the Great Recession on women. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org>
6. Alon, T. M., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. NBER Working Paper, No. 26947. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947>
7. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2010). The impact of the Great Recession on family structure (NBER Working Paper No. 20753). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w20753>
8. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). This time it's different: The role of women's employment in a pandemic recession (NBER Working Paper No. 27660). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w27660>
9. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality (NBER Working Paper No. 26947). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947>
10. Alon, T., Doepke, M., Olmstead-Rumsey, J., & Tertilt, M. (2020). The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality. *NBER Working Paper* No. 26947. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26947>
11. Anderson, B. (2022). *Migration, Domestic Work and Affective Labor: A Transnational Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
12. Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Costa Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., Phimister, A., & Sevilla, A. (2021). The gendered division of paid and domestic work

- under lockdown. *IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper No. 13851*.
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3849999>
13. Beasley, M. A., & Fischer, M. J. (2012). Why they leave: The impact of stereotype threat on the attrition of women and minorities from STEM fields. *Social Psychology of Education, 15*(4), 427-448. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-012-9185-3>
 14. Bell, D. N., & Blanchflower, D. G. (2011). Young people and the Great Recession. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 27*(2), 241-267. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/grr011>
 15. Bettio, F., Verashchagina, A., & European Commission. (2009). Gender segregation in the labour market: Root causes, implications and policy responses in the EU. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/gender-segregation-labour-market-root-causes-implications-and-policy-responses-eu_en
 16. Bianchi, S. M., Sayer, L. C., Milkie, M. A., & Robinson, J. P. (2022). Housework: Who does the most? *Annual Review of Sociology, 48*, 85-104. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-110620-123215>
 17. Bianchi, S. M., Sayer, L. C., Milkie, M. A., & Robinson, J. P. (2022). Housework, paid work, and care: Gender inequality and time use reconsidered. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 84*(2), 565-584. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12771>
 18. Bivens, J., & Shierholz, H. (2018). Understanding the historical role of wage growth in the labor market. Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org>
 19. Bivens, J., & Shierholz, H. (2018). What labor market changes have generated inequality and wage suppression? *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org>
 20. Blair-Loy, M. (2023). The "second shift" and its impact on working women. In *The Handbook of Work and Family* (pp. 223-242). Routledge. Retrieved from: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Handbook-of-Work-and-Family/Blair-Loy/p/book/9780367335740>
 21. Blanchard, O., & Salem, J. A. (2013). The Great Recession and the labour market: Evidence from Europe. In A. B. Atkinson & F. Bourguignon (Eds.), *Handbook of income distribution* (Vol. 2, pp. 1533-1605). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-59428-0.00034-9>
 22. Blanchard, O., & Summers, L. H. (1986). Hysteresis and the European unemployment problem (NBER Working Paper No. 1960). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w1960>

23. Blaskó, Z., Papadimitriou, E., & Manca, A. R. (2022). Gender equality and the COVID-19 pandemic: Labour market impacts in the EU. *Publications Office of the European Union*. <https://doi.org/10.2760/265944>
24. Blaskó, Z., Papadimitriou, E., & Manca, A. R. (2022). The gendered impact of COVID-19: Assessing the EU labor market consequences. *JRC Science for Policy Report*. European Commission. <https://doi.org/10.2760/402600>
25. Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2017). The gender wage gap: A review (IZA Discussion Paper No. 10417). Institute of Labor Economics. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2976192>
26. Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2020). The gender wage gap: Extent, trends, and explanations. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 55(3), 789-865. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jel.20191314>
27. Blau, F. D., & Kahn, L. M. (2023). The gender pay gap: Understanding the persistence and implications. *Annual Review of Economics*, 15, 467-493. Retrieved from: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-economics-061821-110513>
28. Bloksgaard, L., & Rostgaard, T. (2021). Work-life balance and gender equality in Denmark: The impact of the Work-Life Balance Directive. *Nordic Journal of Social Research*, 12(1), 24-42. <https://doi.org/10.7577/njsr.3973>
29. Blundell, R., Costa Dias, M., Joyce, R., & Xu, X. (2021). COVID-19 and inequalities. *Fiscal Studies*, 41(2), 291-319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5890.12232>
30. Boniol, M., McIsaac, M., Xu, L., Wuliji, T., Diallo, K., & Campbell, J. (2019). Gender equity in the health workforce: Analysis of 104 countries. World Health Organization. Retrieved from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/311314>
31. Bottazzi, L., & Da Rin, M. (2002). Venture capital in Europe and the financing of innovative firms. *Economic Policy*, 17(34), 229-269. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0327.00085>
32. Bridenthal, R., & Koonz, C. (1987). *Becoming visible: Women in European history*. Retrieved from <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520070573/becoming-visible>
33. Budig, M. J., & England, P. (2024). The wage penalty for motherhood: Evidence from longitudinal data. *American Sociological Review*, 89(1), 55-78. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00031224221091103>
34. Budig, M. J., & Misra, J. (2010). How care-work employment shapes earnings in the United States. *Community, Work & Family*, 13(2), 189-206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800902922373>

35. Buechler, S., Smith, D., & Martin, A. (2021). Pandemic disruptions and gender inequalities in labor markets: A focus on healthcare, education, and hospitality. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 39(2), 467–493. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712497>
36. Charles, M. (2020). Understanding the feminization of labor: Comparative perspectives and future directions. *Sociology Compass*, 14(4), e12777. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12777>
37. Charles, M., & Bradley, K. (2009). Indulging our gendered selves? Sex segregation by field of study in 44 countries. *American Journal of Sociology*, 114(4), 924–976. <https://doi.org/10.1086/595942>
38. Charles, M., & Grusky, D. B. (2004). *Occupational ghettos: The worldwide segregation of women and men*. Stanford University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=7876>
39. Charles, M., & Grusky, D. B. (2004). *Occupational ghettos: The worldwide segregation of women and men*. Stanford University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=2193>
40. Cheryan, S., Ziegler, S. A., Montoya, A. K., & Jiang, L. (2017). Why are some STEM fields more gender balanced than others? *Psychological Bulletin*, 143(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000052>
41. Chodorow, N. J. (2020). Revisiting gender inequality in economic policy responses to recessions. *Economics and Sociology*, 13(2), 112–125. <https://doi.org/10.14254/2071-789X.2020/13-2/8>
42. Chung, H., & van der Horst, M. (2018). Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking. *Human Relations*, 71(1), 47–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717713828>
43. Chung, H., Birkett, H., Forbes, S., & Seo, H. (2021). Covid-19, flexible working, and implications for gender equality in the United Kingdom. *Gender & Society*, 35(2), 218–232. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211001395>
44. Clarke, L., & Grimshaw, D. (2019). Economic recession and gendered labor market outcomes: A comparative study. *International Labour Review*, 158(2), 223–247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12188>

45. Collins, C., & Mayer, R. (2017). Gender and the economic consequences of the Great Recession. *Social Science Research*, 63, 112-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.09.006>
46. Collins, C., & Mayer, R. (2017). Gender differences in the impact of economic recessions on family income and employment. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 35-58. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.35>
47. Collins, C., Landivar, L. C., Ruppanner, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(S1), 101-112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12506>
48. Collins, C., Landivar, L. C., Ruppanner, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Genders, Work and Organization*, 28(1), 67-83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12519>
49. Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1297-1339. <https://doi.org/10.1086/511799>
50. Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., & Vanneman, R. (2021). The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces*, 80(2), 655-681. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/80.2.655>
51. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167. Retrieved from: <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>
52. Cukrowska-Torzewska, E., & Matysiak, A. (2020). Gender equality and economic growth in the European Union: How close is the link? *European Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(2), 243-262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506819872101>
53. Daly, M. (2021). Gender equality and the COVID-19 crisis: Evidence and policy responses. *Social Policy and Administration*, 55(3), 401-412. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12628>
54. Damaske, S., & Frech, A. (2022). The intersection of work and family: A framework for understanding inequalities in work-family integration. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(2), 451-469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12777>
55. D'Cruz, P., & Noronha, E. (2018). Precarious work in the EU: A comparative analysis of gender and sectoral differences. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 24(4), 383-399. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680118794961>

56. Del Boca, D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, M. (2020). Women's work, housework, and childcare, before and during COVID-19. IZA Discussion Paper, No. 13409. Retrieved from: <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13409/womens-work-housework-and-childcare-before-and-during-covid-19>
57. Eccles, J. S. (2007). Gendered educational and occupational choices: The role of beliefs, values, and social influences. In E. M. Anderman & L. H. Anderman (Eds.), *Psychology of classroom learning: An encyclopedia* (pp. 478-481). Macmillan.
58. Eccles, J. S. (2014). Gendered social influences on STEM motivation and achievement. In I. Schoon & J. S. Eccles (Eds.).
59. ECD. (2003). *ICT and economic growth: Evidence from OECD countries, industries, and firms*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org>
60. Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. R. (2002). *Global women: Nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*. Metropolitan Books.
61. EIGE. (2020). Gender equality in the European Union: The role of the EU budget. *European Institute for Gender Equality*. Retrieved from: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-european-union-role-eu-budget>
62. England, P. (2010). The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. *Gender & Society*, 24(2), 149-166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210368398>
63. Esping-Andersen, G. (2009). *The incomplete revolution: Adapting welfare states to women's new roles*. Polity. Retrieved from <https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9780745640588>
64. Eurofound. (2015). *Recent developments in temporary employment: Employment growth, wages, and transitions*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Retrieved from <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu>
65. Eurofound. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on the gender pay gap. *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-gender-pay-gap>
66. European Commission. (2019). Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers. *Official Journal of the European Union*. Retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158>

67. European Commission. (2023). Directive on pay transparency (2023/2517). European Commission. Retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32023L2517>
68. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2020). Gender equality and economic downturns: Evidence and insights from the EU. *EIGE*. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu>
69. Eurostat. (2023). Gender pay gap statistics. *European Commission*. Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>
70. Eurostat. (2023). Labour force participation rates by sex, age, and educational attainment level. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Labour_market_statistics_at_a_glance
71. Evans, R. J. (1997). *The feminists: Women's emancipation movements in Europe, America, and Australasia, 1840-1920*. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/Feminists-Emancipation-Movements-America-Australasia/dp/0312216899>
72. Evertsson, M., & Nermo, M. (2022). Work-life policies and gender equality: A comparative analysis. *Social Politics*, 29(1), 35-60. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/sp/article/29/1/35/6119152>
73. Fagnani, J., & Letablier, M. T. (2020). Work-life balance policies in France: The impact of the Work-Life Balance Directive. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 30(4), 377-392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928720937014>
74. Folbre, N. (2006). Measuring care: Gender, empowerment, and the care economy. *Journal of Human Development*, 7(2), 183-199. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880600720309>
75. Folbre, N. (2012). *For love and money: Care provision in the United States*. Russell Sage Foundation. Retrieved from: <https://www.russellsage.org/publications/love-and-money>
76. Fuchs-Schündeln, N., Krueger, D., Ludwig, A., & Popova, I. (2021). The long-term distributional and welfare effects of COVID-19 school closures. *Economic Policy*, 36(108), 681-737. <https://doi.org/10.1093/epolic/eiab010>
77. Gough, I., & Wood, G. (2016). Budget cuts and gender inequalities during the Global Financial Crisis. *Social Policy Review*, 28(1), 23-44. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674316X14746318690151>
78. Greve, B. (2020). The pandemic and gender equality: The case of the EU. *European Journal of Social Security*, 22(2), 143-161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1388262720939193>

- 79.Grimshaw, D., & Rubery, J. (2011). Gender inequality and the future of work: Where next after the economic crisis? *European Work and Employment Research Centre*. Retrieved from <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sociology/>.
- 80.Grimshaw, D., & Rubery, J. (2015). The motherhood pay gap: A review of the issues, theory, and international evidence. *International Labour Review*, *154*(2), 155-181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12085>
- 81.Grimshaw, D., & Rubery, J. (2022). Strategies for promoting gender equality in the labor market: The role of policy and practice. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, *64*(2), 175-196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221856211021225>
- 82.Hegewisch, A., & Gornick, J. C. (2011). Statutory portraits of gender and labor market outcomes in the European Union: Gender pay gap and economic downturns. *Feminist Economics*, *17*(4), 1-31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2011.610743>
- 83.Hegewisch, A., & Gornick, J. C. (2011). Work-life balance policies in the United States and the European Union. In P. C. Smith (Ed.), *Work and family: Research and policy perspectives*. Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/work-and-family/worklife-balance-policies-in-the-united-states-and-the-european-union/6E68A1F005E61A38E9E0C5A5D8130A4C>
- 84.Heinen, J., & Wóycicka, I. (2023). The impact of the European Social Fund on women's employment in Poland: A focus on training programs and job placement. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *30*(1), 73-88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12945>
- 85.Hersch, J. (2023). The impact of domestic labor on career progression: A review of recent evidence. *Journal of Labor Economics*, *41*(2), 345-368. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/718076>
- 86.Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2012). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Penguin Books. Retrieved from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/300476/the-second-shift-by-arlie-russell-hochschild-and-anne-machung/>
- 87.Holland, P. (2011). The “she-cession” and its impact on female employment. *Gender and Society*, *25*(4), 471-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211411441>
- 88.Hook, J. L., & Wolfe, C. (2024). Gender and household labor: A study of recent trends. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *86*(2), 456-473. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jomf.13006>

89. Hook, J. L., & Wolfe, C. M. (2024). Gendered expectations and the division of labor in dual-earner households. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 86(2), 390-407. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12822>
90. Hoynes, H., Miller, D. L., & Schaller, J. (2012). Who suffers during recessions? *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26(3), 27-48. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.26.3.27>
91. Hoynes, H., Miller, D. L., & Schaller, J. (2012). Who suffers during recessions? The impact of local labor market conditions on family outcomes. *American Economic Review*, 102(3), 167-172. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.102.3.167>
92. International Labour Organization. (2023). *Gender equality and the future of work: Policy recommendations*. ILO. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_843194/lang--en/index.htm
93. Kabeer, N. (2004). Globalization, labor standards, and women's rights: Dilemmas of collective (in)action in an interdependent world. *Feminist Economics*, 10(1), 3-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570042000191011>
94. Kabeer, N. (2012). *Gender and social protection strategies in the informal economy*. Routledge. Retrieved from <https://www.routledge.com/Gender-and-Social-Protection-Strategies-in-the-Informal-Economy/Kabeer/p/book/9781138053385>
95. Kabeer, N. (2012). *The power to choose: Bangladeshi women and labour market decisions*. Verso Books.
96. Kalenkoski, C. M., & Pabilonia, S. W. (2020). Initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment and hours of self-employed women in the United States. *Feminist Economics*, 26(4), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2020.1821430>
97. Kalleberg, A. L., & Vallas, S. P. (2023). Precarious work and the changing nature of labor market inequality. In *The Oxford Handbook of Employment Relations* (pp. 95-114). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190051184.013.9>
98. Kalman, J. (2020). Gender inequalities in the labor market: The case of female electronics workers in Hungary. *Labor and Society*, 23(2), 45-63. [Link not available]
99. Kaplan, G. (1992). *Contemporary Western European feminism*. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/Contemporary-Western-European-Feminism-Science/dp/0312068768>
100. Karamessini, M. (2014). Structural crisis and adjustment in Greece: Social regression and the challenge to gender equality. In M. Karamessini & J. Rubery (Eds.), *Women and*

- austerity: The economic crisis and the future for gender equality* (pp. 165-186). Routledge.
101. Karamessini, M., & Rubery, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Women and austerity: The economic crisis and the future for gender equality*. Routledge.
 102. Killewald, A., & Zhuo, X. (2019). U.S. mothers' long-term employment patterns. *Demography*, 56(1), 285-320. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-018-0735-5>
 103. Klasen, S. (2019). What explains uneven female labor force participation levels and trends in developing countries? *World Bank Economic Review*, 33(1), 159-190. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhy018>
 104. Kleven, H., Landais, C., & Søgaaard, J. E. (2019). Children and gender inequality: Evidence from Denmark. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 11(4), 181-209. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20180010>
 105. Kochhar, R. (2020). Unemployment rate is higher than officially recorded, more so for women and certain other groups. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org>
 106. Kochhar, R. (2020). Unemployment rose higher in three months of COVID-19 than it did in two years of the Great Recession. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org>
 107. Koslowski, A., Blum, S., Dobrotić, I., Kaufman, G., & Moss, P. (Eds.). (2021). *16th International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1787/453d1b33-en>
 108. Krichewsky, C., & Schaefer, S. (2022). Pay transparency and gender wage disparities: Effects and limitations. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28(3), 303-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09596801221103755>
 109. Kuhlmann, E., & Annink, A. (2023). Gender-sensitive strategies in Germany's COVID-19 recovery plan: Enhancing women's participation in STEM fields. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 38(2), 258-273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-09-2022-0283>
 110. Leaper, C., Farkas, T., & Brown, C. S. (2012). Adolescent girls' experiences and gender-related beliefs in relation to their motivation in math/science and English. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 41(3), 268-282. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-011-9693-z>

111. Magnusson, C., & Nordenmark, M. (2023). The impact of COVID-19 on the gender wage gap in Sweden: Policy responses and labor market outcomes. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 13(1), 75-93. <https://doi.org/10.18291/njwls.138396>
112. Mandel, H., & Shalev, M. (2020). Gender, class, and the welfare state: The feminization of inequality and the devaluation of work. *Social Forces*, 99(1), 152-182. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soz092>
113. Mariscal, I. (2023). Impact of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in Spain: A focus on women's employment in health and social care. *Journal of Social Policy*, 52(2), 234-250. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727942200064X>
114. Mattingly, M. J., & Smith, K. E. (2022). Gender differences in time use: Changes over time and implications for family dynamics. *Gender and Society*, 36(1), 80-103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432211003729>
115. Matuszewska, A., & Kaczmarek, J. (2023). Gender disparities in the labor market during COVID-19: Evidence from European countries. *Labour*, 37(2), 245-263. <https://doi.org/10.1111/labr.12331>
116. McBride, D., & Mazur, A. G. (2012). *The Politics of State Feminism: Innovation in Comparative Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9780745640281>
117. Mezzadri, A. (2016). *The Sweatshop Regime: Laboring Bodies, Exploitation, and Garments Made in India*. Cambridge University Press.
118. Möhring, K., Naumann, E., Reifenscheid, M., Wenz, A., Rettig, T., Lehrer, R., Weiland, A., & Blom, A. G. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and gender inequality in the labor market: The case of Germany. *European Societies*, 23(S1), S228-S245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1823010>
119. Naldini, M., & Pavolini, E. (2021). Social policy responses to COVID-19 in Southern Europe: Care work and its relation to gender inequalities. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31(4), 356-370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928721991693>
120. Naldini, M., & Pavolini, E. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and Southern European families: Gender inequality in work-care patterns and policy responses. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 31(5), 540-554. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211015596>
121. OECD. (2020). Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis. *OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Retrieved from:

- <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/women-at-the-core-of-the-fight-against-covid-19-crisis-553a8269/>
- 122.OECD. (2021). *Employment Outlook 2021: Navigating the COVID-19 crisis and recovery*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5a700c4b-en>
 - 123.OECD. (2021). *OECD employment outlook 2021: Navigating the COVID-19 crisis and recovery*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5a700c4b-en>
 - 124.O'Reilly, J., Smith, M., Deakin, S., & Burchell, B. (2020). Women, work, and welfare in Europe: The impact of the Great Recession. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(1), 234-250. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12365>
 - 125.Parker, R. (2002). The impact of the dot-com crash on the IT and telecoms sector. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 23(4), 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02756660210435303>
 - 126.Parreñas, R. S. (2015). *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford University Press.
 - 127.Percheski, C., & Nelson, T. (2023). Career implications of domestic labor: Gender differences and consequences. *Gender & Society*, 37(1), 25-43. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08912432221095896>
 - 128.Piasna, A., & Plagnol, A. C. (2020). Women in the gig economy: Paid work, care, and time use. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 27(3), 347-357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12434>
 - 129.Pillinger, J. (2020). Work-life balance and gender equality in the European Union. *European Journal of Employment Relations*, 41(2), 110-125. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680119893923>
 - 130.Reilly, D., Neumann, D. L., & Andrews, G. (2019). Gender differences in self-efficacy and academic performance in science: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 31(2), 307-337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-018-9452-z>
 - 131.Ribar, D. C. (2022). Dual-earner families and gender inequality in the household. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 20(1), 125-145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-021-09688-0>
 - 132.Rubery, J. (2020). Gender and the economy during the COVID-19 crisis: The implications of the pandemic for the future of work. *Economy and Society*, 49(4), 653-670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2020.1800982>

133. Rubery, J., & Fagan, C. (1995). Gender segregation in societal context: A framework for analysis. *Work, Employment & Society*, 9(2), 213-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095001709592004>
134. Rubery, J., & Figueiredo, H. (2022). Gender mainstreaming in the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility: A critical assessment. *Social Policy and Society*, 21(3), 440-456. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746421000724>
135. Rubery, J., & Grimshaw, D. (2013). The 2008 financial crisis and gender inequalities in the labor market. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 37(2), 297-317. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bet041>
136. Rubery, J., & Grimshaw, D. (2015). The effects of austerity on gender inequality in the labour market. *Work, Employment & Society*, 29(3), 545-558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017014558934>
137. Rubery, J., & Johnson, M. (2019). Closing the gender pay gap: What role for trade unions? *International Labour Review*, 158(2), 279-307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12152>
138. Rubery, J., & Johnson, M. (2022). COVID-19 and gender inequality in European labour markets: Impact and recovery prospects. *European Societies*, 23(S1), S255-S271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2021.1881394>
139. Rubery, J., & Johnson, M. (2022). Gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic: A global analysis. *Global Social Policy*, 22(1), 36-55. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680181211021615>
140. Rubery, J., & Johnson, M. (2022). Rebuilding after COVID-19: A gender-inclusive recovery framework for Europe. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 28(2), 129-146. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09596801211054283>
141. Rubery, J., & Koukiadaki, A. (2019). Closing the gender pay gap: A review of UK policy initiatives. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 43(6), 1435-1452. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cje/bez012>
142. Rubery, J., & Rafferty, A. (2013). Gender, recession, and austerity in the UK. *Labor History*, 54(1), 131-149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2013.767727>
143. Rubery, J., & Rafferty, A. (2013). Women and austerity: The economic crisis and the future for gender equality. *Routledge*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203129409>

144. Rubery, J., & Tavora, I. (2021). The COVID-19 crisis and gender equality: Risks and opportunities. *Social Policy & Society*, 20(4), 559-570. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746421000152>
145. Schierholz, H., & Bivens, J. (2018). Precarious work and its impact on workers' rights. *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from <https://www.epi.org>
146. Schmuck, P., & Schmuck, R. A. (2017). Gendered stereotypes in STEM: Historical and contemporary perspectives. *Gender and Education*, 29(3), 362-377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1207664>
147. Schor, J. B., & Kluegel, J. R. (2024). The impact of unpaid domestic work on women's labor market outcomes. *Social Problems*, 71(2), 189-208. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spz017>
148. Sparreboom, T., & Blankenburg, A. (2020). The COVID-19 crisis: A catalyst for faster advances towards decent work for women in tourism? *ILO Working Paper*. <https://doi.org/10.21201/2020.6350>
149. Sparreboom, T., & Blankenburg, F. (2020). Revisiting the impact of the 2008 financial crisis on men and women in European Union countries. *International Labour Review*, 159(3), 371-398. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ilr.12172>
150. Tilly, C., & Cohen, M. (2024). Economic insecurity and gender: The effects of unpaid work on women's financial stability. *Gender & Society*, 38(2), 98-115. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/08912432221133251>
151. Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2021). *Relational inequalities: An organizational approach*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/relational-inequalities-9780190071581>
152. Tzannatos, Z., & Sinha, N. (2020). Beyond the pay gap: Structural barriers to women's economic empowerment. *World Development*, 128, 104804. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.104804>
153. Vanderhoven, D., Milward, H., & Gilligan, C. (2022). Evaluating the gendered impacts of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. *Social Indicators Research*, 160(1), 243-262. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-02818-1>
154. Vlad, L., & Popescu, L. (2019). Labor market inequalities in the Romanian garment industry: The role of gender and outsourcing. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 21(3), 345-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2019.1621605>

155. Wagman, A., & Bendre, N. (2002). Gender differences in the aftermath of the dot-com bubble. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 9(5), 567-584. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00172>
156. Walby, S. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the challenge of gender inequality. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 40(9-10), 915-930. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-05-2020-0225>
157. Williams, J. C., & Muller, C. (2021). The gendered workplace: The persistence of inequality in the modern labor market. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 47, 373-394. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121920-112759>
158. Yeates, N. (2012). Global care chains: A critical introduction. *Global Migration Perspectives*, 44(2), 39-59.