

BALTIC JOURNAL OF LAW & POLITICS

A Journal of Vytautas Magnus University
VOLUME 16, NUMBER 2 (2023)
ISSN 2029-0454



Cit.: *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics* 16:2 (2023): 110–130
[https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/bjlp/
bjlp-overview.xml](https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/bjlp/bjlp-overview.xml)
DOI: 10.2478/bjlp-2023-0016

GENDER PAY GAP IN ESTONIA

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Received: February 6, 2023; reviews: 2; accepted: November 27, 2023.

ABSTRACT

The gender pay gap continues to exist in Estonia, irrespective of its economic and social development, since the country's inception. Addressing the prevalence of the gender pay gap is significant in the social and economic development of Estonia, as it reflects equal opportunities and social justice in a given society. Reducing the gender pay gap helps ensure that individuals, irrespective of their gender differences, receive equitable pay for their contributions, which can result in increasing their financial security and quality of life while developing an inclusive society. This study examines the gender wage gap and sexism in Estonia and compares sexism in Estonia with Sweden, in order to understand its antecedents. The findings indicate that Estonia has the highest gender wage gap in the European Union. The findings also highlight a significant level of sexism based on societal beliefs associating women's higher earnings with marital issues and the inability to care for their children. The study further identifies education and income and significant factors influencing the prevalence of sexism in Estonia and Sweden, providing implications for increasing education and employment opportunities for women, implementing fair pay practices, and promoting workplace equality to ensure an inclusive and empowered society in Estonia.

KEYWORDS

Gender Wage Gap, Sexism, Estonia.

INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity continues to prevail as a significant social concern, impeding the prevalence of equality and social development.¹ Although women are provided with employment opportunities, they continue to face pay disparity, which inhibits their career prospects while increasing their risk of poverty and social exclusion.² Despite a variety of research in this context, interpersonal uncertainty exists in shaping individual decisions regarding employment prospects. Policymakers must address the prevalence of wage parity; however, adequate policy development aiming to address the wage gap depends on the understanding of the antecedents that lead to wage disparities.³ In this instance, investigating worker and employment characteristics helps to understand the conscious and unconscious bias that leads to compensation policies, causing a nationwide wage disparity.

Estonia, a country known for its adaptability, economic growth, and innovation, has undergone significant transformations since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.⁴ Estonia has emerged as a dynamic nation due to its progressive policies and vision toward technological advancement and sustainability. However, Estonia continues to face gender wage disparities that are rooted deep in its industrial and commercial sectors, affecting employment rate, political representation, social representation, and academic prospects among women.⁵ According to Eurostat, Estonia, which has the largest gender wage discrepancy in Europe, lacks social stability irrespective of its significant economic growth, while it is estimated that women's average earnings account for only 73% compared to men's earnings from the same jobs.

The prevalence of pay disparity in Europe is determined by using the EU Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) study, which is conducted every four years in accordance with the Council Legislation and Commission Regulation, and the data comprises gross and hourly wages, compensated vacations, and paid leave⁶. However, the findings suggest the gender pay gap remains unexplainable on account of its prevalence and antecedents. Therefore, this study aims to expose the prevalence of the gender wage gap in Estonia and explain the prevalence of this phenomenon based on sexism in the demographic constructs. Sweden has the lowest gender wage gap in Europe, making it a viable option for comparison with regard to the gender wage gap in Estonia.

The purpose of this study is to understand the extent to which the gender wage gap exists in Estonia in different occupations while identifying the prevalence of sexism by determining how Estonian society perceives women's employment as a factor of social development. This study has the potential to understand the prevalence of the gender wage gap through the lens of social development during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to developing implications for policymakers to address the deep-rooted prevalence of discrimination in wages based on gender. It can eventually lead to enhancing career

¹ J. M. Landmesser, A. J. Orłowski and M. A. Rusek, "Gender Pay Gap Across the Income Distribution: Analysis for the EU," *Acta Physica Polonica A* 138, No. 1 (2020).

² C. Boll and A. Lagemann, "The gender pay gap in EU countries—new evidence based on EU-SES 2014 data," *Intereconomics* 54 (2019): 101–105.

³ R. Rosa, E. Drew and S. Canavan, "An overview of gender inequality in EU universities," *The Gender-Sensitive University* (2020): 1–15.

⁴ B. Boman, "What makes Estonia and Singapore so good?" *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 18(2) (2020): 181–193.

⁵ J. Masso, J. Meriküll and P. Vahter, "The role of firms in the gender wage gap," *Journal of Comparative Economics* 50(2) (2022): 454–473.

⁶ *Structure of Earnings Survey – Access to microdata – Eurostat* [WWW Document], n. d. (in English) // <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/structure-of-earnings-survey> (accessed 1.27.21).

prospects for women, as pay equity is a motivating factor for women to pursue employment, which eventually contributes to the country's social and economic development.

Literature Review

The Beijing Declaration for the Progress of Women Across the World was approved by the UN in 1995, and 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of that event. It was UN Women's 10th anniversary, which is the organization specific to gender equality and women's empowerment. The prevalence of women's empowerment is emphasized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have been in place for five years.⁷ The Beijing Declaration went into effect in September 1995 on the occasion of the 4th Women's World Conference and the 50th-anniversary founding of the United States, with the following fundamental principles: they made the decision to support the objectives of freedom, advancement, and peace for women around the globe while acknowledging their opinions, differences, positions, and situations, also while valuing them who took initiatives and inspired the world. They accepted that during the past ten years, women's status had significantly improved in a number of important areas. They noted, however, that there have been significant deterrents still in place, discrepancies between men and women have persisted, and this has had an unfavorable impact on everyone's wellbeing. It was also accepted that this condition is made worse by the expanding poverty that, globally, affects the lives of most people, particularly women and children. In addition, it will lessen the rising burden of rural poverty by increasing women's economic independence, including employment. The Committee made a firm commitment to remove these restrictions and barriers in order to further the advancement and equality of women globally, recognizing that this calls for proactive action taken with commitment, hope, collaboration, and togetherness both now and in the next century. An overview of the General Declaration of Human Rights upholds equality in protecting the fundamental human integrity of men and women. As a basic, imperative, and unshakable component of human rights, the assurance of the rigorous implementation of rights for women and children is also incorporated. The Right to Development was also put into effect. In this instance, women need the same legal, theological, and intellectual protections as men, and this includes the free expression of themselves in all areas of life, whether alone or as part of a community, in order to live up to their full potential. With the aim of attaining communication, development, and peace, the following events were held: the Nairobi Summit on Women in 1985, the New York Summit on Children in 1990, the 1993 Vienna Summit on Human Rights, the Summit on Population and Development in 1994 held in Cairo, and the summit on social development in Copenhagen in 1995. Before the end of the century, one of the goals was to completely and effectively implement the Nairobi Advanced Policies for the Development of Women. They were also convinced by the arguments detailed in the parts that followed, such as the need for women to be fully and equally included in society, including incorporating judgment and acquiring authority while preserving equality, prosperity, and peace. The independence of women is recognized as a civic right. Consists of fair treatment, equal opportunity, and equal resource allocation, including men and women sharing equally in the care of their children because a peaceful

⁷ *Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes* | News | European Parliament [WWW Document] (2020) (in English) (accessed 01.21.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-and-causes>.

coexistence between the sexes is crucial to the health of individuals, communities, and democracies. The abolition of poverty promoted economic and social advancement while preserving the environment and promoting social justice, which calls for women's involvement in economic and social modernization. equitable treatment and involvement in the sustainable development of men and women. Likewise, there needs to be a reassessment of all women's rights to control their fertility as well as other areas of their health. Through empowering women as a crucial entity in leadership and conflict resolution, long-term national, international, and global stability may be achieved. They lay a lot of focus on gender-sensitive topics that need to be created with women's input in order to advance equality. The Platform for Action cannot be implemented successfully without the cooperation and commitment of all players in a respectful society, especially women's groups and organizations, community-based organizations, and other non-governmental institutions with regard to autonomy. Politicians and the community on a global scale understand the need to prioritize steps to encourage and develop women at the national and international levels, including those made at conferences, while also pushing males to actively cooperate in all equality activities. There must be encouragement for the organization of required instruction and education, lifelong learning, and, of course, primary healthcare for women and children in order to promote human-centered economic development, including sustainable financial growth. The Beijing Declaration's most essential pledge was to address human rights and empowerment for women and children facing challenges, inequality, and social development owing to race, age, language, nationality, history, religion, physical or mental handicap, or indigenous status⁸.

Keeping in mind the fact that women not only earn less per hour than their male counterparts, but they also perform more unpaid work as well as fewer paid hours and are more likely to be unemployed than men, all these factors collectively result in the overall differences in earnings of men and women in different European countries. In order to narrow down the existing pay gap between men and women, the representatives of the European Parliament and European countries agreed that in order to make the process of comparing the salaries of all the employees, the EU companies must disclose relevant information. They also agreed that EU countries will impose penalties on the employers who commit violations of rules in this regard⁹.

The proposal suggesting new rules follows the Parliament's resolution regarding the EU strategy for Gender Equality, in which it was stressed that the Commission should develop a gender pay gap action plan with the view to reducing the gender pay gap in European countries over the next five years. The new rules approved by the MEPs in November 2022 focused on the introduction of comparatively more transparent recruitment procedures so that at least 40% of non-executive director posts, or 33% of all director posts, are occupied by women by the next five years¹⁰.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a proposal on pay transparency was developed by the European Commission with a view to ensure that both men and women get equal pay for the equal quantity of work they do. The proposal focused on

⁸ *Beijing Declaration* [WWW Document], n. d. (in English) (accessed 01.26.21) // <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>.

⁹ European Parliament, 2023, "Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes," (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-and-causes>.

¹⁰ European Commission, 2021, "Pay transparency: Commission proposes measures to ensure equal pay for equal work," (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_881.

ensuring transparency in pay matters by emphasizing the disclosure of information about pay limits for job seekers as well as their right to know about the pay limits of the workers doing the same work. It also emphasizes that employers do not inquire about the pay history of job seekers. While stressing the transparency in the pay being paid to the employees as well as avoiding discrimination against women in terms of their pay, especially in the post-COVID-19 scenario, the report concludes that these measures will address a number of substantial factors causing the prevalent pay gaps and will help in addressing the issues propping up in the post-COVID-19 scenario which is reinforcing gender inequalities and puts women into greater risk of poverty exposure¹¹.

During the last several years, the average hourly wage for employed women in the EU has decreased by 16% compared to that of males. There is a 37% gender disparity in pension revenue, notwithstanding the fact that this varies greatly across Member States¹². Therefore, the European Parliament continued to call for further action, highlighting the need to put into place effective safeguards. The resolution was adopted on January 30, 2020¹³.

There have been requests for the Commission to create a comprehensive strategy on gender equality, including steps to address gender pay disparities by implementing the principle of equal pay for equal work from Article 157 of the TFEU. This article implies that each state is responsible for ensuring that equal remuneration for work of comparable worth and effort is implemented for both male and female employees. This article classifies pay as the normal fundamental or minimal salary or remuneration, as well as any extra money or consideration the employee receives either directly or indirectly from his employer.

The following conditions must be met for salary increases to occur without gender discrimination:

1. Piece rates for the same activity should be based on the same level/unit of measurement;
2. Period scale salary should be the same as for analogous positions.

The European Parliament and the European Council should follow regular operational legislative policy methods. In this instance, measures to implement the equal rights principles in jobs, including the implementation of fair compensation principles for works of equal worth or equal value, should be provided after reviewing and consulting with the Economic and Social Committee¹⁴.

The Parliament voted in favor of the incoming President of the Commission's promise in order to ensure "fair pay for equal jobs" as the European Gender Policy, with 493 ballots in favor, 82 opposed, and 79 refrainment from making a judgment. This statement was released in the run-up to International Women's Day on March 8, 2020, and it stated, "Economic inequalities between women and men persisted in the EU¹⁵.

¹¹ European Parliament, 2023, "Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes," (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-and-causes>.

¹² *Ambitious measures needed to ensure equal pay for women, say MEPs* | News | European Parliament [WWW Document] (2020) (in English) (accessed 1.21.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200128IPR71208/ambitious-measures-needed-to-ensure-equal-pay-for-women-say-meps>.

¹³ *Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes* | News | European Parliament [WWW Document] (2020) (in English) (accessed 1.21.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-and-causes>.

¹⁴ Eurostat, 1957, "EUR-Lex - 12008E157 - EN - EUR-Lex [WWW Document]," (in English) (accessed 01.9.21) // <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A12008E157>.

¹⁵ *Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes* | News | European Parliament [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 1.21.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/>

For this model to be accepted by lawmakers, it must contain mandatory regulations covering salary disclosure and gender pay discrepancies in both the government and industry sectors, as well as stringent compliance processes, quantifiable targets, and reporting to assess performance. Furthermore, they urge that the Action Plan on the prevalence of gender pay disparities be revised by 2020 in order to provide specific targets for Member States to achieve over the next five years in order to narrow the gap. To address the antecedents of the gender pay gap, the European Parliament advocated that its member states must implement early childhood education, childcare programs, and family-friendly working conditions to increase employment opportunities for women. Despite the fact that the wage disparity between men and women for seniors is more than twice as large, members of parliament continue to press for wise policies and practices for the elderly, such as nursing loans, suitable required pensions, and survivorship benefit compensation. Education throughout one's life and the development of technical skills may also guarantee women's access to opportunities and benefits. In an attempt to overcome sexist educational preconceptions and enable women to pursue higher education in STEM and other high-paying fields, members of parliament are pushing for more emphasis on entrepreneurial education, STEM topics, and digital training for young girls¹⁶.

Since there are multiple factors that impact gender pay gaps, a working paper on the subject titled "Gender Pay Gap Across Cultures" weighs on the role of culture in gender pay gaps. The study reveals that a society's cultural attributes are important in explaining the gender pay gap. It explains that gender pay gaps are comparatively larger in those societies that attach greater importance to religious beliefs, as well as where there is a greater level of intolerance and a noticeable acceptability of violence against women. However, conversely, the gender pay gaps are narrower in those societies in which the people have more positive, accommodative, supportive, and tolerant attitudes towards women in terms of their education and employment priorities¹⁷.

Data, Measures, and Research Design

Estonia and Sweden have gone through significant social and political change; however, both countries have a significant difference in the prevalence of the gender wage gap due to Sweden being selected as a benchmark to compare the gender wage gap in Estonia. This study examines the prevalence of the gender wage gap, highlights the statistics representing changes in employment dynamics after the COVID-19 outbreak, and examines the perception toward women's employment to help explain its contribution to the gender wage gap in Estonia. This study used data from the Sixth Wave World Values Survey, which was carried out in 52 countries from 2010 to 2014.

Gender wage gap. The data is comprised of wage statistics collected from the International Labor Organization, Eurostat, ERR News, and the Sixth Wave World Values Survey.

society/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-and-causes.

¹⁶ *Ambitious measures needed to ensure equal pay for women, say MEPs* | News | European Parliament [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 01.21.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200128IPR71208/ambitious-measures-needed-to-ensure-equal-pay-for-women-say-meps>.

¹⁷ N. Burns, K. Minnick, J. Netter, and L. Starks, *Gender pay gap across cultures*, (2022) (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w30100/w30100.pdf.

Sexism. The data suggesting the prevalence of sexism comprises the following statements from the Sixth Wave World Values Survey in Estonia:

1. If a woman has a higher income than her spouse, then it causes marital issues.
2. When a woman works for money, children suffer.
3. Receiving a degree from a university is of more value to a man than it is to a woman.
4. A homemaker's life may be just as rewarding as a career outside the home.

These questions were measured on a scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and don't know. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the agreeability of respondents toward the given statements as a means to determine the perception toward women's employment in order to understand the wage disparity in Estonia.

Individual characteristics. The individual characteristics in this study encompass gender, age, education, and income, and these characteristics are used to determine their effects on the prevalence of sexism in Estonia and Sweden. In this instance, Gender accounts as a binary variable, i.e., 0=male and 1=female. The respondents in this data are categorized into five age groups, mainly aged 25–34, 35–45, 46–54, 55–64, and above 65. Education is categorized using the respondents' formal education years, whereas income is measured on a scale of 1 to 10, representing low to high.

Global Gender Wage Gap

Although the European Union has made a significant contribution to the elimination of pay disparity between men and women, there are considerable differences in the extent to which pay disparity in European countries prevails in comparison to the rest of the world. Hence, the unadjusted gender pay gap, calculated as the relative discrepancy between women's and men's median wage¹⁸, is widely used as the primary indicator of advancement. However, the unadjusted GPG has difficulty identifying discrimination as such. It includes possible discrepancies in compensation for 'just labor, or job of equal merit' between sexes as a result of variations in men's and women's general labor market characteristics¹⁹. In this instance, the statistics indicating the prevalence of sexism based on the per capita purchasing power parity in the world are illustrated in Figure 1.

The results in Figure 1 show that Estonia has a higher level of prejudice compared to Qatar, Singapore, the United States, Kuwait, and Japan, whereas Sweden and Germany have the lowest level of prejudice in the European Union. These findings draw parallels between Estonia and Sweden, which continues to account as a major benchmark for Estonia due to similar political and social structures.

¹⁸ Eurostat, *Gender pay gap in unadjusted form* [WWW Document], (2019) (in English) (accessed 1.8.21) // https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_05_20/default/table?lang=en.

¹⁹ *Equal Pay for Work Of Equal Value* [WWW Document], n. d. (in English) (accessed 1.27.21) // <https://www.kornferry.com/solutions/rewards-and-benefits/work-measurement/equal-pay-for-work-of-equal-value>.

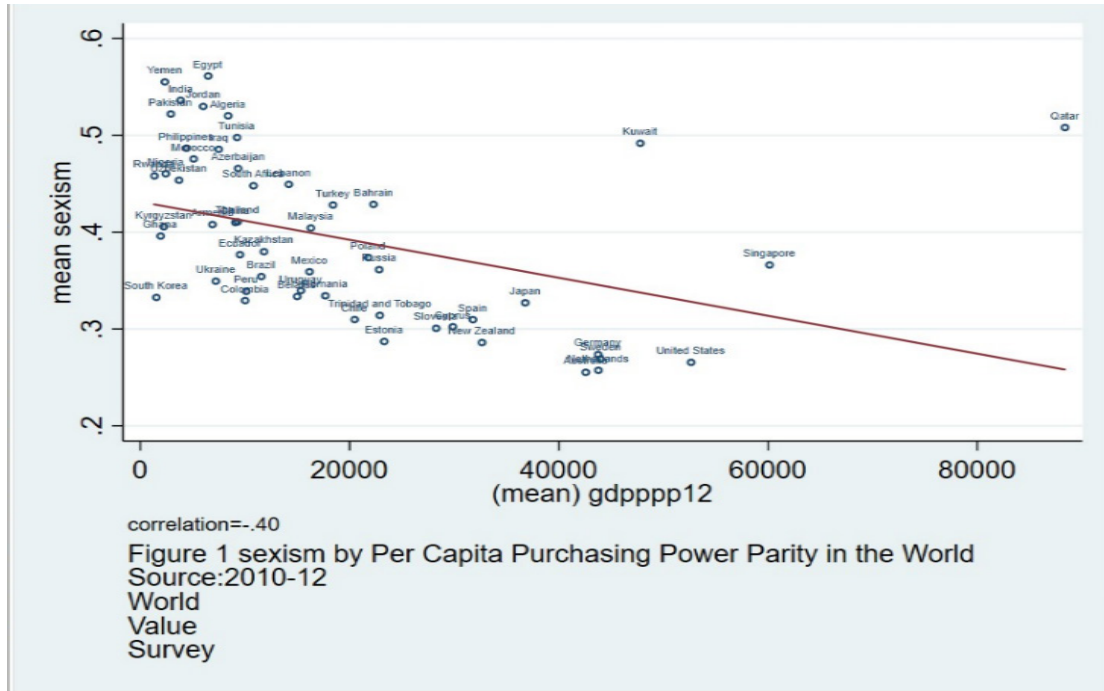


Figure 1. Gender Wage Disparity in the World

The prevalence of pay disparity based on gender is further examined on account of the difference in percentage between average gross hourly earnings, and the findings are provided in Figure 2.

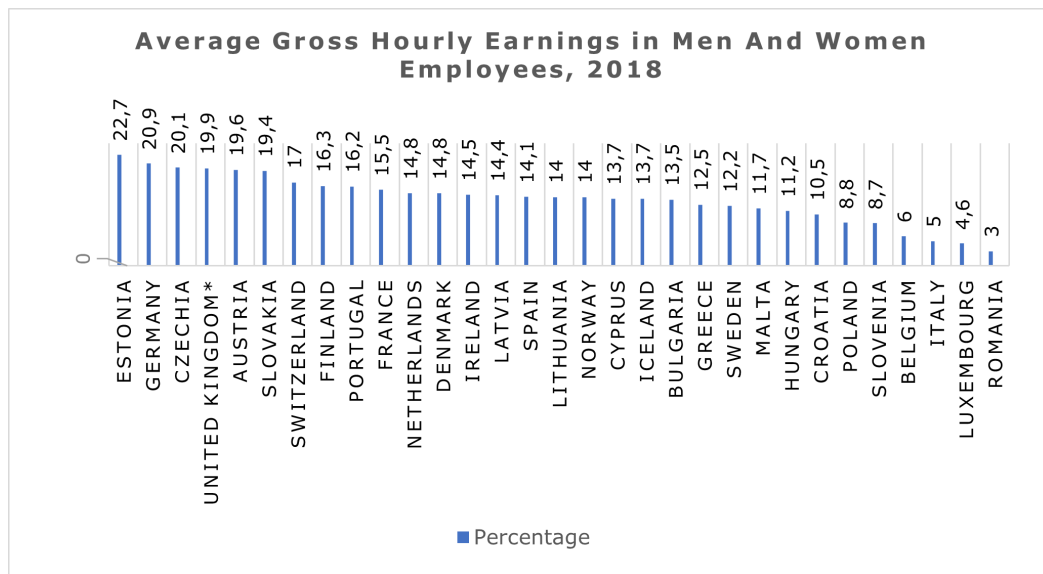


Figure 2. Average Gross Hourly Earnings Among Men and Women Employees, 2018

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics#Gender_pay_gap_levels_vary_significantly_across_EU/

The findings in Figure 2 indicate that the average net hourly earnings of women in the European Union (EU-27) and the eurozone were 14.8% less than that of males in the overall economy (EA-19) in the year 2018. The gender wage in the Member States accounts for 19.7%, ranging from 3.0% in Romania to 22.2% in Estonia. (Figure 5.) In the European Union in the year 2018, the country with the largest gender wage gap was

found to be Estonia, with 22.7%, while the one with the most reduced estimates was Romania, with a total of 3%. The nations with the smallest pay discrepancies include Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, and Croatia, while the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, and Lithuania have the largest variances between the highest and lowest scores.

Gender Wage Gap in Estonia

The gender pay gap in Estonia for the year 2018 with respect to industries is shown in Figure 3. The statistics illustrated in Figure 3 indicate that the banking sector has the largest gender wage gap, at 34%, followed by the manufacturing sector, with a 28% wage gap. Similarly, the wage gap in the data exchange sector is 25.5%, followed by the commercial economy with 24.1%. The wage gap in the technology sector is estimated to be 18.1%, and the property-related or real estate sector has a wage gap of 15.6%. The wage gap in architecture is 12.6%, and heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems have a wage gap of 13.1%. The lowest wage gap is found to be in potable water and recycling services, with an estimate of 4.9%.

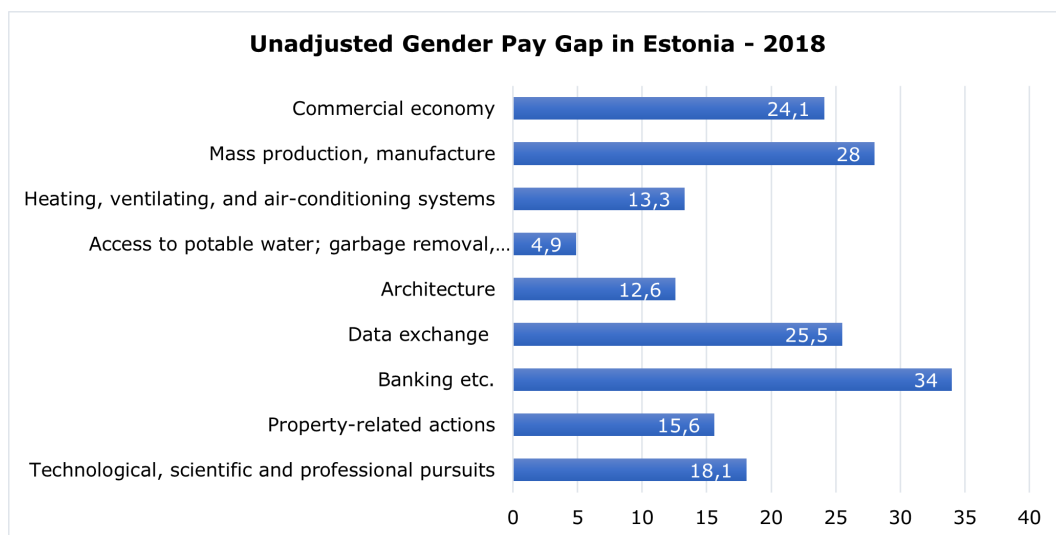


Figure 3. Unadjusted Gender Pay Gap in Estonia, 2018

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics#Part-time_versus_full-time_employment ("Gender pay gap statistics - Statistics Explained," 2020).

The difference in the gender pay gap across different industries in the Estonian economy in the years 2018 and 2019 is illustrated in Figure 4. The findings in Figure 4 illustrate that the gender pay gap in Culture, Arts, and Sports decreased from 25% in the year 2018 to 15% in 2019, followed by Technological, Scientific, and Professional Pursuits, where the gender pay gap decreased from 15.8% to 8%. Lodging and catering also faced a similar trend, with a decrease from 13.3% to 11%, followed by farming, agriculture, and fishing, where the gender wage gap decreased from 20% to 16%. The gender pay gap in the Financial Actions Summary decreased from 18% to 17%, Community Service decreased from 28% to 23%, and Architecture decreased from 27% to 24%. The gender pay gap in mining and extraction decreased from 29% to 26.5%, finance and insurance decreased from 32% to 27.1%, and wholesale and retail trade decreased from 31% to 28.7%.

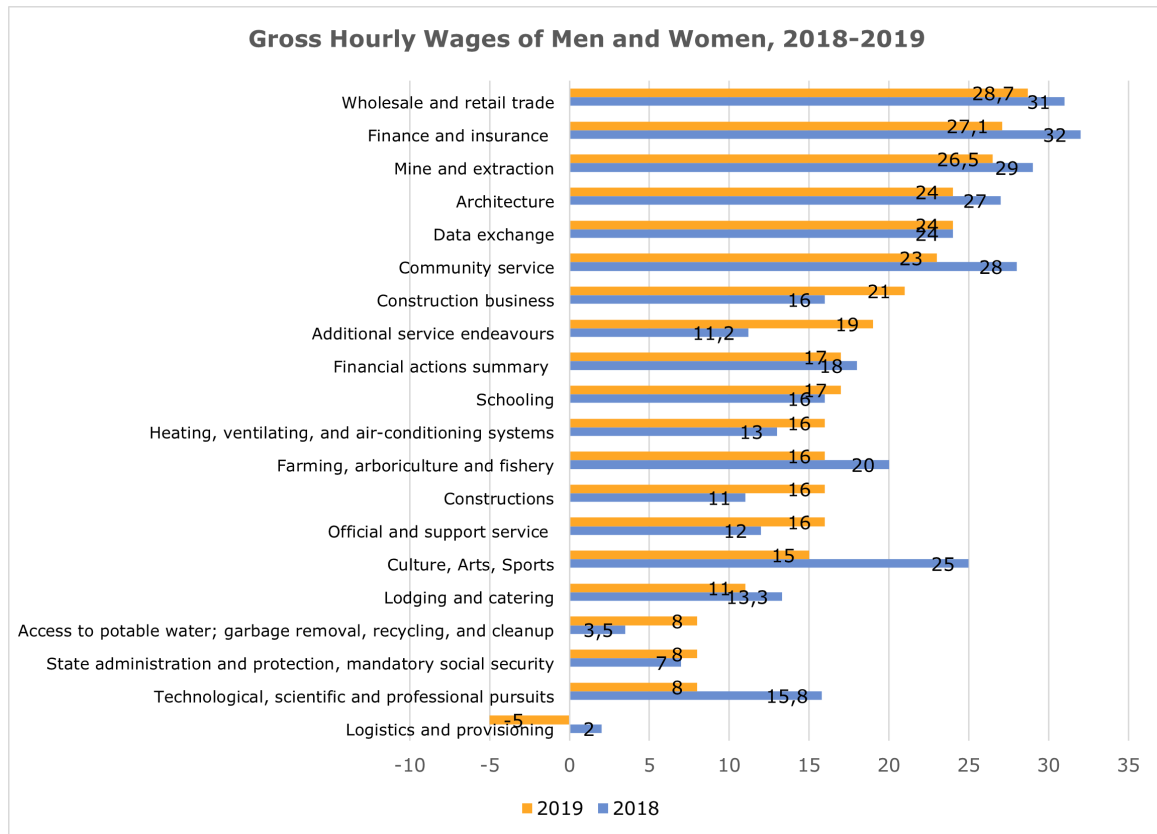


Figure 4. Gross Hourly Wages of Men and Women, 2018–2019

Sources: <https://news.err.ee/992375/statistics-gender-pay-gap-present-in-all-areas-of-estonian-economy> (ERR, 2019); <https://news.err.ee/1115422/statistics-gender-pay-gap-falls-by-0-9-%-on-year> (E. N. | ERR, 2020).

Even in the post-COVID-19 era, there is evidence to suggest that the existing gender pay gap between men and women in Estonia is on the rise in the years following the pandemic. According to preliminary data from Statistics Estonia, the country’s official statistics agency, in 2022, the gross hourly earnings of female employees were 17.7% smaller than the earnings of male employees; the gender pay gap increased by 2.8 percentage points year-on-year. As of 2021, transportation and storage were the only economic activities where women earned more than men, with women’s gross hourly earnings exceeding men’s by 9.3%. Compared with 2021, the pay gap last year decreased the most in construction and increased the most in other service activities²⁰.

Comparing the Gender Wage Gap in Estonia and Sweden

The gender wage gap in Estonia in comparison to Sweden is illustrated in Figure 5. The findings indicate that the gender wage gap in Estonia ranged between 23.8% and 25.7%, whereas the gender wage gap ranged from 10.2% to 15.3% in Sweden in the year 2014.

²⁰ S. Hankewitz, “The gender pay gap in Estonia increases again,” *Estonia World* (2023) (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // <https://estonianworld.com/business/gender-pay-gap-in-estonia-increases-again/>.

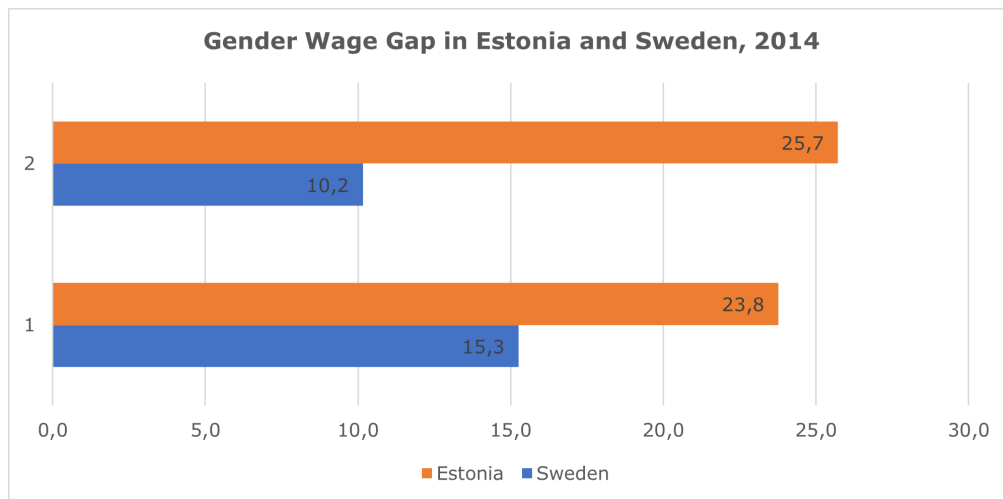


Figure 5. Gender Wage Gap in Estonia and Sweden, 2014

Source: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/maps-and-charts/enhanced/WCMS_650829/lang--en/index.htm ("How big is the gender pay gap in your country?," 2018).

Further delving into the matter of gender pay gaps, a research study titled "GENDER PAY GAP ACROSS CULTURES" examines a cross-country sample of top executives' compensation to assess the role of culture in explaining the gender wage gap. The research explores that the compensation gap is both country and executive-role-specific and that the cultural values of a country or society have a direct bearing on gender pay gaps. Although it is a fact that generally, women are paid less than their male counterparts for the same roles and work, the gender pay gap seems to be minimal at the highest executive level roles. The research study finds that the gender pay gap seems to be comparatively larger in those countries and societies in which people generally attach greater importance to religious beliefs. There is a greater acceptability of violence towards women and intolerance. Conversely, the research further explores that the gender pay gap seems to be comparatively smaller in those countries and societies in which people generally have more positive views on women's rights. Women's education and attitudes about women's involvement in work. Thus, the research finds that the larger pay gap is directly proportional to the cultural values and beliefs of the people of a society towards women; Harsh and intolerant beliefs about women lead to larger pay gaps while the same pay gap decreases as a result of the tolerant, positive and inclusive views of the people in society towards women²¹.

While assessing the impacts of COVID-19, Maryna Tverdostup, an economist at The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, in her paper titled "Gender gaps in employment, wages, and work hours: Assessment of COVID-19 implications," focused on investigating the dynamics and drivers of gender gaps in employment rates, wages and work hours during the pandemic. The study, which is based on Estonian Labour Force Survey data, reveals that the pandemic did not increase gender gaps; rather, it helped reduce gender inequalities. The study further explains that the higher inclination towards the work-from-home modality during the pandemic, as well as better educational attainments of women, successfully controlled the widening of the gender wage gaps²². In her

²¹ N. Burns, K. Minnick, J. Netter, and L. Starks, *Gender pay gap across cultures*, (2022) (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w30100/w30100.pdf.

²² T. Maryna, "Gender gaps in employment, wages, and work hours: Assessment of COVID-19 implications," *EconStor* (2021) (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstr>

research article titled "COVID-19 and Gender Gaps in Employment, Wages, and Work Hours: Lower Inequalities and Higher Motherhood Penalties", Maryyna Tverdostup investigates the factors causing gender gaps in employment rates, wages, and work hours during the COVID-19 pandemic²³. This research is based on Estonian Labor Force Survey data for 2009–2020. The research explores that the disturbance of economic activities as a result of the pandemic teleworking modalities, the closure of day-care centers, and some other activities have negative effects on the employment, work hours, and wages of men and women.

This research reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a reduction in all three gender inequality measures in 2020 and explores that, overall, gender inequalities have narrowed to a larger extent during the pandemic in Estonia. However, child-rearing women and women working in those sectors that were most affected by the pandemic seem to have proved much more vulnerable. Although some literature on the subject reports female employment being more affected by COVID-19 than male employment, a smaller volume of literature points to the fact that the pandemic hit male and female employment quite equally. However, this research concludes that the dynamics of gender gaps in 2020 suggest that female employment, wages, and work hours were resilient in the face of the pandemic-induced crisis and may remain so in the future as well²⁴.

Some sources suggest that Estonia's condition could be improved if it were to adopt the nearly century-old Swedish custom of maintaining gender equality. The Swedish Discrimination Act, for instance, stipulates and compels all companies to zealously pursue certain goals to achieve gender equality. Employers must eliminate salary disparities and other non-preferred working circumstances between women and men performing comparable or equivalent work. Sweden also requires that organizations with equal to or more than 25 employees should comprise a compensation plan that encompasses equity in wages while ensuring a three-year wage review to identify, modify, and eliminate unjustifiable differences in employees' pay based on gender differences caused by employment policies.

The Commission has included five significant improvement areas in its strategic objectives for 2010–2015. Economic freedom and gender equality come first, then equal pay for equal work, righteous management, respect for oneself, ethics, an end to discrimination based on gender, and ultimately sexual equality outside of the EU²⁵. According to estimates provided by Estonia in 2018, the salary gap between men and women is prevalent across the whole area and runs from 32.2% to 1.9%. In October 2018, the net hourly income for males was 18.7% more than the average hourly pay earned by women. When compared to the same time in 2017, the salary differential based on sexual orientation shrank by 2.2 rates. In contrast to the average EU difference of 16.2%, the margin in 2016 was 25.3%²⁶. These results show that Estonia's condition hasn't altered after decades in the EU. On April 19, 2012, ladies of all ages showed dissent against the prevalence of high gender pay disparity in Estonia at Tallinn's Tammsaare Park²⁷.

eam/10419/240645/1/1760917842.pdf.

²³ T. Maryyna, "COVID-19 and gender gaps in employment, wages, and work hours: Lower inequalities and higher motherhood penalty," *Comparative Economic Studies* 65 (2023): 713–735.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Union, P.O. of the E., "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016–2019" [WWW Document], (2016) (in English) (accessed 01.28.21) // <http://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/24968221-eb81-11e5-8a81-01aa75ed71a1>.

²⁶ Eurostat, *Aid, development, cooperation and fundamental right*, (2018).

²⁷ ERR, E.N., 2019. *Statistics: Gender pay gap present in all areas of Estonian economy* [WWW Document], (in English) (accessed 1.28.21) // <https://news.err.ee/992375/statistics-gender-pay-gap-present-in-all-areas-of-estonian-economy>.

Comparing Sexism in Estonia and Sweden

A multivariate ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis was conducted, in which sexism is the dependent variable, and age, gender, education, and income are the independent variables. The findings provided in Table 1 provide the regression results for Estonia’s sexist models that reveal insights into the relationship between the dependent variable, sexism, and the independent variables.

Table 1. Sexism in Sweden and Estonia: A Multivariate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression Analysis

	Sweden’s Sexism Model(1)	Sweden’s Sexism Model (2)	Estonia’s Sexism Model (1)	Estonia’s Sexism Model (2)
VARIABLES	menjob	workingwomen	workingwomen	menjob
Age 25-34	0.0238*** (0.00881)	0.0214** (0.00882)	0.00205 (0.00489)	0.00347 (0.00502)
Age 34-45	0.0249*** (0.00916)	0.0231** (0.00916)	0.0105** (0.00504)	0.00985* (0.00518)
Age 46-54	0.0340*** (0.00959)	0.0390*** (0.00958)	0.0301*** (0.00543)	0.0264*** (0.00556)
Age 55-64	0.0673*** (0.0104)	0.0754*** (0.0104)	0.0611*** (0.00597)	0.0600*** (0.00613)
65+	0.104*** (0.0111)	0.111*** (0.0111)	0.0846*** (0.00641)	0.0842*** (0.00658)
Education	0.0526*** (0.00275)	0.0640*** (0.00273)	0.0750*** (0.00152)	0.0610*** (0.00157)
Male education	0.0991*** (0.00305)		0.141*** (0.00314)	
Income	0.0108*** (0.00139)	0.0104*** (0.00139)	0.0194*** (0.000708)	0.0166*** (0.000732)
Female		0.139*** (0.00561)		0.149*** (0.00174)
Constant	1.271*** (0.0141)	1.466*** (0.0118)	1.345*** (0.00614)	1.028*** (0.00761)
Observations	64,547	65,621	208,321	194,101
R-squared	0.027	0.020	0.028	0.055

Note. Standard errors in parentheses: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Source: Sixth Wave World Values Surveys 2010–2014.

In the Working Women model (Model 1), age groups, education, female gender, and income are significant predictors of sexism. Older age groups exhibit higher levels of sexism, while higher education levels and income also contribute to increased sexism. Being female is associated with a sexism score that is 0.141 units higher than males. The R-squared value of 0.028 indicates that the independent variables explain approximately 2.8% of the variance in sexism. In the Men’s Job model (Model 2), the focus shifts to sexism related to men’s jobs. Here, male education has a positive relationship with sexism, suggesting that as male education increases, sexism related to men’s jobs also increases. The coefficients for age groups, education, females, and income have similar interpretations as in Model 1. The R-squared value of 0.055 suggests that the independent variables explain around 5.5% of the variance in sexism related to men’s jobs. In comparison, the regression results for Sweden’s sexism models indicate the relationships between the dependent variable, sexism, and various independent variables. In the

Men's Job model (Model 1), age, education, male education, and income are significant predictors of sexism. The coefficients for age groups suggest that older age groups are associated with higher levels of sexism. Higher education levels and male education are also positively related to sexism. Additionally, income has a small positive relationship with sexism. The R-squared value of 0.027 indicates that the independent variables explain around 2.7% of the variance in sexism. In the Working Women model (Model 2), the inclusion of the "Female" variable reveals that being female is a significant predictor of higher levels of sexism. The other independent variables (age, education, male education, and income) have similar interpretations as in Model 1. The R-squared value of 0.020 suggests that the independent variables explain approximately 2% of the variance in sexism. Therefore, the overall prevalence of sexism is significantly strong in Estonia, and education and income affect the prevalence of sexism.

Sexism in Estonia

Sexism in Estonia, measured using the survey questions from the Sixth Wave World Values Survey, is examined using descriptive statistics. The findings for the question 'If a woman has a higher income than her spouse, then it causes marital issues' are provided in Figure 6. The findings indicate that out of 1,442 respondents, 3% of respondents strongly disagree, 6% of respondents disagree, 8% agree, and 2% strongly agree. The findings also suggest that 1% didn't know, whereas 50% did not answer. The overall findings suggest that 10% of the total respondents believe that women earning more than men will cause trouble in marital life.

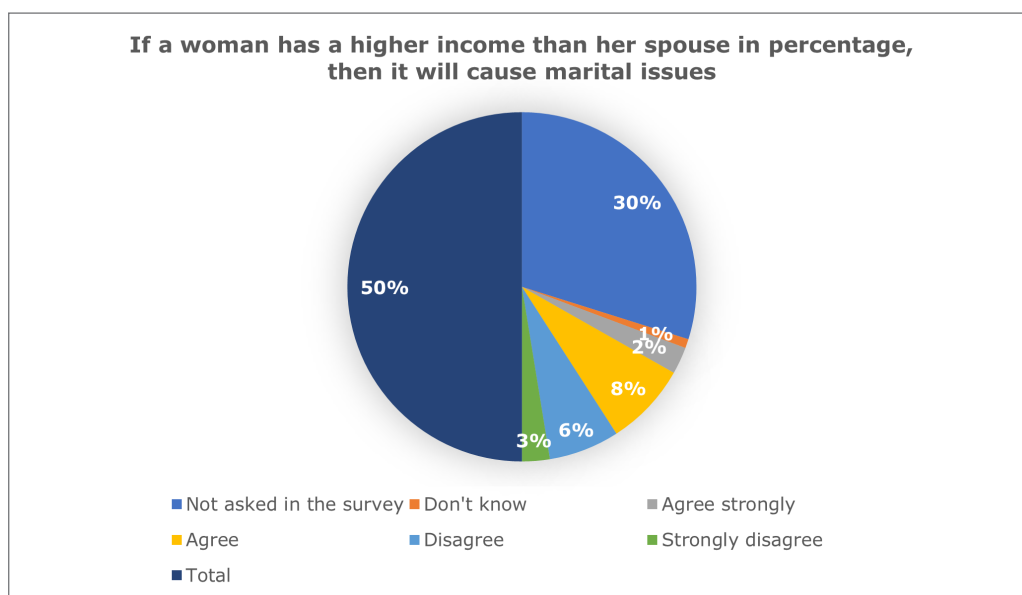


Figure 6. Superiority Issues

The findings for the question 'When a woman works for money, children suffer' are provided in Figure 7. The findings indicate that out of 1,422 respondents, 14.42% strongly disagree, 30.1% disagree, 10.06% agree, and 3.37% strongly agree. However, 0.07% did not answer, and 40.3% were not asked in the survey. For respondents who did not answer, this is a sensitive topic, or they might not be willing to make a choice regarding this concern. These findings indicate that 13.49% of respondents

believe that working women are not able to address the needs of their children, due to which children do not receive adequate care, resulting in their suffering.

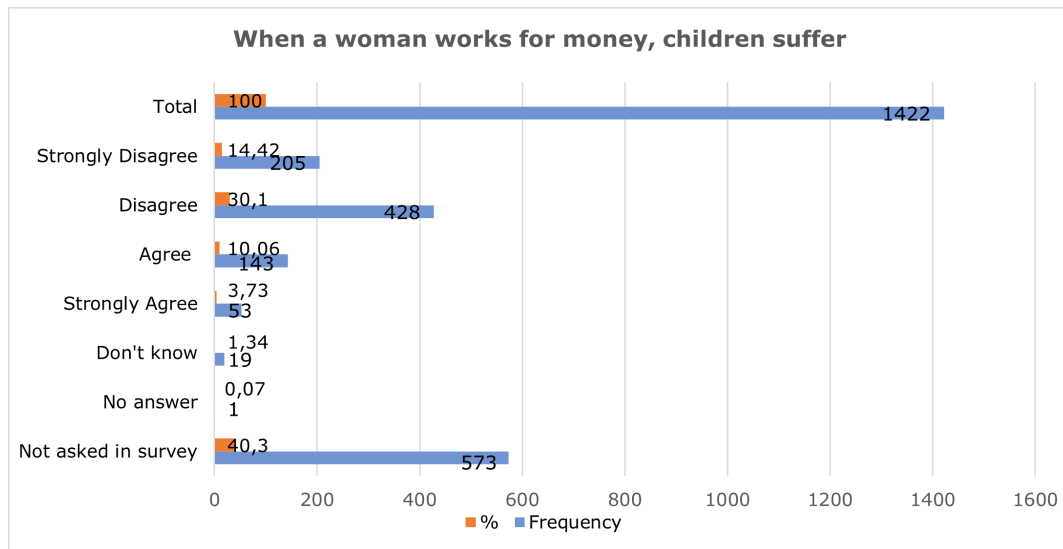


Figure 7. Mothers Struggling with Care for Children

The findings for the question 'Receiving a degree from a university is of more value to a man than it is to a woman' are provided in Figure 7. The findings indicate that out of 1,422 respondents, 44.44% strongly disagree, 33.33% disagree, 12.38 agree, and 7.31% strongly agree. It was also observed that 2.46% did not know, and 0.07% refrained from providing any answer. These findings suggest that a total of 13.79% of respondents believe that women should not pursue higher education as it is not as important for them as it is to men, which eventually indicates the prevalence of sexism in enabling or empowering women to pursue higher education that can lead to better employment opportunities.

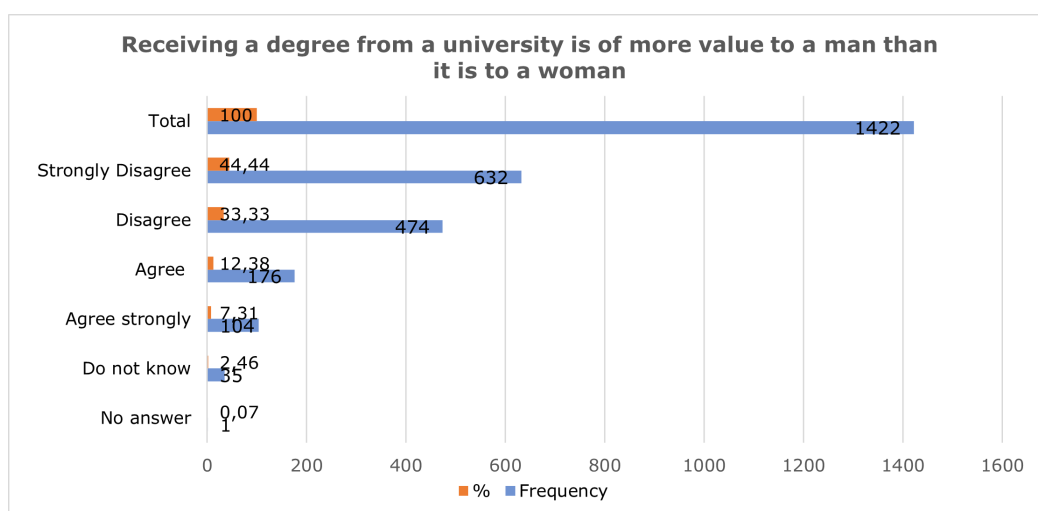


Figure 8. Importance of Education for Women

The findings for the question 'A homemaker's life may be just as rewarding as a career outside the home' are provided in Figure 9. The findings indicate that out of 1,422 respondents, 3% strongly disagree, 17% disagree, 37% agree, 42% strongly

agree, and 1% do not know the answer. These findings suggest that a total of 79% of respondents indicate that they would prefer women to be homemakers than have meaningful employment.

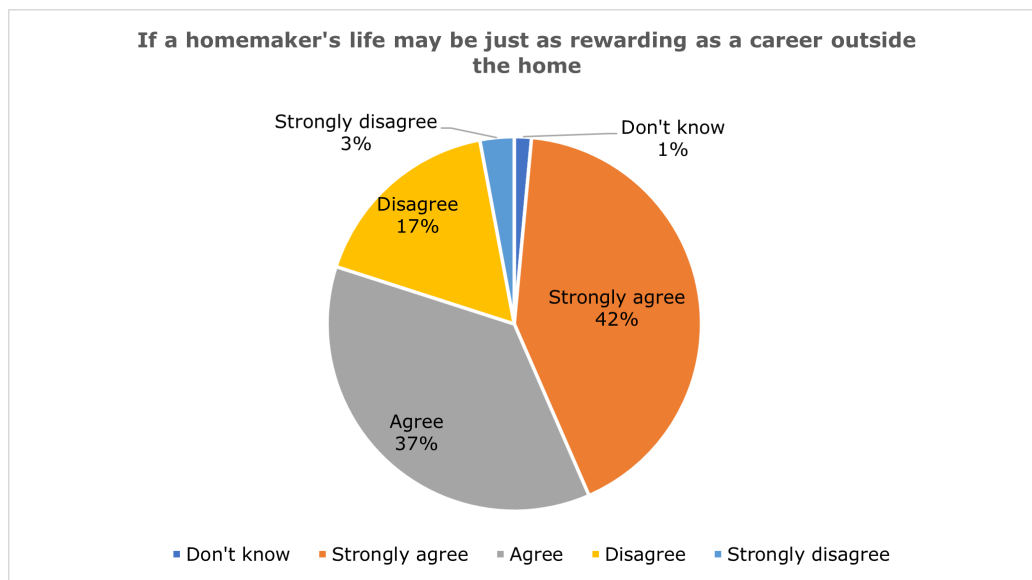


Figure 9. Satisfaction with being a Housewife

A research article by Sandy Ruxton shed light on some of the challenges and opportunities encountered while engaging men and boys in the promotion of gender equality²⁸. The article commences by highlighting key aspects of the current situation as well as the influence of COVID-19 on men and masculinity in general. On the one hand, the article highlights the potential benefits of involving men and boys in gender equality initiatives; but, on the other hand, it also points out the existing obstacles to their engagement in the process. The paper pinpoints the key factors which encourages the involvement of men in promoting gender equality. The article further explores some of the most important sites, such as early childhood, schools, fatherhood and care, environment, organizations, and workplaces where a maximum number of men and boys can potentially be reached and engaged. The paper concludes that although there are opportunities and risks in engaging men and boys in order to make progress toward increased gender equality and other social goals, it recommends that if we aim at improving the lives of men, women, and children, then the participation of men and boys in achieving the desired change is essential and without their support and full involvement, gender equality will remain a distant reality²⁹.

Employment Shift During COVID-19 and Women’s Employment

The coronavirus that swept the globe was an issue that had not yet been addressed in the research on the topic. Speaking on Equal Pay Day in Estonia (23.03.), Liisa Pakosta cautioned that the current scenario, which is brought on by COVID-19’s effects, may lead to a sizable number of women having their working hours reduced or being

²⁸ Maryna, T., “COVID-19 and gender gaps in employment, wages, and work hours: Lower inequalities and higher motherhood penalty,” *Comparative Economic Studies* 65 (2023): 713–735.

²⁹ Ruxton, S., “Men and gender equality: Challenges and opportunities,” (2020) (in English) (accessed 12.13.23) // <https://mmasc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Ruxton-Men-and-gender-equality-ICMEO-2020.pdf>.

permanently laid off from their jobs. There is evidence to suggest that women are spending more time on unpaid home tasks. Prior to the current state of affairs, the working hours of women were doubled compared to the hours of household work as men (in 2010, women’s domestic labor exceeded men’s by 11 hours per week). Women may suffer as a result of the affected industries that could be negatively impacted, such as the tourism and hospitality sectors. An Estonian woman would have earned the same amount of money as an Estonian male who retired on December 31, 2019, according to data gathered on the gender wage discrepancy in the year 2019. Given that the salary gap between men and women in Estonia is estimated to be the highest in Europe and the world, these new numbers would have shown a significant improvement³⁰. However, the assessment of the gender wage gap will be erroneous if the economy is in a state of crisis. When low-income women abandon their employment or only work part-time, the Eurostat-tracked pay difference index will rise. This is a result of part-time workers and unpaid staff not being included in the statistics. Despite this, none of these reforms have improved how locals rehandle their finances. The lessons from the previous financial crisis demonstrate that the degree to which different demographic groups—based on race, age, nationality, etc.—are negatively impacted closely relates to the percentage of the economy that is affected³¹. The Statistics of Estonia reported short-term data on the labor market, businesses, and mortality in order to gauge the effects of the recession in 2020³².

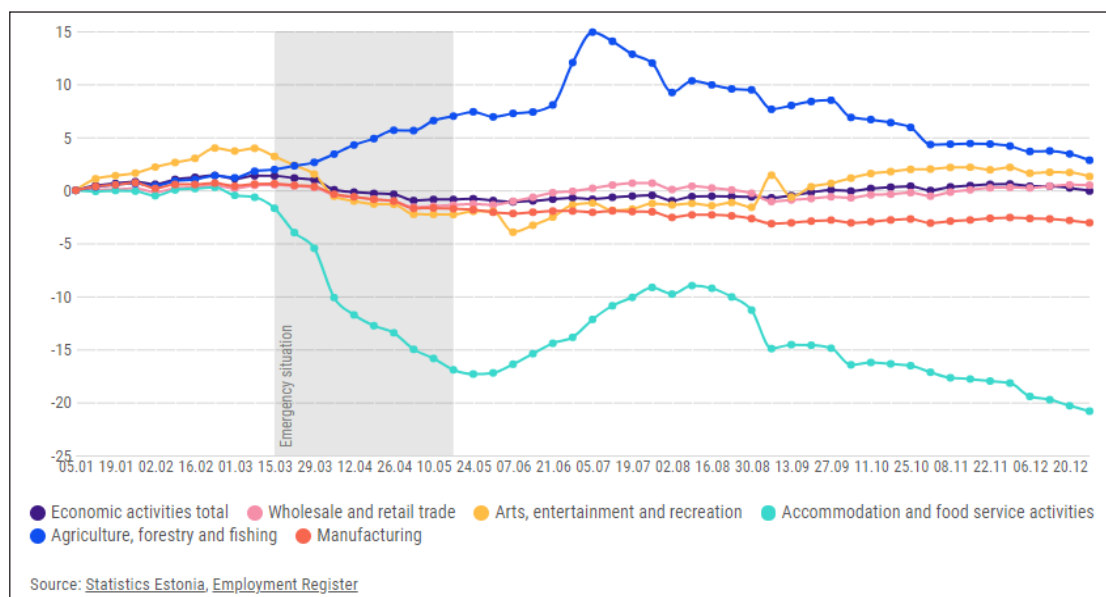


Figure 10. Employment Shift During Covid-19

Source: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/covid-19-impact-estonia/short-term-labour-market-statistics> (“Short-term labour market statistics | Statistikaamet,” 2020).

As a result of the pandemic, sectoral modifications were applied in 2020. Stable employment was available in the domains of art, entertainment, amusement,

³⁰ COVID-19 impact in Estonia | Statistikaamet [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 1.30.21) // <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/covid-19-impact-estonia>.

³¹ ERR, B.], “Estonian commissioner: Crisis may deprive large numbers of women of income” [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 5.18.22) // <https://news.err.ee/1067582/estonian-commissioner-crisis-may-deprive-large-numbers-of-women-of-income>.

³² COVID-19 impact in Estonia | Statistikaamet [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 1.30.21) // <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/covid-19-impact-estonia>.

manufacturing, wholesale, and retail industries, as well as economic activity. From January 26 to March 29, there was a temporary uptick in the art, entertainment, and recreation industries. On Tuesday, February 23, it reached its peak height and gradually stabilized itself with little jumps. On the fifth of July, the largest growth was recorded in the fields of agriculture, forestry, and fishing. It peaked at 14.91 points in the summer of 2020 and continued until November 1st, when the regular numbers were restored. From March 1, 2020, there was yet another significant drop in the quantity of lodging and dining options. However, this decline was not stopped; instead, it continued until December 27, 2020. Given that it is crucial for a country to import or export food, this is the sector that is the most challenging and concerning. Even though it could provide a significant challenge, Estonia might be able to produce its own items and give its farms more attention. Despite the dire forecasts made in 2020, according to Swedbank senior economist Liis Elmik in 2021, the epidemic has not had the negative effects on women in Estonia that were anticipated in 2020. Both unemployment and income disparity based on gender have decreased. Despite that, fewer people worked in the service sector during the past year—an area where women make up the majority of employees—and the labor force among men shrank more than that of women. There are fewer people employed in the transportation, auto dealership, and forestry industries, which all have a higher percentage of men than women. A woman's hourly gross wage was 15.6% less than a man's in 2020. However, the income gap between men and women narrowed by 1.5% points. The wage disparity shrank across a wide range of industries, with the biggest reductions in construction, business, and agriculture. Due to COVID-19 and travel limitations, the gap in the tourism business grew significantly. Age-wise, the age range where the earnings disparity is widest is between 35 and 44, which corresponds to the time when women frequently rejoin the workforce after maternity leave. It is typical for a woman's income to decline by 4-9% after having a baby. Additionally, men were more likely to hold higher-paying management positions and jobs in the technology sector. In 2020, men held 63% of executive positions, and there were roughly twice as many men as women employed in the sector of information technology³³.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to support or refute Estonia's issue with its discriminatory attitude toward women, which believes that women should spend more time at home caring for their children as mothers, this research explored a variety of topics. Women choose to do housework and care for children because the pay for doing genuine work is lower. Nevertheless, it is encouraging that many believe that women's education is just as vital as that of males. Males, on the other hand, would rather not see a woman earn a substantial salary. This is an interesting fact: if a man makes more money and his wife stays home and doesn't have a job, it doesn't cause any problems. However, it can be a problem if a wife also has a job and her pay is equal to or higher than her husband's. The reasons for the gender wage gap, however, go beyond the oversimplified issue of inequality. They are a result of the various barriers that women face to employment, development, and pay. The findings indicate that money and education have an effect on the degree of gender disparity in Estonia. Workplace discrimination against women in lower-paying jobs, which includes

³³ ERR, B. |, "Covid had smaller impact on Women's situation in labor market than expected" [WWW Document], (2021) (in English) (accessed 05.18.22) // <https://news.err.ee/1608185992/covid-had-smaller-impact-on-women-s-situation-in-labor-market-than-expected>.

treatment and schooling, accounts for about 30% of the gender wage gap. However, the proportion of men working in higher-paying fields like science, electronics, engineering, and math is relatively high (almost 80%). The study also revealed that women in Estonia had a tendency to work part-time employment even before the epidemic, which is why women's incomes are so much lower than men's because women work part-time jobs more frequently than men do. As a result, their incomes dramatically decline. In addition, for labor of equal value, women are occasionally paid less than males. But as of 1957, the idea of independence for equal-value jobs has been codified in the European Treaties (Article 157, TFEU). In 2017, the private sector in the majority of the European Union (EU) member states was more significant than the public sector, as shown on graphs showing the gender wage gap by sector. Similarly, due to the gender wage gap, women are more likely to experience old age poverty. In 2018, women in the EU who were over 65 received a pension that was 30% less than that of men. The situation varies greatly between the member states, with Luxembourg's pension differential ranging from 43% to Estonia's difference of 1%, for instance³⁴.

This study used secondary data to determine the extent to which gender wage gaps exist in Estonia. In this instance, it was observed that the gender wage gap in Estonia is the highest in the European Union, suggesting the need for policy implications to reduce its prevalence. This study also aimed to determine the prevalence of sexism by determining the extent to which Estonian society perceives women's employment as a factor of social development. The findings indicated that a greater extent of individuals in Estonia believe that women earning more than men can cause marital issues and increase the suffering of children. The findings also reveal that individuals in Estonia strongly believe that higher education is more important for men than women and that women should be more involved in household activities. These findings suggest that the extent of sexism in Estonia is high. The empirical association between sexism, age, gender, income, and education was determined, suggesting that education and income affect the prevalence of sexism in Estonia and Sweden. It eventually provides implications for policymakers, indicating that increasing the extent of education and income in Estonian society can help address sexism, leading toward the development of more inclusive and equitable workplace policies that can promote pay equity. It can eventually help address the prevalence of the gender wage gap in Estonia while developing a more inclusive and empowered Estonian society, as more women would be willing to pursue employment due to better career prospects and earning potential.

While focusing on ensuring that both men and women receive equal pay for the equal quantity of work they perform, the European Commission recommended a proposal that focused on ensuring transparency in pay matters by emphasizing the disclosure of information about pay limits for job seekers as well as their right to know about the pay limits of the workers doing the same work. While stressing the transparency in the pay being paid to the employees as well as avoiding discrimination against women in terms of their pay, especially in the post-COVID-19 scenario, such measures will address a number of substantial factors causing the prevalent pay gaps and will help in addressing the issues propping up in the post-COVID-19 scenario which is reinforcing gender inequalities and puts women into greater risk of poverty exposure. Although there are opportunities and risks in engaging men and boys in order to make progress towards

³⁴ *Gender pay gap in Europe: facts and figures (infographic) | News | European Parliament* [WWW Document], (2020) (in English) (accessed 01.29.21) // <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200227STO73519/gender-pay-gap-in-europe-facts-and-figures-infographic>.

increased gender equality and other social goals, if we aim at improving the lives of men, women, and children, then the participation of men in achieving change is essential, and without their full support and involvement, gender equality will remain a distant reality.

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