Gender pay gaps in Lithuania and Poland

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Summary

This paper aims to provide a detailed assessment of the gender pay gap in Lithuania and Poland. Gender inequality is still a significant problem worldwide, especially in the labour market, politics, and social structures. Women still earn, on average, 13% less than men due to occupational segregation, fewer career opportunities, and family responsibilities that restrict career advancement. They are also significantly underrepresented in leadership positions and politics, limiting their influence on decision-making. In addition, one in three women in the world experiences gender-based violence, highlighting the urgent need for social and legal reforms. The gender pay gap remains a persistent problem in Poland and Lithuania. Women are more likely to work in lower-paying sectors, such as education and healthcare, while men dominate higher-paying sectors, such as technology and finance.

Keywords

gender pay gap, labour market inequality, wages

Introduction

Gender inequality is a social phenomenon that manifests itself in differences in the rights, opportunities, and responsibilities of men and women across various areas of society, including the labour market, education, and politics. Economic inequality, particularly the pay gap, is a key issue, as women's salaries are on average around 13% lower than men's. In the Baltic countries, including Lithuania, and Poland, gender inequalities in the labour market and wage gaps remain pressing problems, driven by sectoral distribution and occupational segregation. Achieving gender equality and closing the pay gap requires a range of measures, including legislation, organisational change, and social initiatives.

This paper aims to analyse the gender pay gap between women and men in Lithuania and Poland. It examines how the wages of women and men differ in Lithuania and Poland. First, to shed light on the concept of gender inequality. Next, the determinants of the gender pay gap and wage differentials in Lithuania and Poland are examined, and measures to promote pay equality are presented. The article uses theoretical methods of analysis of literature and other sources, as well as statistical data analysis.

1. Concept of gender inequality

Gender inequality is a social phenomenon that manifests in systemic differences in the rights, opportunities, and responsibilities of men and women across various spheres of society, including the labour market, education, politics, and everyday life. This phenomenon stems from historical, cultural, economic, and legal factors that shape established gender roles and stereotypes. Research identifies several key aspects of gender inequality.

One of the most significant is economic and political inequality, reflected in the gender pay gap, differences in career opportunities, and an unequal distribution of leadership positions. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), women's salaries are on average around 13% lower than men's for the same or equivalent work. The comparative analysis between women's and men's wages highlights that economic inequality is also driven by women's greater burden of unpaid work and the responsibility of caring for a family. This may be because women are more likely to choose lower-paid occupations, are less likely to be in managerial positions, and are more likely to have to combine work and family responsibilities. Sahu [2025] notes in her study that collective bargaining mechanisms are insufficient across countries. At the same time, there is a lack of parental leave policies, and the

resulting labour market segregation contributes unequivocally to the wage gap between men and women. Gender inequality is also visible in politics. There are fewer women than men in senior positions. Reingardienė [2004] points out that this difference is not only due to historical factors, but also because it is often more difficult for women to reach high political positions. To address this situation, some countries have quotas to ensure greater women's participation in politics.

Another critical aspect of gender inequality is violence and discrimination. Violence against women remains widespread despite progress in legal protection and prevention systems. United Nations research shows that nearly one-third of women worldwide experience violence in their lifetime, mainly in the family environment. The OECD report highlights that in EU countries, 36% of all women who have ever been in a relationship have experienced violence from a partner. Also, 34% of working women have experienced physical harassment at work [OECD, 2025]. This shows that gender inequality is not only an economic or political issue but also a social and psychological problem that requires the involvement of the state and society. Gender-based violence can be said to be directly linked to deep-rooted gender stereotypes and structural inequalities in society [Dixit, 2024]. Gender inequalities in education are also evident. Researchers argue that social expectations formed from the immediate environment influence girls' career choices and subsequent academic paths [Eccles and Wigfield, 2024]. In many countries, girls and women still face limited access to quality education, further widening the socio-economic gap between the sexes. Gender stereotypes related to abilities and social roles have a significant impact on how pupils perceive their potential and aspirations. According to situated expectancy-value theory, girls often underestimate their abilities in mathematics or technology, not because of a lack of real competence, but because of environmental signals and societal norms that shape their expectations and motivational values [Eccles and Wigfield, 2024]. As a result, career aspirations often veer towards "traditional" female fields, despite high academic achievements in STEM subjects. This disparity is due to several interlinked factors, including gender stereotypes in schools, limited incentives for motivation and structural barriers in the higher education system. Although this gender often achieves better learning outcomes, it is challenging to enter the so-called STEM fields or other high-skilled professions [Eccles and Wigfield, 2024].

A study by Rakauskienė, Krinickienė and Servetkienė [2020] reveals that the income gap between men and women in Lithuania remains significant, and one of the main reasons for this is traditional gender roles, which predispose women to lower-paid jobs. In addition, labour market segregation and a lack of transparency

on wages only exacerbate economic inequalities between the sexes. The legal context is also important. Petrėnaitė [2022] analyses the regulation of gender identity in law and notes that international human rights norms often do not explicitly protect against discrimination based on gender identity. Still, a broader interpretation of these norms allows for the inclusion of the prohibition of discrimination of this kind in the scope of this protection [Petrėnaitė, 2022].

In summary, gender inequality is a complex issue that cuts across different spheres of society, including the economy, politics, and education. One of its most striking forms is the gender income gap, which stands at 13%. Women are less likely to hold managerial positions and more likely to choose lower-paid jobs. In politics, they are still under-represented, although some countries are introducing quotas to change this. Gender inequality also manifests itself in violence and discrimination, as many women experience domestic violence. Girls are more likely to perform better in education, but still face restrictions on their professional opportunities. In Lithuania, traditional gender roles remain a significant factor of inequality. International law does not explicitly provide for all protections against discrimination, but a broader interpretation of these protections allows for the inclusion of protection of gender identity. Achieving true gender equality requires changes in legal, social, and economic structures.

2. Drivers of the gender pay gap and wage differentials in Lithuania and Poland

Gender inequalities are already emerging in the job search. Women's unemployment spells are often longer than men's. When they lose hope of finding a job, they decide to move from being unemployed to being a housewife. Meanwhile, most unemployed men return to the labour market sooner, while a significant number of women who have been pushed out of the labour market are no longer permanently unemployed. This reflects the problem of gender discrimination, which extends beyond job opportunities to wage distribution and is the result of societal factors.

The gender pay gap is closely linked to the distribution of women's wages by economic activity, occupation, education, age, and length of service. Although not all differences observed are due to discrimination, many studies across countries show that discrimination against women in the labour market does exist (Official Statistics Portal, 2022). The income gap between men and women still exists in Lithuania, but it has narrowed slightly in recent years. In 2025, the rate is 12.9%, compared to 13.5% a year earlier (Sodra, 2025). Although the gap may be narrowing, the problem of discrimination against women, especially in the labour market, is still

a society-wide problem that needs to be looked at carefully from different angles and to identify gaps.

Differences in the average job characteristics of men and women can explain the pay gap. These differences are due to a variety of factors, such as gender-dominated economic activities or occupations. When one gender is concentrated in specific sectors, this is called "sectoral gender segregation", and when it is concentrated in certain occupations, it is called "occupational gender segregation". The gender pay gap is due to sectoral segregation, with women more likely to work in lower-paid sectors and men more likely to reach managerial positions because they are more likely to be promoted by their employers. Similarly, occupational gender segregation contributes to the income gap - certain female-dominated occupations are often less well paid. This phenomenon is associated with the term "glass ceiling", which describes the invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing beyond a certain level in the organisational hierarchy. This barrier stems from societal stereotypes of femininity and masculinity [Leythienne and Perez-Julian, 2021].

Professions are still clearly divided by gender. The income disparity between men and women is influenced by the fields in which they work. It is often observed that women are more concentrated in the social, education and healthcare sectors, where salaries are generally lower than in male-dominated sectors such as technology or engineering. Meanwhile, women work mainly in the service sector and in administrative roles, where wages are often lower than in managerial or technical positions [Sodra, 2025]. The pay gap also becomes more pronounced with age and length of service, which is 34 years in 2025. Women are still more likely to take career breaks for family reasons, resulting in shorter average length of service and slower career growth. These factors create a systemic wage gap between men and women, driven not only by occupational choices but also by structural labour-market and social norms [Sodra, 2025].

Educational attainment also affects female unemployment. On the one hand, this means that women with higher and tertiary education are unable to pursue their careers in the fields where they are most comfortable. On the other hand, it means that human resources are being used irrationally. Although women are more likely to hold university degrees, their representation in top management positions remains limited. In this case, a trend is emerging in which women are choosing jobs that do not align with their qualifications and education. Women are much more likely than men to take any job to contribute to the family budget because they cannot wait for an offer that matches their education. The double phenomenon of women's dual responsibility at work and at home is also present [European Parliament, 2025].

Housework, recreation, family traditions, raising children and caring for grandparents or other adult family members are often women's responsibilities. These additional responsibilities make it harder for them to gain a foothold in the labour market, advance in their careers, take on management positions, and achieve higher pay.

In Poland, as in many other European countries, the gender pay gap remains significant. The most considerable wage gaps are in the finance, insurance, and information and communication sectors, where men's salaries are significantly higher, even though women have similar levels of education or work experience [Poland Insight, 2024]. Sectoral and occupational gender segregation is one of the leading causes. Women are more likely to work in lower-paid sectors such as education, healthcare, and administration. At the same time, men are more likely to work in higher-paying sectors such as technology and engineering [Poland Insight, 2025]. According to Statistics Poland, in 2024, women in Poland will earn, on average, 7.8% less than men. Although the gap is lower than the European Union average of around 13%, according to Eurostat, the problem persists in all economic areas [European Parliament, 2025].

Another important factor may be the length of working hours and the nature of the contracts. Women in Poland are more likely to work part-time or on temporary contracts, which results in lower annual incomes, and wage differentials tend to be higher in the private sector than in the public sector [GUS, 2021]. Social research on the impact of parenthood on labour market outcomes also points to what is now known as the "motherhood effect", whereby women's earnings may fall by around 20% after the birth of a child. At the same time, men's wages often even increase as employers perceive them to be more stable workers [Waszkiewicz and Bogusz, 2024]. The overall pay gap in Poland is among the lowest in the EU, but the "adjusted" pay gap, which accounts for factors such as education, experience, and position, can be as high as 14%-24%, especially for higher-level positions [Poland Insight, 2024]. This shows that formal equality in the labour market has not yet been achieved and that the so-called "glass ceiling" continues to limit women's career opportunities. However, Poland has laws prohibiting gender discrimination in pay, but there is still a lack of transparency. To reduce this gap, the country is preparing to implement the EU Pay Transparency Directive, which will oblige employers to provide clearer information on pay structures and ensure equal pay for the same or equivalent work [Payanalytics, 2025].

Eurostat data for 2025, based on a four-year time horizon in euro, show that significant gender pay gaps persist in Lithuania and Poland (Figure 1).

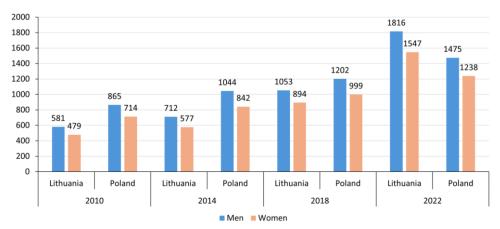


Fig. 1. Average wages for men and women in Lithuania and Poland in 2010-2022 in euro Source: [Eurostat, 2025].

An analysis of wage dynamics between men and women in Lithuania and Poland over the period 2010-2022 clearly shows a consistent gender gap in both countries. In all the years examined, men's wages were higher than women's, but the rate of income growth differed. In Lithuania, over the past 12 years, men's wages have risen from €581 to €1,816, while women's have increased from €479 to €1,547. The absolute income gap between the sexes more than doubled from €102 in 2010 to €135 in 2014, €159 in 2018 and will rise to €269 in 2022, a 2.6-fold increase. Poland has also seen a widening of the wage gap, but more gradually. The income gap between men and women has increased by 1.6 times, from €151 in 2010 to €202 in 2014, €203 in 2018, and €237 in 2022. Looking at 2022 separately, the average monthly wage for men in Lithuania was €1,816 and for women €1,547, a difference of €269, indicating that women earned less than men. However, in Poland, the average salary for men was $\in 1,475$ (about 6262.48 złoty) and for women $\in 1,238$ (5256.24 złoty), highlighting a gender income gap of €237, although the difference is smaller than in Lithuania. These figures show that, overall, women earned less on average than men in both countries. The overall wage gap in Lithuania and Poland has increased to €167 (from €102 to €269) and €86 (from €151 to €237) respectively, which can be attributed to differences in labour market factors, occupational choices and structural economic differences.

In Figure 2, we can see the wage gap in 2025 by age in Lithuania and Poland.

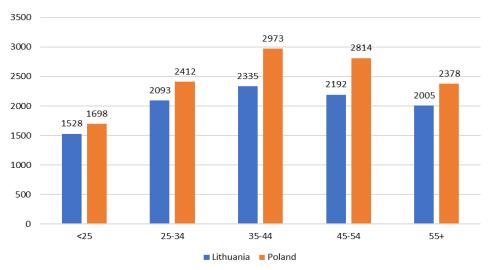


Fig. 2. Average salary in Lithuania and Poland by age in 2025 in euro Source: [Manoalga, 2025; *Pension meter*, 2025].

An analysis of average wages by age in Lithuania and Poland shows that Polish workers earn more across all age groups, with the most significant wage gap in the 35-44 age group, where the highest average wages are recorded in both countries ($\[\in \]$ 2,335 and $\[\in \]$ 2,973). The youngest group of workers, those aged 24 and under, has one of the most minor wage gaps between countries, but the gap widens consistently with age and experience. A similar trend persists in the over-55 age group, where wage levels in Poland remain higher. Correspondingly, the structure of the labour market and remuneration policies in Poland place more value on experience, so that middle-aged and older workers earn significantly more than in Lithuania.

In summary, gender inequalities are particularly pronounced in the labour market and in pay, with men and women often paid differently for the same or equivalent work. There are many reasons for the gender pay gap. Some of these may be related to education level, work experience, or part-time work. Women outnumber men in sectors with lower average wages. Another reason could be that men often have better-paid jobs in specific sectors. In Lithuania and Poland, men's salaries are on average higher than women's, reflecting the persistent gender income gap. This marked gender bias hurts the development of activities, reduces potential, leads to lower wage levels for women and, subsequently, retirement pensions, and further reinforces societal stereotypes about male and female roles in society.

3. Measures to promote pay equality

Examining the gender pay gap can help to identify appropriate measures to reduce it. For both women and men, reconciling work and family responsibilities is important to increase labour market flexibility, improve quality of life, and help them remain successful in the labour market.

To prevent or reduce the gender pay gap, employers are advised first to assess the situation in their company. If such a gap exists, it is vital to identify its causes. It is also recommended that specific measures to eliminate unjustified, discriminatory wage differentials be envisaged (see Table 1), with deadlines for their implementation, evaluation indicators, and the appointment of persons responsible for ensuring their implementation [WłączeniPlus, 2024]. It is fair to apply non-discriminatory, impartial selection criteria in recruitment and to avoid the subjective view that only a person of a particular gender can perform so-called "female" or "male" jobs properly [Strata, 2022].

1 Tab. 1. Measures to close the wage gap

Way	Resources
Legal	Transparency in payroll calculation
	Payroll audit
	Monitoring progress
	Anti-discrimination policy
Organisational	Direct wage equalisation
	Mentoring and development programmes
	Role models and leaders
Social and cultural	Family partnership policy
	Gender balance in recruitment
	Family partnership policy
	Support programmes for those returning to the labour market

Source: Compiled by the authors from [EnablePlus, 2024].

One of the most important measures to ensure equal pay for men and women is a legal framework. Transparency laws can help reduce the pay gap by obliging employers to publish gender-specific pay data. This way, employees can find out whether their salaries are fairly distributed. It is also important to ensure strict enforcement of equal-pay-for-equal-work laws. Even when legislation exists, it is often

not enforced [Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021]. Mandatory pay audits can be an effective tool - companies should periodically assess their pay policies and report on their gender pay gaps. It is also necessary to strengthen legal aid and protection for workers so that they can easily access professional assistance in cases of discrimination and effectively defend their rights [WłączeniPlus, 2024].

Socially responsible companies can actively contribute to equal opportunities. The organisational arrangements framework clearly defines pay criteria, responsibilities, and how they are to be measured. When pay decisions are transparent and based on objective criteria, there is less room for unfair practices. Organisations can implement equality programmes to help women progress to more senior positions and ensure a better gender balance in management [Strata, 2022]. It is also important for employers and HR departments to provide training on gender equality and unconscious bias, so that decisions on pay or career progression are made objectively. Mentoring and career advancement programmes will help women move up the ladder and reduce the "glass ceiling" effect.

The gender pay gap is not only caused by legal or organisational factors, but also by societal norms and stereotypes. One important aspect is facilitating the reconciliation of work and family. Flexible working hours, teleworking, and quality child-care services can help women balance work and personal life. It is also necessary to actively reduce gender stereotypes through education and information campaigns. When society perceives that certain professions or managerial positions are better suited to only one gender, this further reinforces the labour market gaps. It is therefore important to promote men's involvement in family care, for example, by sharing parental leave. This would not only help women to participate more equally in the labour market, but also change gender roles in society [WłączeniPlus, 2024].

In summary, legal obligations, transparent organisational policies and a change in public attitudes are necessary steps towards a fairer working environment. Closing the pay gap requires a wide range of actions, including internal company policies. Education, support in wage negotiations, motivating women to take up management positions, a partnership approach to parenthood, gender balance in child employment, progress monitoring, or support programmes for those returning to the labour market are just some of the measures that can help reduce the pay gap. These strategies require the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders to create a fairer workplace. Combining all these measures can help to effectively reduce the gender pay gap and promote equality in the labour market. This leads to greater gender equality, reduces poverty, and develops parts of the economy, because higher wages

raise women's purchasing power, which in turn increases tax revenue and reduces the burden on social security systems.

Conclusions

Gender inequality remains a pressing social issue affecting the economy, politics, education, and everyday life. Despite progress towards gender equality in recent decades, the gender pay gap, unequal career prospects, and women's under-representation in politics show that this problem persists. Violence and discrimination against women are also a serious challenge that requires the attention of the state, society and international organisations. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes often shape women's choices in the labour market and in education, exacerbating inequalities. To tackle this problem, a comprehensive approach is needed to promote equality, increase wage transparency, strengthen women's participation in politics, and educate the public about the importance of gender equality. Only through systemic change can we create a fairer, more equal society where everyone has equal opportunities regardless of gender.

Equality between men and women is a fundamental principle that applies across many areas of society, including employment. Gender inequality in the labour market remains a pressing issue, as men and women are often paid differently for the same work. This is influenced by education, work experience, length of working time and sectoral distribution, with women more likely to work in lower-paid sectors and men in higher-paying jobs. This perception is a significant obstacle to new implementations and adds to society's entrenched stereotypes about gender roles. Over the period 2010-2022, the gender income gap in Lithuania increased faster than in Poland. In Lithuania, it was €102 in 2010, rising to €269 in 2022, an increase of 2.6 times. In Poland, the income gap between men and women has increased from €151 in 2010 to €237 in 2022, a 1.6-fold increase. Overall, the income gap between men and women in Lithuania has increased by €167 over 12 years, compared to €86 in Poland. Despite overall income growth, gender pay inequality has increased more in Lithuania. In Lithuania and Poland, the gender pay gap remains significant, indicating that women earn less than men, further reinforcing gender inequalities in the labour market. The Polish labour market offers more competitive salaries for experienced workers than the Lithuanian labour market does. Polish workers earn more across all breakdowns, with the most significant difference in the 35-44 age group.

The gender pay gap remains a pressing problem, despite various efforts to reduce it. Gender equality in the labour market is promoted through specific strategies and programmes, legal frameworks, research, and the sharing of good practice. However,

these measures are not yet having the desired effect — the pay gap is not only persisting but, in some places, even widening. Promoting women's entrepreneurship, work-family balance, public education, and employer financial incentives could improve this situation. But fundamental change will only come when both society and employers realise that stereotypical attitudes towards gender in employment are not only undesirable but harmful, and that women and men are treated as equal workers.

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Luka płacowa ze względu na płeć na Litwie i w Polsce

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie szczegółowej analizy luki płacowej ze względu na płeć na Litwie i w Polsce. Nierówność płci nadal stanowi istotny problem na całym świecie, zwłaszcza na rynku pracy, w polityce oraz w strukturach społecznych. Kobiety wciąż zarabiają średnio o 13% mniej niż mężczyźni, co wynika z segregacji zawodowej, mniejszych możliwości rozwoju kariery oraz obowiązków rodzinnych, które ograniczają awans zawodowy. Są one również znacząco niedoreprezentowane na stanowiskach kierowniczych oraz w polityce, co ogranicza ich wpływ na procesy decyzyjne. Ponadto jedna na trzy kobiety na świecie doświadcza przemocy ze względu na płeć, co podkreśla pilną potrzebę reform społecznych i prawnych. Luka płacowa ze względu na płeć pozostaje trwałym problemem zarówno w Polsce, jak i na Litwie. Kobiety częściej pracują w sektorach gorzej wynagradzanych, takich jak edukacja i ochrona zdrowia, podczas gdy mężczyźni dominują w sektorach lepiej opłacanych, takich jak technologie i finanse.

Słowa kluczowe

luka płacowa ze względu na płeć, nierówności na rynku pracy, wynagrodzenia