

GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE GLOBAL LABOR MARKET: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Eveny CIURLEO, PhD in Economics,
University of Calabria, Italy

E-mail: eveny.ciurleo@unical.it

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1448-1591>

Alba Maria GALLO, PhD in AI sector,
Giustino Fortunato University, Italy

E-mail: a.gallo2@unifortunato.eu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1987-5252>

Ubaldo COMITE, PhD in Economics, Full Professor,
Giustino Fortunato University, Italy

E-mail: u.comite@unifortunato.eu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9801-9601>

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Abstract. *Gender inequalities in the global labor market continue to pose a significant challenge, despite progress made in several areas. This systematic literature review examines the factors that perpetuate gender inequalities, with a particular focus on the interaction between welfare policies, labor dynamics, and women's economic participation. Through a rigorous analysis of 20 articles selected from leading academic databases such as Scopus and Web of Science, the study explores various aspects of gender inequalities, including wage inequality, occupational segregation, and limited access to career opportunities. The findings indicate that, in many countries, labor market reforms and economic policies fail to significantly improve women's working conditions, sometimes exacerbating inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accentuated these issues, highlighting the precariousness of women's work and the growing inequalities caused by neoliberal regimes. Welfare policies, although designed to promote equality, often fail to address gender needs and contribute to unequal economic distribution. The implications of this study highlight the need for policy reforms that address the deep roots of gender inequality and promote a more inclusive and inclusive workplace. We need an integrated approach that considers not only equality, but also the intervention of other areas of social and economic inequality to build a sustainable society.*

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Introduction. Gender inequalities are a central and complex issue in the global labor market landscape. Despite progress in many areas, gender inequalities

persist, manifesting themselves in different forms such as wage inequality, occupational segregation, limited access to career opportunities, and work-life balance challenges. Labor market dynamics are closely intertwined with welfare policies, which can act both as tools to mitigate inequalities and, paradoxically, as factors that perpetuate them. In this context, understanding the intersections between public policies, gender dynamics, and economic participation is crucial to design effective strategies to intervene and promote equality.

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to explore the landscape of gender inequalities in the context of the global labor market, with a special focus on the factors that influence these disparities and the policies that can be implemented to address them. Using a rigorous selection and analysis methodology, 20 articles selected from leading research databases such as Scopus and Web of Science were reviewed. The included studies focus on various aspects of gender inequalities, including wage inequality, occupational segregation, welfare policies, the impact of economic crises, and family and caregiving dynamics.

The results of this SLR highlight how labor market reforms and economic policies in many countries, especially in developing ones, fail to significantly improve women's working conditions, maintaining or even exacerbating gender inequalities. In Europe, despite a reduction in gender inequalities in pensions since 2011, women continue to earn less than men, even when differences in career strategies are considered. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated gender inequalities, highlighting precariousness and the growing inequalities created by neoliberal regimes.

The aim of this review is to provide an overview of current research on gender differences in the labor market and highlight gaps in current policies and ways for future updates. We highlight the need for policies that not only promote equality, but also consider gender relations and more.

Research methodology. To conduct this systematic literature review (SLR) related to gender differences, social well-being and employment policies, we used a rigorous and multidisciplinary approach conducted in important part. The process began with an in-depth search of two major knowledge databases, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), and concluded with the use of My SLR software to directly compile and analyze the results. Initially, Scopus searches were performed using a selected set of keywords to retrieve relevant studies. We used words such as “gender,” “policy,” “welfare,” “work” and “inequalities” in the article title, abstract, and keywords. In this section there are two separate sets of questions designed to explore different aspects of gender differences. The first study focused on the relationship between gender differences and welfare policies, while the second broadened the scope to include the interaction between gender and work dynamics. Through this process, 12 relevant articles were identified and selected based on their relevance to the established inclusion criteria.

We have also recently been working on the Web of Science (WoS), another major database of academic articles. Again, we used a range of keywords such as “gender”, “welfare”, “work” and “inequality”, to ensure that the results included

studies that covered the main points of our analysis. The WoS search returned a total of 34 articles selected for their contributions to the fields of business economics, public policy and gender studies. After collecting an initial set of 46 articles from two databases, we used screening criteria to evaluate the relevance and quality of the studies.



Figure 2. Sources
Source: mySLR

The screening process was carried out in two stages: the first stage consisted of checking titles and abstracts to quickly identify irrelevant articles; the second stage consisted of screening all remaining research articles. This approach eliminated 19 articles that did not fully meet the inclusion criteria, and a total of 20 articles were selected for the final stage.



Figure 3. Paper selection
Source: mySLR

To ensure a systematic and consistent analysis of the results, we used My SLR software. This tool facilitated the preparation of selected articles, which allowed a critical evaluation of the evidence, and methods used in the different studies. Furthermore, mySLR helped generate a "word cloud" showing the most common new topics such as "women", "gender", "work", "politics" and "life" and to explore the meaning of these topics in literature. This methodological approach has allowed us to create a comprehensive and in-depth review of current research on gender differences, which contributes significantly to the understanding of welfare policies and work motivation currently.

participation in the labor market can lead to greater equality in economic opportunities (Barneveld et al., 2021), suggesting that policies aimed at increasing women's inclusion in the labor market could have positive effects on reducing gender segregation.

Climate change, such as changes in precipitation, can significantly influence migration decisions in Vietnam, such that women are less likely to migrate in response to climate shocks, thus maintaining gender differences (Luong, Nguyen, Truong, & Le, 2021). It shows how climate change affects genetic diversity and highlights current vulnerabilities.

The use of paternity leave by mothers' partners is found to be a positive factor for female entrepreneurship in Sweden (Naldi, Baù, Ahl, & Markowska, 2022), highlighting how family support and leave policies influence women's career choices. In a European context, tax and benefit systems contribute to the reduction of gender income gaps, but differences in career strategies between men and women continue to produce significant wage gaps, even in the early stages of the career (Doorley & Keane, 2017; Gronlund, 2015).

Gender constructions influence retirement investment strategies in the UK, with men tending to adopt riskier strategies than women (James & Agunsoye, 2023), and migrant mothers' experiences are often problematically represented in official Swedish discourses, perpetuating stereotypes and social barriers (de los Reyes, 2022).

Part-time female workers show lower levels of health and well-being than their male colleagues during economic crises (Merino-Llorente & Arechavala, 2020), and single parents, both mothers and fathers, are often disadvantaged compared to parents in couples in terms of socioeconomic conditions and health (Lanza-León & Cantarero-Prieto, 2019). The redistribution of public income in Scandinavian countries shows that in-kind and cash transfers have different but complementary redistributive effects (Arendt & Christensen, 2024).

Finally, analysis shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified and exacerbated the growth of inequality caused by neoliberal policies, highlighting the need for strategies to create just and sustainable societies (Barneveld et al., 2021). Societies characterized by strong masculinity and/or low individualism tend to strengthen the relationship between public spending on child care and women's risk of becoming entrepreneurs (Gimenez-Jimenez, Calabrò, & Urbano, 2020), indicating that informal businesses can reduce gender gaps.

Main results. The results of this systematic literature review provide important insights to better understand how gender differences are linked to welfare policies and labor market dynamics. It is clear that there are many areas that need to change to promote greater equality and inclusion.

One of the most evident results is the need to reform welfare policies to better manage gender inequalities. Although many countries, particularly OECD member countries, have implemented work-family policies, these policies are not sufficient to reduce gender gaps in the labor market. This suggests that current policies are too broad or poorly designed and do not take into account the unique aspects of

women's and men's work and family experiences. For example, policies that promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities between men and women could help balance economic and employment opportunities. Furthermore, it would be useful to develop programs that facilitate women's reintegration into the workforce after periods of absence related to motherhood, thus ensuring that their careers are not irreparably interrupted.

The issue of pensions emerges as another crucial aspect. The findings indicate that mothers face significant challenges in pension systems, such as the Spanish one, where career breaks related to motherhood are not adequately compensated. This not only contributes to perpetuating gender inequalities in pensions, but also highlights a broader problem of how care work, often unpaid, is undervalued or ignored in social policies. It is therefore clear that pension systems need to be reformed to recognize and enhance women's contribution to care and to adequately compensate for these periods of absence from the labor market. These reforms will help achieve greater equality and fairness for all and reduce economic disparities that persist into old age. Working conditions, particularly for women in sectors such as the international garment industry, are another factor to consider. Despite commitments to stability and gender equality, many women continue to work in precarious conditions. This highlights a disconnect between announced policies and actual practice, emphasizing the need for more effective changes. It is crucial that sector-specific policies not only promote good working practices but also implement and monitor them. Organizations and authorities must collaborate to create workplaces where women have the opportunity to advance and are afforded the same status and respect as men.

Furthermore, your research shows that increased participation of women in the labor market reduces the economic gender gap. This is a significant finding because it demonstrates that improving gender equality requires motivating women at all levels of the labor market, including decision-making and leadership roles. Policies supporting female entrepreneurship, such as those observed in Sweden with maternity leave, show positive results in reducing the gender gap. This suggests that governments should consider similar measures to promote work-life balance and foster a culture that supports women's economic empowerment.

Another interesting aspect discussed in this study is the effect of climate change on gender differences. For example, women in Vietnam are less likely to respond to climate shocks, and gender disparities persist. This suggests that climate policies should take into account gender differences in vulnerabilities and response capacities. It is important that climate adaptation strategies also consider the specific needs and constraints of women to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for strategies to build fair and sustainable societies. Gender disparities have worsened during the health crisis, reflecting the weaknesses of existing social and economic systems. This suggests that a more integrated approach is needed to address inequality, one that goes beyond temporary measures and considers long-term structural changes to ensure true equality.

In summary, the prepared work is a collection of important insights and provides concrete directions for future policy and social reforms. The path toward equality requires a sustainable and multifaceted approach capable of addressing the deep-rooted causes of inequality and promoting real and lasting change in society.

Discussion and conclusions. The systematic literature review (SLR) conducted in this study reveals several critical insights into the persistent gender inequalities in the global labor market and highlights the multifaceted nature of these disparities. The findings underscore the complex interplay between welfare policies, labor market dynamics, and gender-specific economic participation. Despite numerous policies aimed at promoting gender equality, the results suggest that existing frameworks often fall short of addressing the root causes of inequality. This disconnect between policy intentions and actual outcomes is evident across various sectors, particularly in industries such as global apparel, where women continue to face precarious working conditions despite public commitments to stability and equality.

A key discussion point arising from the SLR is the inadequacy of welfare policies in effectively mitigating gender inequalities. While many countries, particularly within the OECD, have implemented family-friendly policies, these measures often do not sufficiently account for the diverse experiences and needs of women and men in both professional and domestic spheres. For instance, policies that fail to adequately support women's return to the workforce post-maternity or that do not equitably distribute caregiving responsibilities between genders can inadvertently reinforce traditional gender roles and economic disparities. The findings suggest a need for more targeted and nuanced policy interventions that recognize and address the unique challenges faced by women in the labor market.

The impact of economic crises and external shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, further exacerbates these gender disparities. The pandemic has not only highlighted the precariousness of many women's employment situations but also intensified existing inequalities under neoliberal economic frameworks. This calls for a re-evaluation of current economic policies and labor market reforms to better support gender equality, especially in times of crisis. Additionally, the research points to the need for greater inclusion of gender considerations in climate policy. The example of women's lower likelihood of migrating in response to climate shocks in Vietnam illustrates how gender-specific vulnerabilities must be addressed to ensure comprehensive and inclusive climate adaptation strategies.

Moreover, the promotion of female entrepreneurship and leadership roles emerges as a promising avenue to reduce the gender economic gap. Policies like Sweden's maternity leave for fathers demonstrate the potential benefits of shared caregiving responsibilities in fostering women's economic empowerment and reducing gender disparities in the labor market. Such initiatives could serve as models for other countries aiming to balance work and life responsibilities while promoting a more inclusive workforce.

In conclusion, this systematic literature review provides a comprehensive overview of current research on gender inequalities in the global labor market,

highlighting both the progress made and the significant gaps that remain. The study demonstrates that while there have been strides toward gender equality, significant structural barriers continue to perpetuate inequalities. Effective policy reform requires a multifaceted and integrated approach that addresses the deep-rooted causes of gender disparities, including unequal caregiving responsibilities, inadequate support for women's career progression, and insufficient attention to gender-specific vulnerabilities in times of crisis.

To foster real and lasting change, policymakers must move beyond generic and often ineffective measures and develop targeted interventions that account for the complex realities of women's lives. This includes creating supportive environments for women's entrepreneurship, ensuring equitable distribution of caregiving duties, and integrating gender considerations into all aspects of social and economic policy. Additionally, the unique impacts of external shocks, such as economic crises and climate change, on gender inequalities should be a central consideration in future policy development.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality in the labor market requires sustained commitment and innovative approaches that not only address existing disparities but also create opportunities for all individuals to thrive equally. This study lays the groundwork for future research and policy-making efforts aimed at building a more equitable and inclusive society, where gender no longer dictates economic outcomes.

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