

GENDER PAY GAP IN ALBANIA: SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

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Abstract

The gender pay gap or gender gap is a relative disparity between women and men which is reflected in a variety of sectors in many societies. This difference exists in many countries and industries and is often related to factors such as occupational segregation, and differences in education and experience. The gender gap must also be considered in the context of gender inequality. The focus of this paper is to analyse the gender pay gap and gender inequality in participation in the labour market in Albanian society. Albanian society is committed to and has made significant progress towards gender equality policies. However, the gender gap is still present. The paper aims to analyse and interpret indicators of the Albanian gender pay gap in the context of culture of gender roles. Cultural values and socio-cultural conditions of one's society significantly impact the gender gap. The paper will highlight the sources of the gender gap in Albania as cultural and socio-economic. Understanding the gender inequality in Albanian society requires a complex analysis that examines the impact of socialisation, cultural norms and values, the division of gender roles, access to public life and the social privileges that gendering creates asymmetrically for men and women.

Keywords: *gender pay gap, horizontal gender segregation, gender roles, labour market*

1. Introduction

The gender pay gap is defined as the difference in average incomes between men and women in the labour force, and it is typically stated as a percentage of men's income. This disparity exists in many nations and industries and is frequently linked to variables such as occupational segregation, discrimination, and differences in education and experience. Equal pay for equal labour, and hence the elimination of the gender pay gap, is a critical aim for advancing gender equality and economic justice.

Since gender equality is crucial to the sustainable development of societies, facilitating progress towards gender equality is a key component of the Western Balkans' European Union (EU) membership agenda. Thus, promotion of gender equality has become a focal issue for international organisations and policymakers. The analysis of women's participation in the labour market is fundamental to understanding the gender patterns of Albanian society when it is obvious that women's work is diverse and complex.

During the communist period in Albanian society, special efforts were made to increase women's participation in the labour market, challenging traditional gender roles. Regardless, women remained responsible for domestic care and reproduction even though they, like men, were included in paid work in various sectors, including many technical occupations. In post-socialist Albania, traditional gender roles and gendered division of the professions are still evident, with women once again being charged with unpaid work and domestic duties. During the early phases of Albania's transition to a free market economy, women withdrew from the labour market, leading to the polarisation of gender roles. The destruction of state economic units at the beginning of the Albanian transition brought high unemployment rates to the country. While men attempted to develop the first private enterprises, women remained responsible for household chores.

In addition to the efforts for political and socio-economic progress in Albania, significant progress has been made in improving the well-being of women and girls. The Albanian transition, large-scale migration, and the socio-economic development of the country have influenced the narrowing of the gender gap over the years. Despite this, gender inequalities continue to persist in Albania. Wage differentials favouring men remain. Currently, Albanian women face many challenges and obstacles to being included in the labour market and continue to bear the multiple burdens of traditional gender roles and norms that favour men and put women in subordinate roles. Cultural norms are a partial source of gender inequality in that gendered norms create a normalised culture of male dominance and female obedience, contributing to gender disparities across different aspects of society (Breger, 2014; Nartey et al. 2023). While Albania has adopted international regulations and developed new national rules to allow women to have the same access to the labour market as men, there are still many challenges related to women's participation in the labour market, including horizontal segregation and pay inequality. There are two types of pay discrimination: The first type occurs when a different salary is given for the

same job; the second type of discrimination occurs when jobs that are different in content but of equal value, receive different pay (ILO 2006). Both types of discrimination are contrary to the principle of the Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), according to which people should receive 'equal pay for work of equal value' (ILO, 1998).

As a result, based on the assessment that gender equality and empowerment are related to equal valuing of paid work, knowledge, and decision-making power, this paper will analyse the gender pay gap and the obstacles faced by women attempting to enter the Albanian labour market, based on the assumption that the gender pay gap in Albania is more of a cultural and social issue than a legal issue.

This paper includes an analysis the gender gap in Albania, based on data from various international sources, ILO, EIGE, OEC, Eurostat, and UNDP, as well as national sources INSTAT. Legal documents and statistical data from international reports were reviewed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis and interpretations. Indicators have been interpreted through the lens of Albanian cultural patterns with the intention of pointing out the impact of cultural values and socio-cultural conditions on the gender gap in Albania.

In Albania, there is a lack of studies on the socio-cultural aspects of the gender gap. Most studies focus on structural factors and the impact of the gender gap. A holistic understanding of the problem is needed to address the issues of gender equality. This study may contribute to understanding the social and cultural aspects of the gender pay gap in Albania which may lead to further research in the future. Addressing the problem of the gender gap requires the implementing of integrated, sustainable and multidimensional policies to bring fundamental change to the problem. To address issues of the gender gap, educators, parents, specialists, and other stakeholders in education must be aware of its causes, implications, and potential solutions.

2. The gender pay gap and gender segregation

The gender pay gap has been the focus of discourse among economists, lawyers, experts on equal rights, researchers, and sociologists. Asa Löffström (1999) points out that the doctrine of equal pay applies not only to a specific job that is the same whether done by a man or a woman (equal pay for equal labour) but also to those types of work or employment that are not the same but are judged to be of equal value. The gender pay gap debate has grown significantly in recent days. The gender pay gap has been reduced in some countries, while there has been little change in others. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO 2019), women are still paid around 20% less than men globally. The average gender pay gap is one indicator that is frequently used to measure the extent of women's disadvantage in the labour market. This gap is calculated as the female-to-male average earnings ratio in a given labour market. This ratio varies by country, period studied, characteristics of the groups concerned, and the definition of the earnings variable used (ILO 2006). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD) states that the gender pay gap is the difference in earnings between men and women as a percentage of men's earnings. The gender pay gap may also be presented as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women expressed as a percentage of men's average gross hourly earnings. These definitions emphasise the inequality in pay between men and women. The gender pay gap has generated debate among economists and sociologists discussing the factors that may contribute to this inequality. Arguments focus on whether gender, education, labour participation, skills, or other variables contribute to pay disparities between men and women. Researchers have introduced three theoretical perspectives concerning women's participation in the labour market that affect the gender pay gap:

First, the gender role theory supports the idea that women and men are socialised into different social roles, presenting different features which determine different labour market statuses of women and men.

The second, human capital theory, highlights the idea that individuals make choices that maximise their benefits. According to this perspective, women are more likely to choose certain jobs that may fit or align with their roles as mothers.

Third, the socio-structural perspective explains that women's labour market participation in male-dominated jobs is limited due to social and structural barriers such as the job application process, discrimination, and family responsibilities.

In practice, inequalities in the opportunity to enter the labour market appear in two forms: Horizontal segregation is understood as men's and women's tendency to perform different jobs, and vertical gender segregation means the tendency for men and women to be employed in different positions within the same occupation or group of occupations; for example, most school principals may be men, while most teaching staff are women (Anker, 1997; Blackburn et al., 2014; Gedikli, 2020). In other words, the gender distribution in occupations is usually done in two dimensions of separation: vertical segregation, where men and women are grouped into different occupations according to a hierarchical division, and horizontal segregation, referring to a division in the occupational hierarchy that is based on differences in occupational characteristics and attributes between jobs held by men and women.

3. Sociological, psychological, and legal considerations

The factors that impact the gender pay gap and gender horizontal and vertical segregation have been the focus of sociological and legal interpretations. Gender stereotypes impact the educational and professional choices of women. Studies show that boys have better self-esteem and self-efficacy in mathematics than girls, even when performing the same (Catsambis, 1994; Tiedemann, 2000; Else-Quest et al., 2013; Zander et. al., 2020). People implicitly associate men with scientific occupations, although the intensity of these stereotypes is lower in countries with a larger representation of women in STEM, Science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Stereotypes interact with the norms

of self-expression, causing women to be oriented towards jobs that require verbal skills rather than numerical skills. Due to the employment structure, post-industrial societies with high economic development are characterised by horizontal segregation, with women underrepresented in jobs which require numerical skills and overrepresented in jobs with verbal skills requirements. From a psychological perspective, one's cognitive abilities, sense of self-efficacy, and interests can guide one's career choice, as suggested in social cognitive career theory. Previous studies have found gender differences in cognitive abilities, with men having a slight advantage in complex math and visuospatial tasks, while girls outperform boys in verbal skills and episodic memory (Jorm et al., 2004; Ardila et al., 2011). Dekhtyar et al. (2018) claim that gender differences in academic performance, which largely reflect gender differences in cognitive abilities, appear to have a long-term impact on individual life outcomes by influencing the career choices of women and men. While gender segregation occurs as a result of the combination of many individual and environmental factors, it is not static and varies throughout time. Since the 1960s, most industrialised labour markets have trended towards gender desegregation. The degree of desegregation is unevenly distributed among occupations, showing a tendency towards stagnation in recent years and reflecting similar patterns as gender segregation in education (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006).

From a legal point of view, every human right possessed by an individual will be respected by the state. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines "recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world." Regarding this, disrespecting the dignity of an individual can be related to the concept of disrespecting a woman and her wage. It can be argued that the gender pay gap undermines a person's intrinsic value or the inherent worth of human beings who enjoy the right to be respected. Emmanuel Kant (*Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1998) treated dignity as a metaphysical notion that originates from human reason. It is an innate worth or status that makes humans worthy of respect. For Kant, each person is capable of reasoning, so all persons, regardless of rank or social class, have an equal intrinsic worth or dignity. This means that it is not moral to treat people simply as a means to an end. The modern theory of human rights is inspired by the concept of human dignity proposed by Kant; therefore, we often find a Kantian reflection in the current discourse of human rights. Moreover, the theory of socialisation according to gender roles, the theory of human capital, and the socio-structural perspective reflect the difficulties women face in entering the labour market, which causes a gender pay gap. Furthermore, the notion of dignity is linked to the gender pay gap, which indicates that the existence of the gender pay gap demonstrates a disregard for the innate value of individuals, respectively women, and hence the concept of personal dignity. The notion of dignity underlies the preambles of the International Covenant on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which provide the basis for a just, fair, and progressive world.

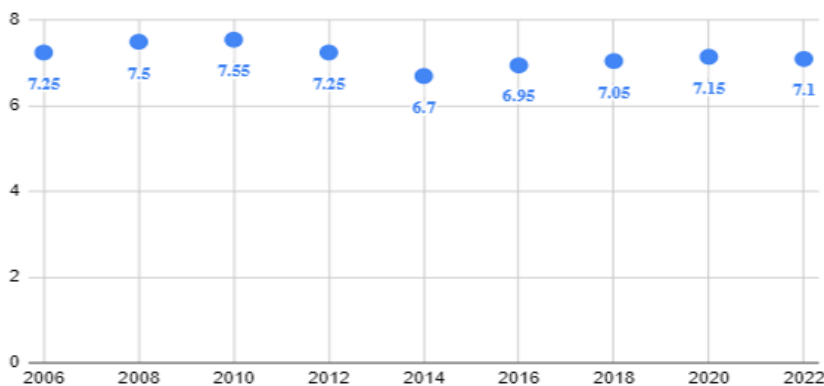
Despite the commitment of states and progress in gender equality, entrenched gender segregation in education, training, and the labour market remains a reality for women and men in EU countries. The report of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE 2017) stated that STEM fields and education, health, and welfare (EHW) were the most gender-segregated areas in the education system and subsequently in employment (2017: 64). Gender segregation is mostly influenced by stereotypes, social norms, and cultural practices, which deter women and men from choosing and remaining in professions traditionally dominated by one gender.

From a macrosocial point of view, political and socio-economic transformation processes affect the quality of democracy in a country and, as a result, the measures taken to strengthen gender equality in a country. There is a positive association between the quality of democracy in the country and closing the social, economic, and political gender gap. There is a difference between developed and developing countries in this aspect. Gender equality increases with increased democratic quality in more established democracies (Piccone 2017).

Countries at lower and middle levels of democratic quality likely do not provide enough civic space or possibilities for engagement for the mutually reinforcing mechanism between democracy and gender equality to work.

Regarding the state of democracy in Albania, we refer to the BTI Transformation Index, which analyses and evaluates how developing countries are moving towards social changes to improve democracy and the market economy. Three dynamic cases of democratic reform, socio-economic development, and successful political steering, the BTI Index 2022 assesses Albanian democracy as a flawed democracy, evaluated with 7.1 points out of 10 maximum points (Figure 1).

Figure 1: State of Democracy in Albania 2006- 2022, BTI transformation index



Source: BTI transformation index

According to the BTI index, Albania is performing poorly in its aspirations to become a state which generally acknowledges the rule of law. Albania receives

5.5 out of a possible 10 points for this standard. The second indication of democracy judged as poorest in the BTI index is the country's stability of democratic institutions, with 6.5 points. Political and social integration is the third standard that is considered the poorest in terms of the degree of democracy in the country, specifically 6.8 points out of 10. Democracy and gender equality are interlinked, with higher levels of liberal democracy being necessary for higher levels of gender equality.

The legal framework for promoting legal equality in Albania has been considerably improved by ratifying a series of important international documents and other amendments.

Albania has ratified several of these international conventions, including the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the European Convention on Human Rights. It has also approved many human rights documents and strategy plans, including the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021- 2023, the Eradication of Gender-Based and Domestic Violence, and the Action Plan for Women Entrepreneurs. Many national legislative changes in the field of gender equality have been made from 1995 until 2019. However, gender inequities still exist.

4. Women and the labour market in Albania- Gender gap indicators

According to the ILO, there is a significant heterogeneity in how countries define and measure employment status, especially among self-employed workers and unpaid family members. Data obtained from surveys of economic units only includes information about employees; unpaid family members in family businesses are not included. Regarding this, the share of employment in the agricultural sector is greatly underreported. Analysing the labour market in Albania from a gender perspective, females are 1.8 times more likely than males to be contributing family workers. The labour force participation rate for the population aged 15–64 years old is 66.8%. For the male population aged 15–64, the labour force participation rate is 18.1 percentage points higher than for females at 84.0% (INSTAT 2018: 6-7). Table 1 shows the percentage of participation in the labour market by gender over the years.

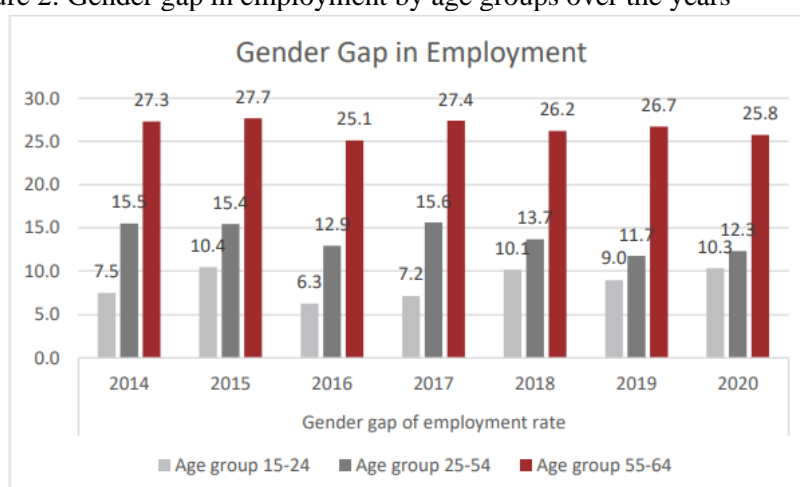
Table 1: Labour market participation rate, Albania 2014- 2022 (%)

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Labour Market Participation Rate	Men	0,64	0,64	0,65	0,67	0,68	0,68	0,67	0,67	0,68
	Women	0,44	0,47	0,50	0,50	0,51	0,53	0,52	0,53	0,57

Source: INSTAT 2023

Labour market participation rates demonstrate the willingness of individuals to participate in the labour market, as well as their perception of employment opportunities. As shown in the table, there has been an increase in participation in the labour market by women over the years, but still, it remains low compared to men. In Albania, women have a lower employment rate than men, despite the recent increase in their participation in the labour market. Figure 2 shows the gender gap in employment by age group over the years. The highest gender gap in employment includes the 55–64 age group, while the lowest is among the younger population group (age 15–24). There has been no significant change in the gender gap in the employment rate in Albania over the years. Despite the measures and policies towards gender equality, the gender gap remains almost the same (Figure 2).

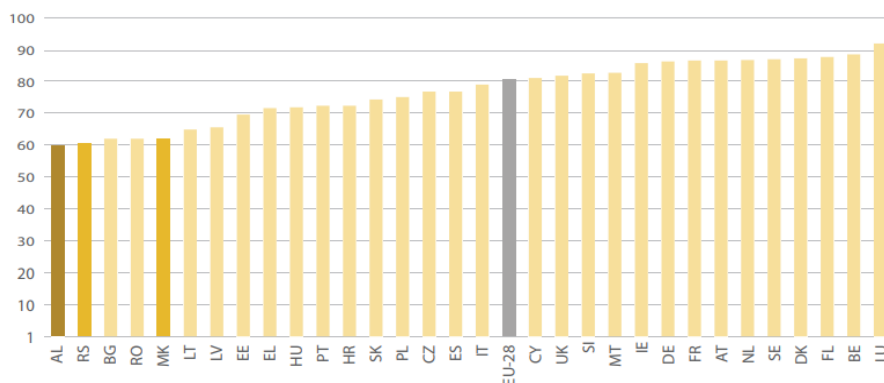
Figure 2: Gender gap in employment by age groups over the years



Source: INSTAT 2021

The Albanian labour market shows larger inequities between men and women compared to the EU-28. Women have lower labour force participation and employment rates, as well as greater unemployment rates, due to domestic duties. The index for the domain of work in Albania is 67.6 and is lower than the average for EU-28 by 4.4 points. In the subdomain of segregation and quality of work, the index shows higher employment of women than men in the social sectors of education, human health, and social work. According to labour force survey data, in 2018, 13.8% of employed women and only 3.9% of employed men were employed in these sectors. This situation is similar to that in EU countries, with 30% of women employed in these sectors and 8.3% of men employed in the same sectors (Gender Equality Index Albania, 2020:11). Regarding the gender equality index for the domain of money, the index score for Albania is 59.6 points, which is lower than the EU-28 average of 20.8 points (Figure 3).

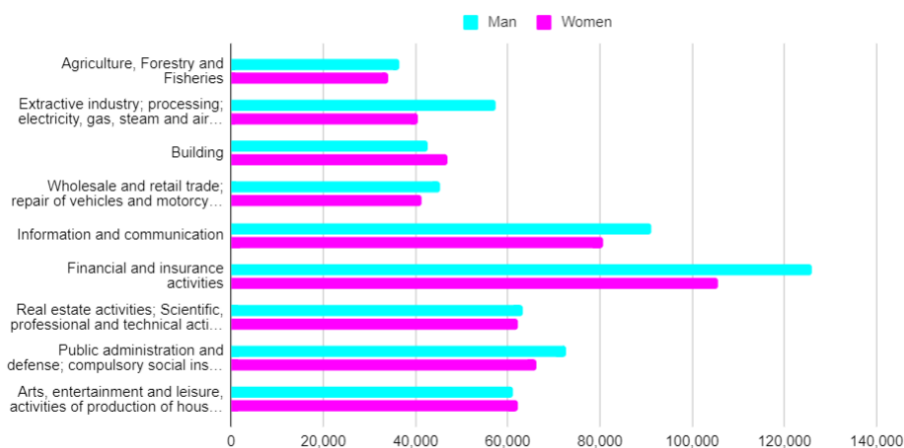
Figure 3: Gender Equality Index in the domain of money, Republic of Albania 2017, EU-28 2017, North Macedonia and Serbia



Source: EIGE 2017

According to INSTAT, the gender pay gap in 2017 reached 10.1%, up from 10.7% the previous year. The gender pay gap is higher among employees in economic enterprises belonging to the economic activity group “mining and quarrying; manufacturing; electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply; water supply; sewerage, waste management, and remediation activities.” For this group activity, the gender pay gap is 35.3%. Compared with the previous year, the gender pay gap for this group of activities has decreased by 2.5 percentage points (2018: 12). Analysis of the average salary based on economic activity by gender for 2021 shows almost the same trend regarding pay inequality. The gender pay gap is higher in the sectors of extractive industry, electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply; financial and insurance activities; and information and communication (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Gender Gap indicator of the average salary in Albania due to the economic activities in 2021



Source: INSTAT, Trading Economics

In terms of demographic trends, the Albanian population is expected to decrease, mainly due to low birth rates and high emigration. According to INSTAT (2023 b), Albania's population on January 1, 2023, was 2,761,785 people, a 1.1% drop from January 1, 2022. Since 2013, the birth rate has steadily declined, contributing to population reduction. In 2022, the birth rate had decreased by 9.3% compared to the previous year. The fertility rate is lower than the replacement rate and the EU-28 average. Moreover, Albania has continued to experience emigration. The number of Albanian migrants in 2022 was 46,460, or 10.5% more, compared to 2021. High emigration and low birth rates will contribute to future population decline, as well as changes in job offers.

Gender inequality is further fostered by Albania's education quality, which is much lower than the EU-28 average for both men and women. Gender differences in education reflect imbalances in the labour market as well, since gender is hierarchical and produces inequality related to other social and economic inequalities. Albania has a 7.9-point lower knowledge domain index score than the EU-28 average. The disparity in the sub-domains of achievement and participation is 17.5 points, whereas Albania outperformed in the sub-domain of segregation by 0.6 points.

However, segregation according to educational areas is still prominent, with women who are tertiary students dominant in education, health and welfare, humanities, and the arts, while few male students are studying in these study programmes (Gender Equality Index Albania 2020:16). While the gender gap favours males in lower grades, it reverses in tertiary education, benefiting girls. Girls represent 57.8% of students enrolled in tertiary education in Albania for 2022- 2023 (Titili, Dolani & Margo 2024, p.2). Regardless of this, horizontal segregation is present in Albanian tertiary education. Academic fields are

characterised by gender-based practices. The percentage of female students in science, technology, and engineering university courses is low. Gender segregation in STEM is still heavily impacted by assumptions about male identity features and duties, with ramifications for whole career paths. The gender gap in math and science achievements is shrinking in secondary-level education and no longer plays a significant role in the decision to pursue a STEM profession. More women than men graduate from science, mathematics, and statistics fields at the post-secondary level, but their share in other STEM sub-sectors remains continuously low, if not decreasing (EIGE 2017, p.67).

The vertical gender gap is the imbalance between women and men in leadership categories, which relates to women's high concentration in lower-ranking positions. Vertical segregation is represented by the 'glass ceiling' index. A glass ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that prevent women from progressing in their career paths within an institution (Pai & Vaidya, 2009). There is a gender gap in each sector and profession; it is more noticeable in the manufacturing and industrial sectors than in academics and education. According to studies, the vertical gender gap, that is the fact that women are less likely to occupy leadership roles in university administrations that come with higher salaries, is a better explanation for the gender pay gap in the academic sector. Data provided by INSTAT show that the glass ceiling index for all Albanian higher education institutions is 1.33 (54.1%/40.7%). Although women dominate the number of academic staff in Albanian universities, they remain underrepresented in academic leadership and decision-making positions in universities and research institutions.

5. Analysis via the lens of Albanian cultural pattern

The gender indicators regarding the gender pay gap and gender segregation in Albanian society may be interpreted through the lenses of gender socialisation theory, which claims that boys and girls learn the appropriate behaviours and attitudes from their families and the overall culture in which they grow up. Henslin (2011) claims that socialisation is the learning of culturally defined gender roles. The attitudes and behaviours considered appropriate for each gender are largely determined by societal, cultural, and economic values in a given society (Henslin 2011, p. 77). Gender socialisation can thus vary greatly among communities with diverse values and norms. The family is certainly important in reinforcing gender roles. Ozdemir (2003) defines gender as one of the main components of the social system, which includes power relations, inequities, and hierarchies between men and women (2003: 72). Gender inequality comes out in all sectors, both public and private, impacting the identity, attitudes, behaviours, and social status of women and men. Gender inequality results from gender differences developed through socialisation, with the goal to prepare individuals for social roles undertaken during life, and cultural expectations which are expected to be followed, that determine rewards and punishments for different ways of behaving.

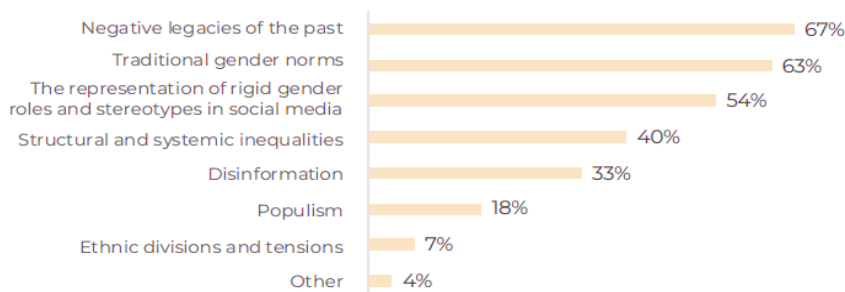
In our analysis, cultural pattern is an essential component for understanding individuals' attitudes, actions, and social interactions. A feature of male dominance characterises the Albanian cultural model. Patriarchalism is particularly strong in Albania (King & Vullnetari, 2009: 22). Albanian society is characterised by strong family ties, which facilitate the transmission of beliefs and attitudes from parents to children. Family behaviour patterns and gender attitudes impact the education and transmission of cultural values to children, including gender equality values. Segregation based on social norms and gender roles is visible in Albania.

Patriarchy has established an imbalance in the gender hierarchy, producing biases and gender stereotypes that undervalue women's skills and keep them away from social influence, harming their potential for social progress (Dervishi, 2001; 2011). Society assigns girls and women social roles mainly related to domestic duties, reproduction, service, and care. This underestimates their professional skills and intellectual capacity and prevents them from advancing in their careers, taking leadership positions, and undertaking entrepreneurial initiatives.

Albanian society has had considerable social and cultural change due to urbanisation and migration. According to studies, migration and urbanisation sever traditional family bonds in developing countries (King & Vullnetari 2009; Tacoli 2013; Titili & Nikaj 2012). Migration can provide new economic and social possibilities for women migrants, potentially changing the structure of gender-based labour division and leading to increased autonomy and decision-making for individuals migrating (Titili & Nikaj 2024, p.1656). Economic development, social emancipation, and migration have contributed to the challenge of traditional gender roles in Albanian society. Studies show that social remittances, which are driven by migration, impact gender roles and challenge gender inequalities through changing values, attitudes, and social norms. (De Haas, 2007; Vullnetari & King, 2010). In addition, legal improvements, policies, and commitments to gender equality have contributed to closing the gender gap. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, the gender gap score in 2023 for Albania is 0.791. It is ranked 11 in the regional ranking. The Educational Attainment subindex displays the highest gender parity score (99%), while the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex stands at 76%. The global gender gap index of Albania increased from a 0.66 index in 2008 to a 0.79 index in 2023, growing at an average annual rate of 1.34%.

Regardless of the above indicators and the measures to strengthen the value of equality and inclusion, gender inequality is still a social and cultural challenge in Albanian society. Based on a survey regarding youth perceptions of gender equality in Albania (2020), it is estimated that '*traditional gender norms*' are listed among the main factors that hinder gender equality in Albanian society. 63% of respondents consider traditional gender norms an obstacle to achieving gender equality (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Youth perception of factors that hinder gender equality



Source: UN Women 2020

Gender norms include those that regulate who takes care of children, who maintains the house, who is expected to earn more, as well as in which sectors men should work. Traditional gender norms contribute to gender stereotypes, which hinder women’s development and support gender inequality in society (Nartey et al. 2023).

The division of unpaid work in the household is used in many cases as an indicator of behaviour that is more or less traditional (Cosp & Roman, 2014). Regarding this, we refer to a survey conducted by UNDP (2016) in Albania, which examines the public perceptions of gender equality in Albania. Data on the division of household chores among partners show that gendering exists in the sharing of domestic duties, with women mainly involved in cooking, cleaning the house and shopping, while men are more involved in house maintenance (table 2).

Table 2: The division of the household chores (%).

Division of the household chores

	Cleaning the house	Cooking	Shopping	Taking the garbage	House maintenance
Usually women	84%	82.1%	36.9%	31.4%	4.5%
Usually men	0.6%	1.1%	19.1%	24%	77.3%
Both women and men	14.7%	16.3%	43.1 %	43.1%	12%
Mostly third person	0.7%	0.5%	0.9%	1.5%	6.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: UNDP 2016

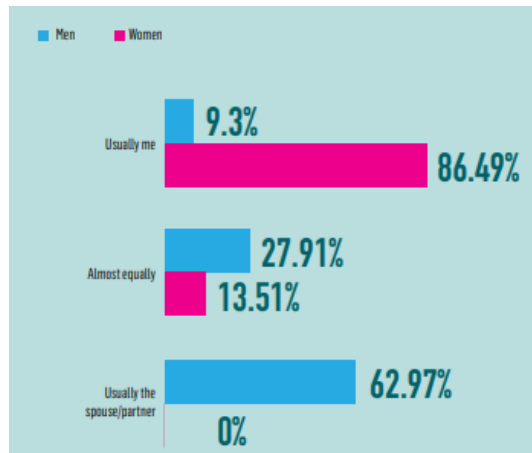
The above data shows gender inequality in the division of domestic duties, highlighting the traditional cultural norm that women are considered caretakers. The gendered division of work within the household varies by individual-level characteristics, such as education, age, and migration experience. Well-educated individuals living in urban centres and those with migratory experiences are more likely to have an equal share of domestic duties. Gender inequality in the division of domestic duties impacts women's participation in the labour market in two ways: first, due to family responsibilities, they have less time to be involved in paid work, and second, women often choose to support their families above seeking training opportunities, making them less competitive in the labour market. This impacts women's career progression and the pay disparities between women and men.

Education and participation in the labour market contribute to changes in expectations of gender roles, as well as women's change of attitude with improved education and participation in the labour market (Carter et al., 2009; Thornton et al, 1983; Miluka 2013).

Regarding access to education, Albanian society has made significant progress toward gender equality. The gender equality index for access to education in Albania is 99% (Global Gender Gap 2023). The number of women participating in tertiary education overcomes the number of men. It is estimated that the number of graduates from tertiary education in the academic year 2021- 22 was around 31 thousand students, of whom 66.3% were girls (INSTAT, 2023: 54). However, the increasing indicators of women's access to education in Albanian society is not accurately reflected in their participation in the labour market (Ilić 2022). Though the number of graduated women exceeds that of men, there is a considerable difference in participation in the labour market in favour of men. Horizontal segregation is of great importance in this aspect. Horizontal segregation places women in a group of professions and study programmes (education, social sciences, humanities) which society traditionally defines as suitable for them. This impacts job offers in the labour market and, consequently, the pay gap.

Cultural norms determine the distribution of access to education between boys and girls (Hiller 2014). An important aspect that facilitates or hinders women's participation in the labour market relates to career-family balance. The lack of the opportunity for work-life balance may lead women to withdraw entirely from the labour force. Data from INSTAT (2023 a) show that the labour market participation rate is 57.0 % women; and 68.0 % men for 2022. Regarding this, data show a significant gender divide in parental responsibilities (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Taking care of children by gender (%)



Source: UNDP 2016

As shown in the figure above, men are more likely than women to report sharing parenting tasks with their spouses. Women are more likely than men to report feeling unsupported by their spouses when caring for their children. Work-life balance is crucial for empowering women and achieving gender equality.

In 2015, the law on social security in Albania included allowing men to take maternity leave (Law no. 104/2014, date 31.07.2014, article 13 of the law). According to this law, only when the child is 63 days old, can the father receive maternity leave. This measure has been considered progress in the legal framework regarding gender equality. Despite this, data from INSTAT showed that only 6.5% of men received maternity leave in 2022, out of 13,000 insured women who gave birth to a baby. The cultural pattern is crucial in this regard.

In the Albanian socio-cultural model, women are still considered responsible for childcaring, which separates them from the labour market in cases where they fail to establish a work-life balance. Family responsibilities hinder women from career progress, which often leads to sacrificing their careers, for the sake of family care. Data on the perception of gender equality in Albania (UNDP 2016) support this argument. Indicators regarding this show that 81.11 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “the wife should sacrifice her career for the family”. Respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement “the wife should sacrifice her career for the family” than with the statement “the husband should sacrifice his career for the family.” (UNDP 2016: 36). This data suggests that there is still a traditional mindset in Albanian society which impacts attitudes regarding gender equality. In Albanian traditional culture men are breadwinners for the family while women are considered caregivers. This is more evident among low-educated individuals, living in rural areas and, having no migratory experience.

Analysing the gender gap in Albania based on international and national sources showed that gendering still occurs in Albanian society. Traditional cultural norms significantly impact gender disparity. Gender equality is a cultural and mindset challenge, rather than a legal or political one.

Conclusions

Based on the above analysis of social and cultural sources of the gender gap in Albanian society, societal expectations and cultural norms impact the shaping of gender imbalances. Because of the cultural meanings attributed to being a woman or a man, gender serves as an organising principle for society. This is visible in the gender division of labour. In most communities, there are distinct patterns of women's work and men's work, not only within the family but in society as well. Indicators on women's unemployment rate, women's participation in the labour market and women's access to education in Albanian society, pointing to the presence of gender inequality. The legal framework progress and policy improvements have not been sufficient to achieve gender equality in Albanian society. Traditional cultural norms and gendered socialisation hinder achieving gender equality. The analysis of indicators on the division of household chores, division of childcare responsibilities, perceptions and attitudes towards the role of women and men in the family, and career-family balance pointed out that gendering still occurs in Albanian society. Culture remains of great importance in this context. Gender equality requires reshaping the culture and emphasising cultural values of equality, inclusion, and respect for women's dignity and potential. Gender equality is a cultural and mindset challenge, rather than a legal or political one. The analysis showed that despite the obvious legal improvements, and measures to achieve gender equality, there is still a gender gap. Indicators of inequality in the labour market and education point out the impact of culture and traditional cultural norms that attribute subordinate roles and status to women in society. Women's and girls' status shows that they are socially subordinated due to the application of gender schemes that produce social stratification, related to the social mindset and cultural pattern. Cultural change occurs because societies and cultures are dynamic and are reshaped over time, allowing cultural gender definitions and expectations to change.

The analysis reinforces the findings of other studies that women empowerment programs must be multilevel programs to impact the mindset of the whole society and reach not just girls or women but also empower their significant others, such as husbands, to support women's development and gender equality (Nartey et al. 2023, p.11).

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