

HOW DESIRABLE IS GENDER EQUALITY IN THE RURAL LABOUR MARKET? THE EVIDENCE FROM SPAIN AND POLAND

Adrianna Wojciechowska✉

Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland

Abstract. The article focuses on women's situation in the labour market in rural areas compared to men and on determinants that influence the labour market supply in Poland and Spain. The article examines these countries' levels of gender parity. Through the theory of labour supply, the work presents problems women face when trying to participate in the labour force and wasted potential caused by lower performance compared to men. The methods applied in the research include: a critical literature review in order to place the research in its proper context and show the extension of the research beyond the state-of-the-art, as well as statistical analyses based on the data from national and European databases to show the statistically significant differences between the groups in question such as demographic, legal, socio-cultural and economic aspects. The paper concludes that women in rural areas, besides being more educated, have lower participation in the labour market. The gender gaps considering economic activity and gender pay gaps are higher in rural areas than in urban ones. The level of gaps are quite high in both countries. Lower wages in the occupations chosen by women, having different categories when choosing a job or rural areas specifics (higher number of children, more traditional household division of labour), among others, may be the reasons for gender gaps.

Keywords: rural areas, rural women, gender equality, labour market, Europe

INTRODUCTION

The article deals with a vitally important subject: gender equality in the European labour market. The paper distinguishes two cases involving Poland and Spain – two members of the European Union, relatively large in terms of size, measured by number of citizens and total area. The reasons for choosing these specific countries are their similar population potential, as well as equal participation in the European Parliament. Simultaneously, the selected countries have a different level of economic development, which makes the comparison more interesting. The paper especially considers the activity of female inhabitants of rural areas compared to male. It examines both countries' labour markets and determinants that influence them, such as level of development, demographic processes, cultural changes, gender parity and segmentation. The work aims to juxtapose theory and the newest data on determinants influencing labour market supply and gender equality. In the paper, the author defines the rural area as a non-metropolitan area. Furthermore, "metropolitan regions" are defined as a single NUTS level 3 region or its groups in which 50% or more of the population lives in a functional urban area (FUA) that is composed of at least 250 000 inhabitants. Remaining NUTS level 3 regions are referred to as "non-metropolitan regions" (Eurostat, 2016).

✉Adrianna Wojciechowska, Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: awojciechowska@irwirpan.waw.pl, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6352-8609>

McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) claims that female workers generate about 37 percent of the world's GDP, which is significantly lower than the 50 percent of their share in the working-age population. With the labour market in the gender balance, if women were employed to the same extent as men, the member states of the European Union would be able to increase their GDP by between 14-45 percent (Löfström, 2009). Gender equality could be the way for expanding the labour force and exploit the wasted potential of women that are currently not economically active to increase the economic growth of analysed countries. It is worth raising the subject of the situation of women in the labour market, not only the big changes concerning the role that women play in society which occurred in the past century, but also the problems that women still face being participants in the labour market. The European Commission's report shows that women in the EU earn, on average, 13 percent less than men and are less represented in politics and business (European Commission, 2021; Shreeves, 2021). One of the reasons for the gap in earnings is a "glass ceiling", which is defined as an obstacle that women are facing in managerial positions. Sheryl Sandberg (2013) discussed the reason for few women leaders. She recalls her own experience in leadership positions, confirming different treatment of women. She argues that women must make harder choices between professional success and life fulfilment. Besides, women's abilities are not only underestimated by others, but also by themselves. What is more, one of the reasons for gender inequality is more pressure on men to succeed (Kimmel, 2000; Sandberg, 2013). The "glass ceiling" is created not only by men but also by society as a whole and it is strongly anchored in stereotypes and ideas about women, their life roles, and competencies.

The unpaid care work performed by women could be valued at 10 trillion dollars of the annual output – this amount is 13 percent of global GDP (Woetzel, 2015). According to IMF in 2016, 700 million fewer women than men were hired in paid jobs, and even if a female worker were employed, the jobs that women tend to do have lower earnings, worse conditions and limited career development (Can Bertay et al., 2020). Women's participation in the labour market is rising, as well as their education level or a variety of skills that they can perform. However, female candidates are still encountering discrimination and inflexibility of people responsible for the recruitment process or their employers.

Women's competencies are not fairly considered. That and undervaluation of women's self-perception results in lower participation in the labour market. Unfortunately, the inequality between women and men in the labour market has more levels than the ones already mentioned above. A comparison between Poland and Spain is going to present pictures of two different countries with distinct cultures, histories, and stereotypes. This article finds similarities and differences in the rural women labour market in these countries and explains the reasoning for such a situation to identify the problem that women are struggling with currently. Discrimination against women in the labour market exists and it is a waste of labour market potential in many countries (International Labour Office, 2010). It is crucial to build awareness of the problem and look for its possible solution.

This article aims to verify the labour supply of the rural population in two developed countries and underline the existing gender inequality. In both cases of Poland and Spain, there are gender gaps in many areas, such as economic opportunity, leadership positions, wages, legal protection etc. The paper shows the wasted potential of the female population and pinpoints that by eliminating gender gaps, both countries could gain in economic terms and increase the countries' welfare. The contribution of the paper is to build awareness of the mentioned issue and encourage policy changes to use full labour force potential. The outline of the paper is as follows. After the introduction, there is a literature review on the principles of labour market theory. The areas considered in the literature review are labour market supply, the impact of gender equality on economic growth, labour market supply of women, human capital theory and labour market segmentation. Next, there is a methodology and sources of data specified. Finally, there is a discussion of the results and the conclusions of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Labour market supply

Labour market supply is the number of workers willing and able to work in a job or industry for a given wage. As Kwiatkowski and Kryńska (2013) stated, the concept of labour supply is the same as the concept of real labour resources and active population. Real work resources include people in their working age, able to work and ready to take the job under typical conditions

existing in the economy. This definition shows that the supply of labour is identical with a part of the working-age population (age of work capacity) (Pencavel, 2001). Labour supply can be analysed in global terms, including all active people in each labour market (local, regional, national, or international). Generally, there are significant differences in labour supply for men and women. The ones that are worth underlining are history, biology and social factors that caused high women's activity at home carrying out domestic duties. For different reasons, such as discrimination, society shaped gender roles. The labour market in a specific economy can increase because of population growth, immigration, increase in people employed and searching for a job or workers offering more work hours available in each period. As OpenStax Economics (2016) mentioned, the concept of labour supply is suitable for well-developed countries, for a market with employed labour. The labour supply concept in less developed countries is less clear, because of factors such as culture, history, traditions, and institutions affecting it. The labour supply is a complex concept, which is influenced by various factors. According to Kwiatkowski (2013), these factors can be divided into 5 groups, as follows: demographic factors, legal factors, economic factors, socio-cultural factors and finally institutional factors. Among the demographical factors that influence the quantity of labour supply, there is the population number in an area of the labour market, the structure of population according to age, sex and education, as well as migration and its direction and size. Another group of factors are legal factors. They influence the labour supply equally on the territory of every country's market. The retirement regulations should be mentioned here as the higher the age of retirement, the greater the labour force is (Auer et al., 2000). What is more, the working hours applicable in the specific country also influence the labour supply quantity (Lumsdaine, 1996). The next group of factors is the economic one. In this group, there are factors such as supply, prices of products offered to consumers, the amount of money paid for workers (OpenStax Economics, 2016) and the access of households to alternative sources of income (Blundell and Macurdy, 1999). The next group of factors is socio-cultural, which mostly consists of traditions and customs existing in a country. Activity in the labour market is determined by the preferred family model, job traditions of women or attitude towards working (Farré and Vella, 2013). Lastly, the

institutional group, which contains factors such as the development of institutional care of children and disabled people (Porterfield, 2002; Uunk et al., 2005), development of infrastructure and situation in the labour market (Cipollone et al., 2014).

As the matter of the paper is the situation of women in the labour market, one should be aware of factors influencing women's labour supply, as it differs from the male one. In his book, George Borjas shows that in the last decades from 1980 to 2003, the participation of women increased (Borjas, 2013). The main determinant is an increase in the real wage. In the literature, there are few actors influencing women's reservation wages mentioned, such as life fertility and the age of children. The state-of-the-art stands that it is more likely for women with a higher number of children, as well as women with a child at a young age, to increase a reservation wage and decrease their participation in the labour market.

The newest studies show that from 1950 until now (2022), the total lifetime fertility of the average grown woman decreased from 3.3 to the level below 2.5 (Roser, 2014). Thus, the decrease caused a rise in women's participation in the labour market. Nevertheless, the relationship between the issues mentioned above took a reversed turn. Notwithstanding, women work more, and this is the reason for the fertility lifetime to decrease. That reversed statement can be supported by the very high opportunity cost of having a child for women (Birch, 2005). Furthermore, the literature states that women's labour supply is more sensitive to wage changes than men's labour supply because of a small number of men specialized in household production, so such a conversion would be unusual among men. The next matter worth mentioning is the occupation of women, as well as the relationship with her partner that occurs in a household. The family labour supply decisions are made by taking into consideration the household and market productivities of each partner (Ehrenberg and Smith, 2012). Another factor that affected women's participation in the labour market is the technological development of time-saving household equipment, such as dishwashers, stoves and washing machines. In the twentieth century, there was a huge cut in the time spent on household activities. This created more time for work and labour market activities. In a nutshell, many influences contribute to the rise of women's participation in the labour market. The main factors are wage rates, reduction in fertility and technological development of

household equipment. What is more, advances in family planning, maternal health, and large changes in gender attitudes, such as a more equal point of view to work, family, gender roles or changing women's aspirations (Peetz, 2017).

Currently, as can be seen in many countries, there is evidence of gender discrimination: employers, politicians or men in general treat women as subordinates rather than equal earners. There are many forms of gender discrimination emphasized in the literature. To begin with, the exploitation of gender profiling is when an employer is more willing to hire men because the women are not believed to be equally devoted to working as men (Merluzzi and Dobrev, 2015). Furthermore, there is a problem with undeveloped and gender-biased family support policies in many countries (Grimshaw et al., 2017). Then, there is an exploitation of women locked in "bad jobs", which stops their development and possibility for improving their life (Rubbers, 2019). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning both wage and employment gaps between genders. When it comes to employment gaps, this can be explained in terms of human capital "endowments" – income-earning characteristics, experience and education, which is an individual matter for every person (Peetz, 2017). Women's endowments tend to be undervalued, especially on the upper ends of the private market factors that have a sector earnings distribution. The studies suggest much labour impact on the fact that men earn more money than women do. To start with, time out of the labour market is caused by the domestic sphere, for instance having a baby. Another issue is the segregation of women into certain occupations and industries. The occupations with high female participation tend to have lower wages (Cassells et al., 2009). The gender gap looks to be lower among union members than among non-members, particularly for lower-wage earners (Card et al., 2003). The gap is also smaller in the public sector, rather than the private (Barón and Cobb-Clark, 2008). Considering the relation between education and income, one should see that the greater gender gap of high-income earners arithmetically reduces the apparent returns on education for women.

METHODOLOGY

Sources of data and research methods

In the paper, secondary data sources were used, coming from two major sources: a literature review and

acknowledged international databases: European Statistical Office (Eurostat), The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS) and National Statistical Institute of Spain (INE). The number of data sources is consciously narrowed for the sake of better compatibility and comparability of the data. Following the objectives set, different methods of collecting and analysing data, as well as presenting results, have been used. The methods of data collection that were applied include a critical literature review on the principles of labour market theory. The areas analysed were labour market supply, women's labour market supply and then finally human capital theory and the issue of the gender gap. The literature chosen on the later topics was abstracted from scholar sources and it includes articles, reports, books and scientific papers. The literature review of this paper aims to take a closer look at the labour market supply of women in Europe to have a wider idea on the subject matter before analysis of chosen countries. When it comes to secondary data collection, it was extracted from national and European databases mentioned in the previous point. The data collected concerns demographic characteristics, education level, legal and institutional aspects, socio-cultural determinants and economic aspects to the extent of the national and rural area. In respect of data analysis, the methods were descriptive statistics, description, as well as underlining relevant data for the study and its analysis. The results have been presented using descriptions, tables, and charts. The examination of the gathered data shows the situation of rural women and women generally in Poland and Spain.

RESULTS

Demographic factors

With a surface of 312 679 km², Poland has almost 38 million inhabitants while Spain, with a surface of 505 990 km², is populated by around 48 million citizens. The approximate number of people per one km² in the case of Poland is 121 and in Spain 95. These facts show the similar population potential of both compared countries. The Polish urban population is slowly decreasing to the advantage of the rural population. Lately, the population structure contained 60 percent of the urban population and 40 percent of the rural one (see Table 1). Contrastingly in Spain, the fastest

Table 1. Comparison of demographic determinants between Poland and Spain

| Indicator | Poland | Spain |
|---|---|--|
| Population growth | Rural population growing faster than urban and population in general | Urban population growing at a faster pace than the population in general and rural population |
| Population structure | After 2004 slow decrease in urban population In 2017, 60% people were living in cities and 40% in rural areas | Prevalence of urban population. In 2018 there were 75% urban population and 25% of the rural population |
| Population density (urban/rural) [persons per km ²] | 125/86 | 92/35 |
| Gender structure of the rural population | Prevalence of women over men | Slightly more women than men |
| The age structure of rural women | The population of rural women is ageing The biggest percentage of women are of working age | The population of rural women is ageing The biggest percentage of women are of working age |
| Migration | Since 2016 positive migration balance | Positive net migration ratio |
| Education level | Women are better educated than men 15,25% women in STEM studies Rural women are mostly educated on an upper secondary level however, tertiary education level is increasing | Women better educated than men 12,44% women in STEM studies Rural women have mostly low secondary level education, however, tertiary and upper secondary is rising |
| Access to local services | 2 km (urban areas) 5.5 km (rural areas) | 2.2 km (urban areas) 12.4 km (rural areas) |

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat, Bank of Spain and Global Gender Gap Report (2019).

growing population is the urban one and rural areas are experiencing depopulation. In 2018, the structure of the population contained 75 percent of the urban population and only 25 percent of the rural ones. The population density of Spanish rural areas is twice as low as in Poland. Furthermore, in both cases there are more women than men in rural areas. Nevertheless, the prevalence in Poland is significantly bigger. Another similarity, in the case of both countries, is the age structure of the rural female population. They are both aging populations. The working-age population amounts to around 66 percent in both cases and it will diminish over time, as the percentage of people that are in the young age (15 and less) is 15 percent in both countries. In Poland, there was a negative migration balance until 2016, which means that Poland was an emigration country for many years. Only for a few years back has there been a positive balance thanks to Ukrainian immigrants. In Spain, the situation is different, as the country experienced huge inflow of immigrants since joining European Union. Unfortunately, the financial crisis (2009)

caused a negative migration balance until 2016, when there was a positive net migration ratio. In both cases, women are generally better educated than men are. The degree types that women mostly graduated from in ascending order are business administration and law, education and health and welfare. In both countries, there is little participation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) studies. Furthermore, levels of education in rural areas differ. In Poland, most of the women are educated at the upper secondary level. In Spain, most rural women have lower secondary education. In both cases, there is an increasing trend of rural women with tertiary education. The last factor to be mentioned is access to local services. In Polish rural areas, the distance to the closest local service is 5,5 km, while in the case of Spain, the distance is double of that in Poland (12,4km). Local services are defined as those services whose scope of action or coverage is concentrated in small geographic areas, and include, for example, a library, a nursery school, geographical areas and primary health care center (Alloza Frutos et al., 2021).

Legal and institutional aspects

There is a lot of diversity between Poland and Spain in terms of legal determinants (see Table 2). To begin with retirement age, there is a wide difference in the case of women. In Spain, the age is 67 and in Poland, 60. An age difference of 7 years is significant for the labour market size. The working hours applicable are the same in terms of the week – 40 hours. However, in Spain, there is a maximum of 9 hours in one day, while in Poland it is 8 hours. The situation of maternity and paternity leave is quite different in the two cases. The Spanish government is focusing on gender equality in that matter, which is why there are 16 weeks for both parents that are not transferable. Whilst in Poland it is

20 weeks for the mother, from which she can transfer only 6 to her partner. The alternatives of child benefits and tax breaks in Spain appear to encourage women to be more economically active (benefits for working mothers or self-employed mothers). In Poland, the child benefits are causing an outflow of women from the labour market and the policy is focused on increasing the very low birth rate (in 2022, there was an implementation of– a Family Welfare Capital policy, as the programme “500 Plus” did not raise the birth rate as expected). Furthermore, both countries offer grants and benefits such as a one-off childbirth grant (Poland), infant care benefit (Spain), child-raising supplements or tax breaks for parents. Both countries encourage their

Table 2. Comparison of legal determinants between Poland and Spain

| Indicator | Poland | Spain |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Retirement age | It is 60 years old for women and 65 for men | It is 67 for both women and men |
| Working hours | 40 h per week, maximum of 8 hours a day | 40 h per week, a maximum of 9 hours per day |
| Maternity/paternity leave | 20 weeks for mother, from that she can transfer a maximum of 6 weeks to father Breastfeeding time off until the mother decide to stop | 16 weeks for both parents, non-transferable Breastfeeding time off until the child is 9 months old |
| Child benefits and tax breaks | “500 Plus” benefit Family Welfare Capital policy (2660€ for the period of 2 years, for families with two children or more) One-off childbirth grant (net income per person lower than 271€) Tax relief for single parents (330€ per year from personal income tax due) Child tax relief (from 247€ per year) The one-off benefit from the Law on support for pregnant women and their families “For life” (for people with severe and irreversible disability – 880€) Benefit “Good start” is paid once a year for every child starting their school year until they reach the age of 20 (66 € per child) Parental benefit Family allowance and supplements (for people of net income per person lower than 150€) | Working mothers are entitled to receive a payment of 100€ per month or tax break for 1200€ at the end of the year until her child is 3 years old Self-employed mothers are released from paying monthly Social Security contributions Infant care benefit, benefit for risk during pregnancy/breastfeeding Benefits for dependent children or foster children (for families of income lower than 1044€ per month, from €341 a year per child) Benefits for large or one-parent or mothers with a disability (€1,000 paid as a single payment, income in certain limits) Benefits for multiple birth or adoption (single payment from 3800€ – 2 children) Periods considered as insured (period of leave requested in order to care for a family member – first 3 years will be considered as contributory for the purpose of retirement, permanent disability, death and survival, maternity and paternity benefits) |
| Agricultural Social Insurance | Agricultural Social Insurance Fund for farmers in Poland (KRUS) | Agricultural Social Security Scheme in Spain (REASS) |

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat and www.ec.europa.eu (2022).

citizens to have bigger families with child benefits such as the Family Welfare Capital policy in Poland or large family benefits and breaks in Spain. In Spain, there are benefits supporting mothers with risk of pregnancy or breastfeeding. Both countries offer agricultural social insurance programmes: the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund for farmers in Poland (KRUS) and Agricultural Social Security Scheme in Spain (REASS).

Socio-cultural factors

The birth rates of both countries are very low. The average age of having the first child shows a difference of 4 years between the two cases – in Spain, women have children later (see Table 3). In general, the average number of people in the household is similar in both countries. However, the households in Poland are larger in rural areas. Furthermore, people get married more rarely in Spain and Spanish women get married a lot later than women do in Poland. Both countries noted high divorce rates, with a slight prevalence of Spain.

Table 3. Comparison of socio-cultural determinants between Poland and Spain

| Indicators | Poland | Spain |
|--|-----------|--------|
| Number of people in a household | 2.64 | 2.5 |
| Birth rate | 1.32 | 1.33 |
| The average age of having the first child | 27.3 | 31.0 |
| Number of people in a household in rural areas | 3.21 | 2.54 |
| Marriage rate/average age of first marriage(women) | 5.1/25–29 | 3.7/33 |
| Divorce rate per 1000 inhabitants | 1.6 | 2.1 |

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat (2019).

Economic factors

Firstly, it is worth mentioning that both countries have gone through great changes over the last 100 years and it is impressive how their economies have developed during that time. The two countries have similar population potential, same participation in the European parliament, however, the GDP per capita values are different. Spain had a GDP per capita almost twice as

big as Poland in 2019. The Spanish labour market has a more developed service sector, which in 2018 made up for 78 percent – 20 percentage points higher than in Poland (see Table 4). Participation of the agricultural sector in employment structure is still notable in Poland – 10 percent, whilst in Spain, it was only 3.8 percent in 2018. The labour market structure in rural areas was quite similar, both countries had 40 percent of services in the equation, around 25-30 percent of the industrial sector. However, the agricultural sector was twice as important in Polish rural areas. There are significant differences when it comes to economic rates considering place of living and gender in both countries. The unemployment rate values and gaps between women and men were greater in rural areas. Spanish unemployment rates in rural areas in the case of women was higher for over 13 percentage points. The unemployment rate gender gap was also higher in Spain. The economic activity rate was higher in urban areas in both countries. The differences between genders were significant in Spain (11%) and Poland (16.4%) – higher for rural areas. It can be said that rural areas tend to be more gender unequal in terms of economic activity. Comparing employment rates in rural areas, Poland has higher rates for both the male and female population. Nevertheless, gender inequality is present in this area as well. The difference between female and male in Poland is almost 16 percentage points and in Spain, it is over 13 percentage points. Turning to part-time employment, it is on a higher level in the case of Spain. In total there is over 21.4 percent of women working in the reduced time dimension (less than 30 hours) in Spain and 9 percent in Poland. In both populations there are more women working part-time. Considering unpaid care work female to male ratio in the researched countries, the values are very similar. Women are doing almost twice as much unpaid work (such as shopping for household goods, routine housework, or care of household members) as men in both countries. The values of paid work f/m ratio are on the level of 0.65 in Poland and 0.7 in Spain. This means that women are paid for only 65 percent of hours worked as a percentage of men's paid hours, analogically in the case of Spain. Hourly wages are higher in Spain and in the case of men, they are twice as high. In the case of women, the variance is less than 50 percent. These are large values. Finally, the gender pay gap: Poland shows a smaller gender pay gap by over 5 percentage points.

Table 4. Comparison of economic determinants between Poland and Spain

| Economic factor | Poland | Spain |
|--|--|--|
| GDP per capita (2019) | 13 730.00€ | 26 420.00€ |
| Structure of the labour market | Services – 58%, Industrial sector – 32%, Agricultural sector – 10% (2019) | Services – 78%, Industrial sector – 10.9%, Agricultural sector – 3.8% (2018) |
| Structure of the labour market in rural areas (2016) | Services – 40%, Industrial sector – 24%, Agricultural sector – 21% | Services – 38%, Industrial sector – 31%, Agricultural sector – 10.7%, Public Administration sector – 31% |
| Unemployment rate in urban areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 3,6%/3%/0,58 percentage point (p.p.) | 15,99%/12,45%/3,55 p.p. |
| Unemployment rate in rural areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 4,5%/3,26%/1 p.p. | 18,01%/12,77%/5,24 p.p. |
| Economic Activity Rate in urban areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 64,6%/79,7%/15,10 p.p. | 69,62%/79,38%/9,76 p.p. |
| Economic activity in rural areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 61,2%/77,7%/16,42 p.p. | 67,61%/78,91%/11,36 p.p. |
| Employment rates in urban areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 61,1%/75,3%/14,23 p.p. | 57,91%/68,7%/10,8 p.p. |
| Employment rates in rural areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 57,7%/73,4,8%/15,74 p.p. | 54,93%/68,05%/13,12 p.p. |
| Part-time employment in rural areas (female/male/gap) (2019) | 9%/3,3%/6 p.p. | 21,4%/6,2%/15,2 p.p. |
| Hourly wages (female/male-2019) | 5.12€/5.64€ | 9.36€/11.8€ |
| Gender Pay Gap (2019) | 9.2% | 14% |
| Unpaid care work (female/male ratio) | 1,86 | 1,97 |
| Paid work (female/male ratio) | 0,65 | 0,7 |

Source: own calculations based on Eurostat, Polish Central Office of Statistics and Spanish Statistical Office (2019).

DISCUSSION

Comparative analyses of Spain and Poland

The state of affairs in rural areas in Poland and Spain differ considerably. The dynamics of the urban population in Spain are higher than the rural one. Whereas, in Poland, those dynamics take another turn. The reason for that is the suburbanization process that started in 1995, caused by lower mobility of Polish citizens, high level of unemployment in cities and a difficult housing situation. Besides, since joining the European Union in 2004, development programs implemented in rural areas made them more accessible and comfortable to live in. This could be confirmed by the fact that there is, for instance, only a 5 km distance to the closest local

service, compared to 12,4 km in Spain (Table 1). Consequently, all the improvements that happened in rural areas converted them into urbanized areas and at the same time, they stayed “rural” in administrative terms. All the issues mentioned above contributed to the faster growth of the rural population. When looking at Spain in the same aspect, the situation is quite different: the rural areas are depopulating. Firstly, it is important to mention that Spanish rural areas are not well developed. In most cases, the infrastructure leaves much to be desired, which limits the mobility of people, as well the access to social services offered by a country. The average resident of a municipality at risk of depopulation has to travel more than 30 km to the nearest school, health centre, gas station or sports centre, compared to 14 km

for the average resident of other rural municipalities and 2 km for the average urban resident (Alloza Frutos et al., 2021). Moreover, there are difficulties in terms of territorial cohesion as well as communication and safety (García Álvarez-Coque, 2021). All these problems are discouraging people from living here, which is reflected in the very low population density of Spanish rural areas. The factor that helped the rural population to grow in the past was a great inflow of immigrants. Nevertheless, the effects of the financial crisis in 2009 stopped the inflow and since then, the process of depopulation started to increase. The Spanish Statistics National Institute anticipates a further reduction of the rural population until the year 2030. The characteristics of the rural population are similar in Poland and Spain. Women in general and rural women have a higher number of elderly people, given their longer life expectancy. The latter, low birth rates and the prevalence of women in the population together contribute to population ageing of Poland and Spain, thus shrinking labour force in both countries. Considering education, both countries generally maintain the upper secondary level of education above the OECD average and a tertiary level below that average. When it comes to rural areas, it can be stated that Polish rural women are educated to a higher level than rural women in Spain (see Table 1). This could be due to easier access to education for Polish rural women or to more developed rural areas infrastructure. The prevalence of women in higher levels of education could be caused by the undervaluation of their abilities. In other words, women are required to be more qualified than man when applying to the same job position. Very little women choose STEM studies in Poland and Spain. Women are the minority in the occupation that is responsible for the biggest advances in society. The female perspective in the engineering/scientific world is important, as they make up half of the society. There is a cultural belief that women are doing worse in scientific subjects than men (Sterling, 2015). The cultural problem of gender division influences women from the early stages of their life, decreasing their development and diminishing their opportunities in the labour market. Nowadays, there is a lot of demand for scientific or technical workers and these kinds of workers have higher earnings. As women usually choose the education sector or business studies, they might lose the opportunity to meet the labour market demand, thus missing their life improvement.

Regarding legal aspects, the retirement age is much lower in Poland (60 y/o for women, 65 y/o for men) compared to Spain (67 y/o both). Lately, the Polish government reduced the retirement age – in the case of women by 7 years and for men by 2 years (See table 2). This fact results in a shrinking labour force, especially for women. Of particular note are the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund for farmers in Poland (KRUS) and Agricultural Social Security Scheme in Spain (REASS). KRUS insurance covers the household members that are not related to farmers by the employment relationship. It means that the family of a farmer, even if not working, is covered by social security, thus having access to social services. This is different to Spain, where REASS covers people that are employed or self-employed in the farm. The newest data shows that most people covered by REASS are employed (81 percent). There are 82 percent of rural women living in rural areas assisting their spouses or family members. Their status is not clearly defined in the legislation. They are not paid and only 59 percent of them are covered by social security (Martínez León and Miguel Gómez, 2018). Nonetheless, the importance of agricultural insurance is diminishing in Poland and Spain together with the role of agriculture in employment structure. The maternity leave length is above the OECD average (19 weeks) in both countries. In the case of Spain, the government is trying to create more equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market with the “Royal Decree-Law on urgent measures to guarantee equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in employment and occupation”. In 2021, the initiative reached its goals by implementing 16 weeks of both maternity and paternity leave that is not transferable. Poland offers 20 weeks for the mother with 6 weeks transferable to the father; the transfer option is not usually used. This increases the time-out of women in the labour market and decreases their wages, making it more difficult to re-enter. Considering child benefits and tax breaks, the policies implemented for Spanish women seem to be more encouraging for the labour market activity. There are tax breaks for working mothers and release from paying social security contributions for self-employed mothers. Polish policies focus more on increasing the birth rate rather than gender equality. In 2016, the Polish government introduced a large child benefit, called “Family 500 Plus” that had a huge impact on female labour market activity. Besides increasing the fertility rate,

the programme intended to decrease poverty, especially among children. The benefit is universal for every child under the age of 18. This programme more than doubles fiscal support for families, making Poland one of the top spenders in the EU concerning cash transfers for families. The research shows that there has been a huge net outflow of women from unemployed status to inactivity and a drop of outflow from unemployed women to employment. The decrease is mostly observed among less educated women, particularly those living in small towns and villages, and women with three or more children (Magda et al., 2018). The benefit hadn't reach the desired goals of raising fertility and lowering poverty (Błaszczuk and Sawicka, 2018) and in 2022, the government implemented additional programme called "Family Welfare Capital policy" for families with 2 children or more. What is more, both countries offer grants and benefits such as one-off childbirth grant (Poland), infant care benefit (Spain), child-raising supplements or tax breaks for parents. Spain is not as much focused on the increased birth rates as Poland. Nevertheless, there are large family benefits and breaks to encourage the growth of the rate.

Regarding the socio-cultural factors, the model of the family changed in both countries: people in Poland and Spain tend to have fewer children. In both cases, the fertility rates decreased to levels below the EU average (see Table 3). In Spain, the birth rates decreased by 50 percent from the 80s until 2016. In both countries, the age of having a first child increased (30s) and there is an increasing number of children born in informal relation. All of this suggests people walking away from the typical family model. The later time for having children could be due to family planning, improvement of maternal health, access to birth control, change in women's aspirations and the cost of having a baby. Concerning the number of members in a household, both Poland and Spain noted a decrease. Furthermore, in both examples the families are more numerous in the rural areas, as the influence of traditions there is stronger. All my results above are in line with the report of UNICEF on the family model, which stated that in Poland, there is the prevalence of households with childless couples and that this trend is increasing. The second type of household that is popular in Poland is a couple with one child – this type remained stable over the years. In Spain, one-fourth of households are childless couples, one-fourth of households have only one member, 4 in 10 households are

couples with one child (UNICEF, 2019). The evidence above is caused by changes in society that apply in both countries, for instance, fewer people wanting to be in a relationship, longer bachelor state and higher education aspirations (Balcerzak-Paradowska et al., 2012). Lower marriage rates and more divorces in the investigated countries could mean that women are becoming more independent and economically active. A transformed family model, lower birth rates, fewer marriages and more divorces are the result of modernization of the world – technological development, possibility of family planning, better economic and employment situations. In the case of rural areas, changes occur at a slower pace, so the view of women can still be overdue. Therefore, it is crucial to review the state so that it is up to date. More space and lower population density in rural areas increase the influence of society and the impact of traditions. There is a lot of gender discrimination in the traditional role model of women, for instance, women treated as subordinates rather than equal partners/earners. As the influence of traditions is present, the role model of women in rural society is still a housewife. Previous research and my results show that in Spain, this role is strongly highlighted, as Spanish rural areas are described as traditional, masculinized and gender unequal. Only 9 percent of women are in charge of mostly small farms, and 82 percent of rural women are taking care of a member of a family. Even if a woman oversees the farm, it is highly probable that a man takes business decisions (Alonso and Trillo, 2014). In Poland, there are still women that want to fulfil that role model. However, a great number of Polish rural women have been torn between two possible roles: the traditional one and the modern woman that is educated, participating in the labour market and entrepreneurial (Michalska, 2013). The customs in Poland and Spain are still significant as the rural society is characterized by a higher number of children, less economic activity, or a lower level of education. In addition, the poor infrastructure, no access to social services, difficult access to education, no agencies to help women in the labour market all contribute to lower education level or difficult access to the labour market in Spain. Social reproduction politics, gender profiting, undeveloped or gender-biased family/labour market support policies and household division of labour also contribute to the current situation of rural women.

Rural women in both countries, besides being better educated than men, have lower participation in the

labour market. The labour market of Spain is characterised by greater values of economic activity rates than the case of Poland (See Table 4). Rural women in Spain are more economically active. However, women in rural areas of Poland shows higher rates of employment. Unemployment in rural Spain is much higher than in Poland (14 percent of a difference in case of rural women). Worth repeating is that in Poland, because of the “500 Plus” benefit, there was a huge outflow of women to the not economically active group, that caused a lower economic activity rate and decreased female unemployment. Besides, in Poland, some rural women are assigned to the employed group, even if not working because of KRUS insurance. In both cases, rural areas show a greater gender gap than the urban areas. The gender gaps in rural areas are clearly visible in economic activity (10 and 15 percent in Poland and Spain, respectively) and employment rates (over 13 percent in both cases). Different behaviour of women compared to men in terms of labour supply could explain the gender gaps in rural areas. Over time, the participation of women is increasing globally, and both considered countries match that trend. There are gender gaps in rural areas of both countries in all economic indicators. The reasoning of that could be women having a higher number of children in rural areas, more traditional household division of labour – the influence of sex discrimination. Moreover, the results confirm that women’s abilities are underestimated. Even though there are more women with higher education than men, there is a lower labour market participation among women in both countries. Women perform twice as much unpaid care work as men, they are prevalent in part-time employment and they work professionally only 60 percent compared to men. Women earn less than men do in both countries. Nevertheless, Spain is the country with the higher gender pay gap. The latter can be explained by many factors. For instance, the occupations with higher feminine participation tend to have lower wages. Moreover, when looking at the relation of education and income, the greater gender gap of high-income earners arithmetically reduces the apparent returns on education for women.

According to the results of the paper and the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR), Spain is a more gender equal country than Poland (World Economic Forum, 2022). The report claims that in 2022, the global gender gap has been closed by 68.1%. It will take 132 years to close gender gap globally (60 years in Europe) at such

a pace of change. Spain is ranked as 17th in the ranking of GGGR with the global gender gap index at the level of 0.788 (1 = parity), Poland is ranked as 77th with the score of 0.709. Both countries dropped in the ranking since the report in 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2019). The better score of Spain is due to higher educational attainment, significantly greater political empowerment, more women occupying high-rank positions and greater legal protection for women in Spain. In the past edition of the GGGR, Spain was one of the countries that improved the most over the past years. This improvement placed Spain in the top 10 most equal gender countries. It was mostly due to a significant increase in the number of women in parliament, but also due to improvement in all fields. Decreased numbers of 2022 derive from a lower percentage of women in the parliament or higher gender pay gap. Besides being less gender equal than Spain, Poland shows areas that were more advanced in terms of gender parity such as a higher percentage of legislators, senior officials and managers, more women working in technical jobs or the existing (albeit small) presence of women as head of the state. In Poland, only 28 percent of parliament consists of women. Moreover, only 27.3 percent of ministerial positions are held by women and in the last 50 years, women were head of state only 3.8 percent of the time. This data is not motivating, and political empowerment should be an area of consideration for the Polish government. It is important that women are represented in the political area. Both countries have a small percentage of women in STEM studies, gender pay gaps, unmet needs for family planning, physical violence or few women in high-rank positions. In other words, there is room for improvement in both cases.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper analysed gender equality levels in the rural labour market of Poland and Spain based on the theory of labour market supply. The paper concludes that there is gender inequality in both examined countries – this is confirmed by the results of this research and global gender indicators. Gender gaps are higher in rural areas than in urban areas or the country as a whole. Women in rural areas, besides being more educated, have lower participation in the labour market. The gender gaps considering economic activity and gender pay gaps are higher in rural areas than in urban ones. The level of gaps are quite high in both countries. Women perform

twice as much unpaid care work, they have prevalence in part-time employment, and they work professionally only 60 percent compared to men. Lower wages in the occupations chosen by women, having different categories when choosing a job or rural areas specifics (higher number of children, more traditional household division of labour), among others, may be the reasons for gender gaps. It seems like legal, institutional, and socio-cultural factors have the greatest influence on rural labour markets in Poland and Spain. According to the EIGE report (2016), both Poland and Spain could gain from implementing more gender-equal policies to a different degree, which is in line with the findings of this paper. The author also concludes that diminishing gender gaps would increase female participation in the labour market and thus, increase productivity and economic growth. As a more gender-equal country, Spain shows higher female participation in the labour market, but the gaps are still visible in many areas, such as wage differences, women working in a high-rank position, employment and economic activity rates discrepancy. Poland shows greater gender gaps in economic indicators, thus the recommendation is to pay more attention to gender-equal policy. The rural areas of Spain seem to be omitted by the country's policy, remaining undeveloped and with difficult living conditions. Contrastingly, Poland could develop rural areas thanks to EU funds. In both cases, there is room for improvement. Gender equality in Poland and Spain could not only have economic benefits but also benefits in terms of the well-being of the inhabitants. Besides, gender parity could also be an answer to the ageing population in both countries.

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