

Structural determinants of the gender wage gap in Mexico's informal sector

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the factors that perpetuate and widen the gender pay gap in the Mexican labor market. The methodology used consists of the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition, supplemented by a descriptive statistical analysis. The results show a wage gap exceeding 39%, attributed primarily to unobservable factors, generally associated with discrimination. Furthermore, the variables number of hours worked and educational level are identified as significant, with a favorable effect for men and women, respectively. As a recommendation, it is suggested that public policy be oriented toward actions that combat wage discrimination and the cultural factors that promote unequal pay. Among the limitations of the study is its static nature, as it does not incorporate a historical perspective but is based on the most recent available data. The originality of the study lies in the integration of econometric analysis with statistical evidence, which allows for a broader and better-substantiated approach. In conclusion, the results indicate that the wage gap is not explained solely by differences in job skills but is largely due to structural and cultural factors.

JEL Classification: J16, J31, O17

Keywords: gender pay gap, informal labor market, job inclusion, gender equity, public policies.

Determinantes estructurales de la brecha salarial de género en el sector informal mexicano

Resumen

Esta investigación busca identificar los factores que perpetúan y profundizan la brecha salarial de género en el mercado laboral mexicano. La metodología aplicada consiste en la descomposición Oaxaca-Blinder, complementada con un análisis estadístico-descriptivo. Los resultados muestran una brecha salarial superior al 39%, atribuida principalmente a factores no observables, generalmente asociados a discriminación. Asimismo, se identifican como significativas, las variables número de horas trabajadas y nivel educativo con un efecto favorable para los hombres y mujeres respectivamente. Como recomendación, se sugiere orientar la política pública hacia acciones que combatan la discriminación salarial y los factores culturales que promueven una retribución desigual. Entre las limitaciones del estudio se encuentra su carácter estático, ya que no incorpora una perspectiva histórica, sino que se basa en los datos más recientes disponibles. La originalidad del trabajo radica en la integración del análisis econométrico con evidencia estadística, lo que permite un enfoque más amplio y mejor fundamentado. En conclusión, los resultados indican que la brecha salarial no se explica únicamente por diferencias en habilidades laborales, sino que mayormente se deben a factores estructurales y culturales.

Clasificación JEL: J16, J31, O17.

Palabras clave: Brecha salarial de género, mercado laboral informal, inclusión laboral, equidad de género.

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1. Introduction

It is imperative that men and women enjoy equal opportunities in accessing decent work. The International Labor Organization vision establishes that these jobs not only must ensure an equitable income but also must guarantee safe conditions in the working environment as well as social protection, equitable treatment, and the creation of perspectives that encourage personal development and full social integration of all people, regardless of their gender. (Ghai, 2003).

Furthermore, as part of a strategy aligned with feminist principles and sustainable development goals, the eighth goal of the 2030 Agenda aims to achieve authentic labor inclusion and the promotion of decent work for all people, including men, women, young people, and persons with disabilities. This is accompanied by an unwavering commitment to eliminating pay disparity, ensuring equal pay for equal work. (United Nations, 2023)

In the contemporary labor context, gender equity and pay equality are crucial issues that directly impact societies' prosperity and development. In spite of significant progress towards gender equity in various scopes, the informal labor market remains like a field where inequality notably perseveres. Informal workers continue facing obstacles that limit their access to equitable employment opportunities as well as fair payment. In this context, the gender pay gap not only reflects women's work undervaluation but also directly affects their quality of life and well-being, perpetuating existing gender inequalities. To address this challenge, it is essential to understand the gender pay gap multiple dimensions in the informal labor market in order to formulate strategies that empower women and promote equal opportunities.

The informal labor market, characterized by its lack of regulation and precarious working conditions, presents a persistent challenge in the quest for equal pay between men and women. Efforts aiming at promoting the inclusion of women in the workplace are not enough in Latin America. Studies, such as Ruesga et al. (2014), highlight how labor mobility dynamics and informality contribute to gender pay gaps in the Brazilian context. Meanwhile, Sánchez et al. (2021) study shows the persistent inequality-by-gender pay in Ecuador and the importance of addressing gender discrimination in all working conditions. Linthon-Delgado and Méndez-Heras (2022) research highlights different components that contribute to gender pay gap in both formal and informal work in Ecuador.

In Mexico, Loayza and Sugawara (2009) study highlights the role of informal work as a last resort for many workers and its relation to formal labor markets, especially in urban areas. Varela-Llamas et al. (2013) highlight how informal workers are part of traditional or disadvantaged sectors, evidencing the duality with the Mexican labor market.

A number of research studies have addressed the issue of wage gaps in Latin America. For example, Zuñiga (2019) analyzes the gender pay gap in Peru and the adequacy of the measures adopted by the State under the Equal Pay Act. In Ecuador, Sanchez et al. (2021) analyze the impact that social inequities have on people's quality of life; their study concludes that there is evidence that the gender pay gap has been reduced by about 46%, which means a difference of 52 USD on average. Torres and Zaclicever (2022), evaluate wage discrimination by gender in the Costa Rican labor market between 2001 and 2019, a period characterized by a strong increase in the presence of multinational companies in the country, which would have contributed to improving the

opportunities for women's labor market insertion and the quality of the jobs to which they have access. In Ecuador, Antón et al. (2021) estimate and analyze the gender wage gap to identify the factors that influence wage determination in the public and private sectors. Among the main results, they highlight that there was no evidence of a gender wage gap in the public sector. However, in the private sector there is evidence of a wage gap that is mostly due to gender discrimination. Rodríguez (2022) analyzes the gender wage gap along the wage distribution in the regions of Mexico. The results reveal that, in Mexico and its regions, gender wage inequality is accentuated at the top of the wage distribution in the regions most exposed to trade liberalization.

Rodríguez et al. (2017) identify significant pay disparities between genders in different labor sectors, highlighting the necessity to address these inequities; meanwhile, Rodríguez et al. (2019) determine that pay inequality and informality vary in different regions of Mexico and evidence how these factors interact to affect women in the labor market. Likewise, Varela-Llamas and Ocegueda (2020) show how both informal work and unemployment impact poverty in different regions of Mexico contributing, thus, to understanding the link between the labor market and poverty.

Additionally, Rodríguez (2019) identifies how gender pay differences vary among sectors and how it affects gender equity in the Mexican labor market. González and Treviño (2020) highlight the persistence of informality in the Mexican labor market and raise questions on such informality's length and impact. Rodríguez (2022) analyzes gender pay differences between the public and private sectors in Mexico, considering the informal sector a relevant factor. Furthermore, Varela and Retamoza (2020) suggest a connection between the informal work increase and the economic activity in the Mexican labor market.

In the context of corporations, Ovando-Aldana et al. (2021) ascertain that the company's size plays a pivotal role in determining a higher prevalence of informal employment. Furthermore, their research suggests that public policies aimed at mitigating this phenomenon have failed to exert a discernible influence on the characteristics of informal employment in Mexico.

This paper aims at exploring the connection between the gender pay gap and the informal labor market in Mexico, analyzing causes that make female workforce be displaced to the most vulnerable activities within the informal sector of the Mexican economy; the consequences; and possible recommendations for the social and economic policy design that promote female empowerment and that may contribute to the issue reduction.

Moreover, concrete female empowerment strategies that have the potential to close the pay gap and improve working opportunities for women in the informal labor market will be presented. Ultimately, this paper seeks to contribute to debate and action in the search for a more fair and inclusive society, where all people, regardless of their gender, have equal opportunities and rights in the workplace.

The research begins by defining informal economy, continues with the analysis of female participation in the informal market, and then analyzes the factors that explain gender pay gap, as well as the family care roles carried out by women. Lastly, it analyzes the atypical work forms women have and it concludes with a proposal for public policies in order to address the gender pay gap in Mexico. Section four analyzes a decomposition model called Oaxaca Blinder, which analyzes the wage gap by explained and unexplained factors and by characteristics. Section five discusses the challenges of economic policy, and section six presents the conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Informal Economy Concept

According to the International Labor Organization, ILO (2018), the informal sector comprises a set of units, generally small-scale and with basic organizational structure ones, mainly dedicated to creating jobs and obtaining income for people involved in such activities. This includes both unregistered companies and legal entities regardless of their owners, usually belonging to one or more members of the same household. Other definitions of informality highlight its dual nature. On the one hand, it is a work source, but at the same time, it can have illegal connotations, as indicated by Cota and Navarro (2016), due to its lack of legal recognition, according to Osorio and Díaz (2005), and its operation on the fringes of government regulations, as pointed out by Heintz (2006).

Furthermore, informal activity results in regulatory-liability and tax evasion, while excluding workers from protection and services offered by law and the State, as argued by Loayza and Sugawara (2009). In this context, it is important to highlight that women are particularly affected by such informality, as they are often forced to work in informal jobs that lack legal protections and social benefits, increasing, thus, their economic vulnerability.

The groups that are labeled “informal” on account of a fundamental characteristic they share: lack of recognition and lack of protection within legal and regulatory frameworks. Aside, from this common characteristic, both ILO (2002) and Calderón (2018) emphasize that informal workers and entrepreneurs are characterized by facing a high degree of vulnerability, further emphasizing the disadvantages women frequently experience in the informal sector, being part of a particularly precarious position.

Although labor informality affects everyone equally, it is crucial to recognize that women face significant unfavorable conditions in this context, according to Bonnet et al. (2019), there is a noticeable number of women in highly vulnerable informal work, characterized by extremely low pay. These works, as described by Chant and Pedwell (2008) and, Horbath and Gracia (2014), are often invisible to society and include occupations such as household work, home piecework, and unpaid work in small and medium-sized family businesses. Generally, women have to choose informality because, as Alcazar et al. (2015) and, Loayza and Sugawara (2009) mention, there are factors limiting women's incorporation into formal employment. Notwithstanding, it is important to underline that, women often face significant disadvantages in the informal sector regarding job security and social protection. In this way, choosing a job in the informal sector is due more to necessity than to a voluntary decision.

Chant and Pedwell (2008) highlight that these occupations are often characterized by low quality, lack of regularity in employment and, in many cases, the complete absence of pay; furthermore, rarely do they provide access to social security benefits. Unfortunately, despite the precarious conditions, many women are forced to turn to informal work since, in many situations, this is the only option that adapts to their needs to enter the labor market. This allows them to balance their household responsibilities with their generating income necessity, as noted by Ejaz, Grinevich, and Karatas-Ozkan (2023). Under this approach, the importance of recognizing gender inequality in labor informality is highlighted while the invisibility and precariousness of jobs occupied mainly by women is emphasized.

3. Data Analysis

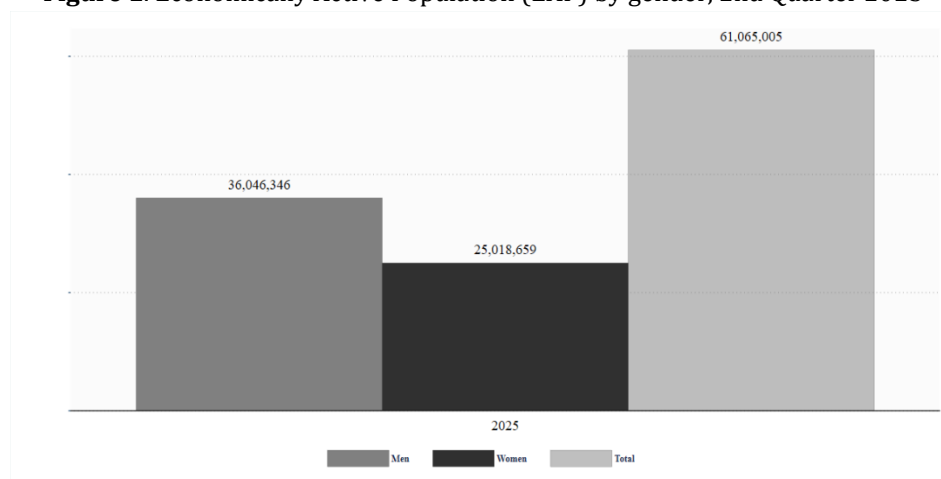
3.1. Pay Gap in the Mexican Informal Market

Mexican economy is characterized by low female participation in the labor market, according to the National Occupation and Employment Survey (ENOE, for its Spanish initials), at the end of the second quarter of 2025, Mexico had approximately 61 millions of Economically Active Population (EAP), just about 59% of this group were men and nearly 41% women (See Figure 1.).

By 2025, 4.5 women out of 10 are engaged in economic activities, while the figure for men is seven out of 10. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, women's economic participation had been increasing slightly but systematically. Moreno and Cuellar (2021) point to atypical behavior in the informal sector, during de the COVID-19 pandemic, as this sector functioned as an adjustment or absorption mechanism in response to the loss of formal employment during times of crisis to becoming the sector that expelled the largest number of EAP.

The informal sector was particularly affected, with reductions of 0.53 percentage points for men and 4.44 percentage points for women. However, after the outbreak of the pandemic, this indicator has not recovered, which means an increase in the participation gap between men and women, as well as a setback in terms of women's economic autonomy. (UNDP, 2023)

Figure 1. Economically Active Population (EAP) by gender, 2nd Quarter 2025

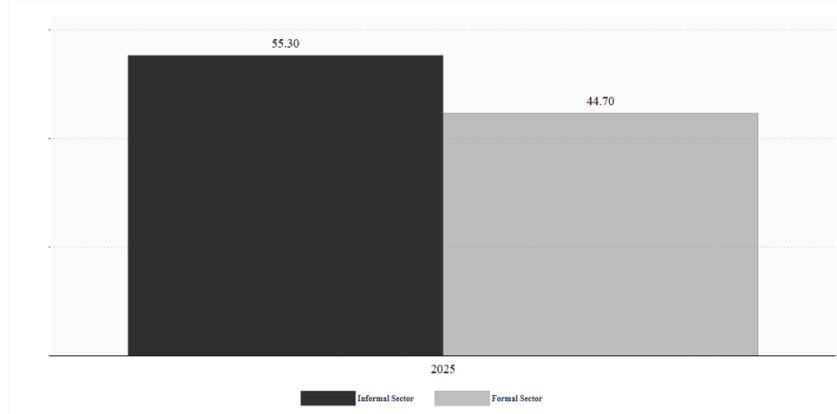


Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

In this sense, the financing structure and profitability levels in the Mexican industrial sector play an important role in the ability of companies to generate stable and well-paid jobs. Morales, Gurrola and López (2025) show that greater indebtedness without a proportional increase in profits can negatively impact long-term financial sustainability.

This behavior is a consequence of a series of socio-economic factors such as the caregiving role that in Mexico and Latin America is delegated to women, social stereotypes, the quality and type of education, among others. In this context, women face a lower possibility of finding a formal job, consequently, the informal sector appears as an option to combine the responsibilities at home and earn an income, for this reason just over 45% of the female EAP is employed in the formal sector against approximately 55% who are working in the informal sector (See Figure 2).

Figure 2. Employed women in formal and informal sector, 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

The informal sector also becomes in the most common labor alternative for vulnerable age groups, as shown in Figure 3 for female population between 15 and 29 years of age and 56 years and older, labor participation occurs predominantly in the informal sector. These results align with observations in the Chilean economy, where, according to Flores-Arenas and Inostroza-Correa (2025), younger women and those nearing retirement age are more likely to be employed in the informal sector.

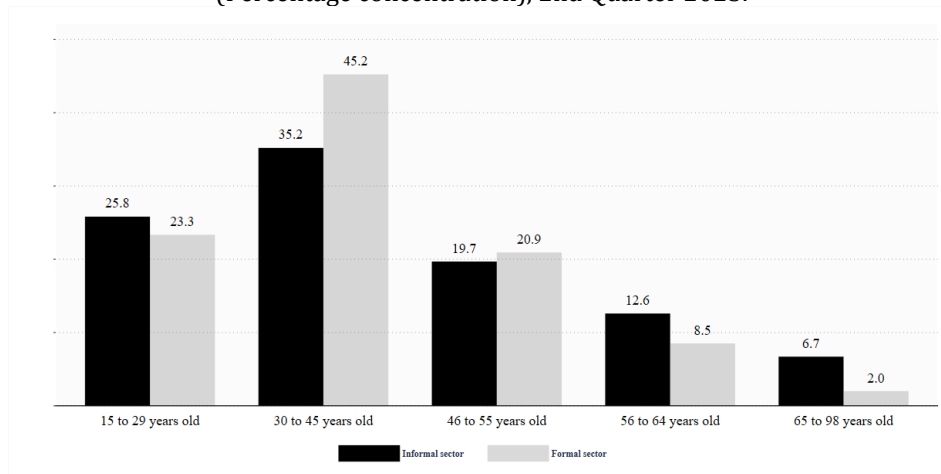
Unfortunately, women are negatively affected by informality since this sector excludes workers from protection and services offered by law and the State (Loayza & Sugawara, 2009), in addition to offering jobs with a high degree of vulnerability (Calderon, 2018) and at the same time, the occupations in this sector are often characterized by their low quality, lack of regularity in employment and, in many cases, the complete absence of pay (Chant & Pedwell, 2008). While informal work is critical and may drive employment, it is often a “last resort” option and poses numerous challenges for women’s economic and social wellbeing (WEF 2023).

In the informal sector increases the likelihood of falling into poverty, as demonstrated by the work of Ramos-Soto, et al. (2025), which shows that nearly 90% of changes in poverty can be explained by variations in the informality rate. Similarly, their analysis reveals a bidirectional causality, estimating that for each one-point increase in the poverty rate, the informality rate rises by approximately 1.3 points.

In addition to the precarious work conditions, the informal sector has another characteristic that affects gender equality since in this sector the wage inequality persists and worsens. According to the ENOE (2025), the average monthly income of employed population in Mexico was set at \$5,844.00, while men receive 111% of this national average, women only earn 89.5% which means a salary gap of approximately 21 percentage points.

The gap becomes larger if we analyze the information by formal and informal sector. As can be seen in Figure 4, in the formal sector women earn 87% of a man's salary in contrast, in the informal sector the woman’s salary is only 71.5% respect to man. (ENOE, 2025).

Figure 3. Employed female population by age group and formal-informal sector (Percentage concentration), 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Figure 4. Average income of employed population by gender and formal-informal sector, 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

The wage gap is a crucial problem for our country. According to the Global Gender Gap Index (2025), we rank 123rd out of 148 countries, which places Mexico among the worst performers in the world and in Latin America. Unfortunately, this gap deepens in the informal sector, where there are also conditions of labor and social vulnerability, that's why it's urgent reflection on the necessity to address this issue from a feminist perspective in the workplace, recognizing that such disparities reflect not only economic but also structural and systemic inequities that deeply affect women in their search for equality and justice.

3.2. Factors explaining the concentration of women in the informal sector and the widening of the wage gap

3.2.1. Gender gaps in education skills

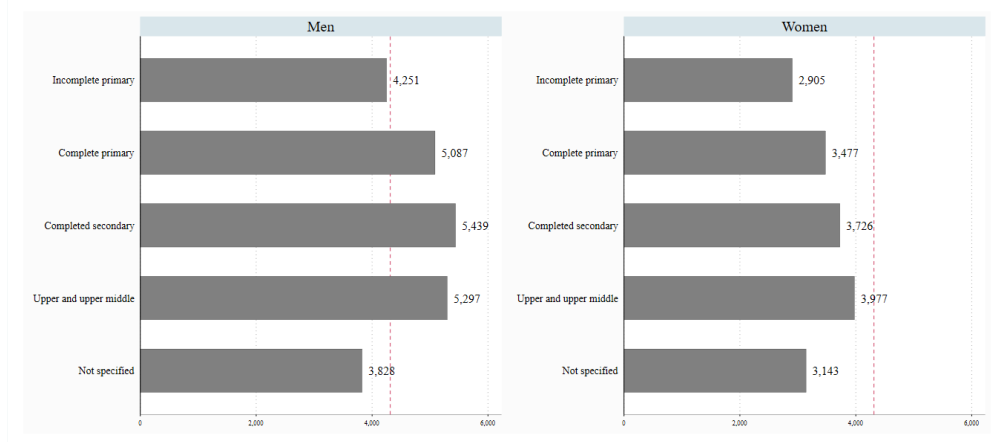
Labor markets are reconfigured with the emergence of new modalities and needs, education must adapt to new technologies and provide the cutting-edge skills necessary to reduce the gap in employment, productivity and salary. The skills and tools that the population acquires through education and training can impact women's flexibility and ability to balance care responsibilities around work. (WEF, 2023)

Nonetheless, it is essential to emphasize that, although educational disparities are a main cause of pay differences between men and women, there are researches, such as the one carried out by Horbath and Gracia (2014), that indicates a higher educational level does not necessarily represent a higher income for working women. In this sense, progress in education has not been sufficient to eliminate the wage gap that persists to this day, as is the case in our country.

According to the WEF (2023) through The Global Gap Index, Mexico is in complete education parity, with full parity in enrollment in secondary and tertiary education and 98% parity in literacy rate. On the other hand, INEGI (2020) points out that women represented approximately 55.2% and almost 56% in postgraduate studies, like specialties and master's degrees respectively. Meanwhile, participation is virtually equal, around 50%, for both genders in doctorate degree. Furthermore, within the group of women who are part of the employed population, 42.1% have a higher education degree, a figure that exceeds by almost 5% the proportion of men with similar education, reaching 37.2%.

However, despite these notable advances in the educational field, a worrying gender pay gap persists latently. After analyzing the information on the population education levels and their respective pays, a clear picture of the disadvantages is revealed. Figure 5 shows data related to the average salary of informal jobs by educational level (the red line corresponds to the national average income). The information reveals that, for all levels, the salary gap is wide. With primary education, women earn only 68% of the average salary corresponding to men, and for higher education, it reaches 75%.

Figure 5. Average monthly income of informal sector by level of education, 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Regardless of notable advances in women's education in Mexico, these improvements do not proportionally reflect an equal pay between genders. Even with an increase in women obtaining

higher education degrees, the gender pay gap continues existing. These results are particularly interesting, as they contradict the theory that investment in education and vocational training should lead to improved productivity and, consequently, higher wages. Contrary to what is happening in the Brazilian economy, as demonstrated in the research by Gomes et al. (2025) the wage gap between employees with an intermediate level of education and those with basic education is between 17% and 20%. However, those with higher education earn significantly higher wages, with an increase ranging from 82% to 89% compared to their less qualified peers.

The findings of Arroyo et al. (2024). for the Peruvian market are consistent with what was observed in the Brazilian market, indicating a positive correlation between educational attainment and salary level. However, the impact of education tends to be more pronounced in formal sector jobs than in the informal sector. For instance, higher education results in a 44% increase in income for formal sector positions, compared to a 36% increase for informal sector jobs.

Although the level of education has not been able to close the wage gap, it does have a positive effect on the possibility of leaving the informal sector. According to data from the International Labor Organization report (2018), as well as research carried out by Loayza and Sugawara (2009), it is evident that there is an inverse relation between education level and participation in the informal economy. Those who finished high school or higher education, in contrast to those who have no studies or just elementary school, are less likely to be employed in the informal sector. This tendency is globally observed regardless of being a developing or developed country. For instance, in America, approximately 80% of people in the informal sector do not have formal education; this percentage decreases to 32% among those with higher education. (ILO, 2018)

3.2.2. Work force representation in female-dominated fields

Around the world there is a marked bias in occupational fields traditionally held by women, the activities where the female presence dominates, according to the WEF, 2023 are Healthcare and Care Services (64.7%), Education (54.0%) and Consumer Services (51.8%). This phenomenon demonstrates a deeply rooted issue in society. The fields of science, technology, and politics have historically been dominated by men, resulting in significant obstacles for women to access them. Even once inside, their representation remains a minority. This pattern leads to a clear disadvantage for female workers in areas that men are often more valued in terms of income and job opportunities. As a result, the female population is in a clearly disadvantaged position, staying in less valued areas and in occupations traditionally considered an extension of their household roles, (Horbath and Gracia, 2014).

Dressel et al. (2025) highlight that cultural norms persist over time and have a strong effect on the valuation of work, which is why occupations traditionally associated with women continue to be undervalued. Unfortunately, even working or training in cutting-edge fields does not eliminate the gender pay gap. As Zajac, et al. (2025) work shows, income disparities persist in areas like STEM as well. From the early years of a career, a gap of approximately 20% against women is observed, which not only persists but also tends to widen over time.

In Mexico, it is important to highlight that, according to INEGI (2020), approximately 75% of women choose majors related to Education, Health Sciences (68.3%), Social Sciences and Law (59.4%). Nevertheless, it is crucial to notice that female participation in fields such as Engineering represents only 30%, while it barely reaches 24% in Information Technology. These results show the

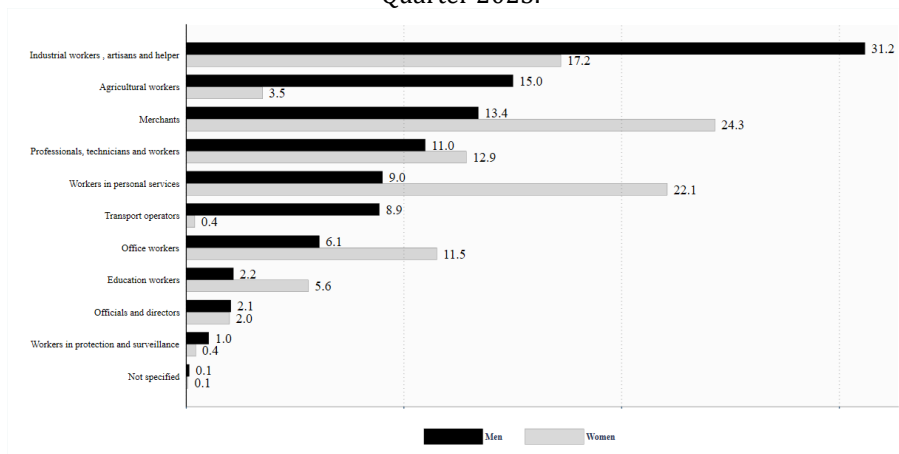
need to redirect efforts and acquire the new skills that labor markets demand and in which women would have a greater possibility of higher salaries. According to WEF (2023) enrollment in technology skills such as technological literacy has a 43.7% parity and AI and big data 33.7%, both are within the top 10 skills projected to grow, and progress has been sluggish since 2015.

According to Van-Ham and Büchel (2006) and Cota and Navarro (2015), gender discrimination still is a significant barrier to advancement in female employment, as women are often pressured to study and work in fields or activities traditionally labeled as feminine. The issue of wage gaps, as previously mentioned, remains unresolved in Mexico, despite progress in educational equity.

Contrary to expectations, wage inequality persists and, in many cases, deepens over time. In this context, the wage gap appears to be closely linked to structural factors, such as the sexual division of labor. As Carreño and Crisóstomo (2025). Argues that the feminization of labor refers to the trend in which certain activities have been classified as feminine, leading to the stereotyping of women's participation in sectors such as commerce, healthcare, domestic work, and personal services. These sectors generally exhibit low levels of labor formality and limited job stability. Furthermore, women often occupy lower-skilled positions or subordinate roles, which results in lower incomes and limited access to social security systems.

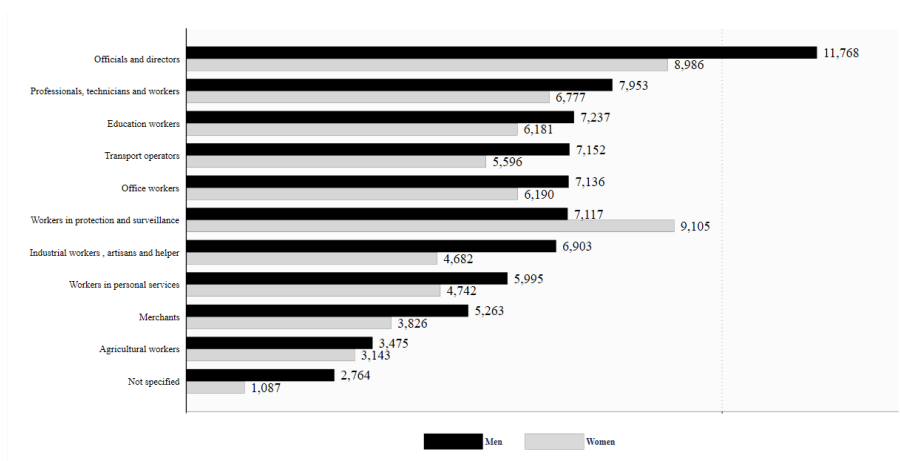
Figure 6 y 7 show that as a result of the educational pattern adopted by the female population and stereotypes still persist in the Mexican economy, it is observed that they have predominant participation in the areas where they receive the lowest salary levels such as: merchant's activities (female participation 24%; 27.3 percentage points wage gap), personal services (female participation of 22.1%; 21 percentage points wage gap), office workers (female participation 11.5%; 13.25 percentage points wage gap). Although educational services are the third highest earning activity and are characterized by a dominant female presence, unfortunately women earn only about 85% of the salary corresponding to men.

Figure 6. Employed population according to occupation and gender, (Percentage concentration) 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Figure 7. Average monthly income of employed population by occupation and gender, 2nd Quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

To address this, pay inequality and promote greater gender equity in the workplace and payments, it is essential to actively encourage the participation of women in areas such as engineering, mathematics, and computing. Doing so not only expands income opportunities also, works toward building a more equitable and diverse work environment.

Regarding the informal sector, Heintz (2006) observes that women are concentrated in informal work as self-employed workers in non-agricultural activities, household employees, and family business workers. These jobs usually offer lower hourly pay and a higher risk of falling into poverty compared to typical informal work for men.

Such patterns reflect the necessity of challenging and transforming gender structures embedded in society, which perpetuate pay inequalities and limit women's opportunities in the workplace. It is crucial to question and change these gender standards and stereotypes that continue hindering progress towards genuine pay equality.

3.2.3. Family caregiving role limits access to full-time jobs

In Mexico, as well as in many other countries, women continue predominantly taking over the role of caregivers of children, sick people, people with disability, and the elderly, as well as of household activities (Vela, 2017). It is important to highlight that these tasks are characterized by generating no payment or remuneration although this work is so important that it is estimated it could reach an economic value equivalent to 22.8% of the Gross Domestic Product in 2019, according to the INEGI Women and Men in Mexico (2020) study. However, these unpaid tasks restrict women's opportunities of getting into the labor market or doing it under equitable conditions.

They also limit their participation in social, political, recreational, and training activities, thus preventing their full development as human beings. The caregiving role remains like a persistent reality in Latin American economies. As highlighted by Flores-Arenas and Inostroza-Correa (2025), the responsibility of caring for dependents significantly raises the likelihood of women being employed in the informal sector, a trend that even has been further intensified by the pandemic. Even in countries outside Latin America, such as the Philippines, the same post-pandemic effect can be observed, with the probability of falling into informality increasing by 2.2 percentage points for the female population, compared to 1.7 percentage points for the average population. Ramos (2024).

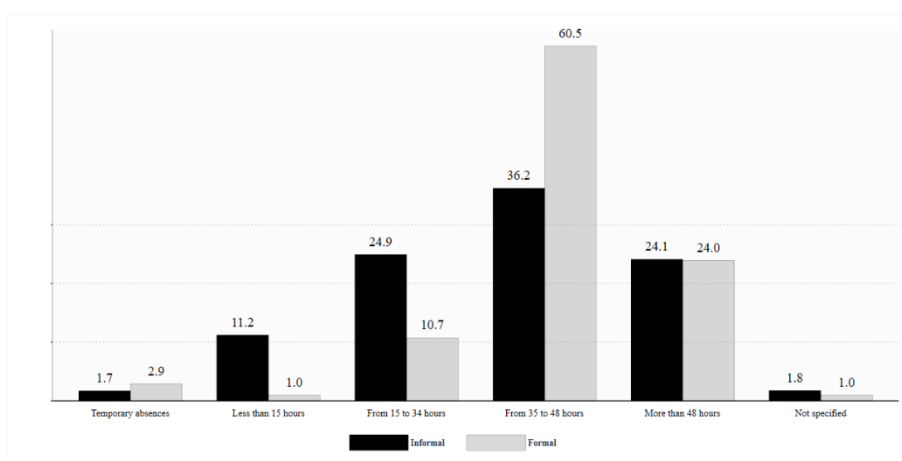
Statistics reveal that household chores are carried out mainly by women, which constitutes a clear obstacle to their opportunities to access the formal labor market and their ability to do so under favorable conditions (Vela, 2017). This is reflected in the high proportion of women who, being mothers, declare that household responsibilities are the main reason for not working at a 92% compared to 12.8% of the male population in the same situation. (INEGI, 2020). Even women re-entering the workforce after becoming mothers may face additional short-term wage penalties, as demonstrated by a study of Chalermsook et al. (2026) in which the authors found a temporary but pronounced gap in the first few years postpartum. These penalties are concentrated in occupations with greater time rigidity and limited schedule flexibility.

The result of this unequal burden of unpaid work is that women spend considerably more time on these tasks than men, averaging more than 50 hours a week compared to approximately 28 hours for men. This means that women not only face a double shift, working 66.6% of their time without pay, but they also sacrifice their leisure time and health. If the current trajectory continues, the disparity in the time women and men spend on unpaid care will decrease only slightly; however, by 2050, women worldwide will still spend 9.5% more time or 2.3 hours per day more than men on unpaid care work. (Onu Women, 2023)

This household responsibility allocation imbalance not only limits female worker's options to access formal employment but also explains the observed pay segmentation. Women are often pushed into informal sector activities, giving them greater flexibility to combine paid work with family care, even if this means earning less. (Heintz, 2006).

In Figure 8, we can see that the labor relationships denominated as atypical which, according to the definition of the International Labor Organization (2018), include temporary jobs and part-time jobs (less than 35 hours per week), predominantly fall into labor informality with a 37.7% against 14.6% in the formal sector.

Figure 8. Employed population by formal-informal sector and duration of the workday (Percentage concentration), 2nd Quarter 2025.

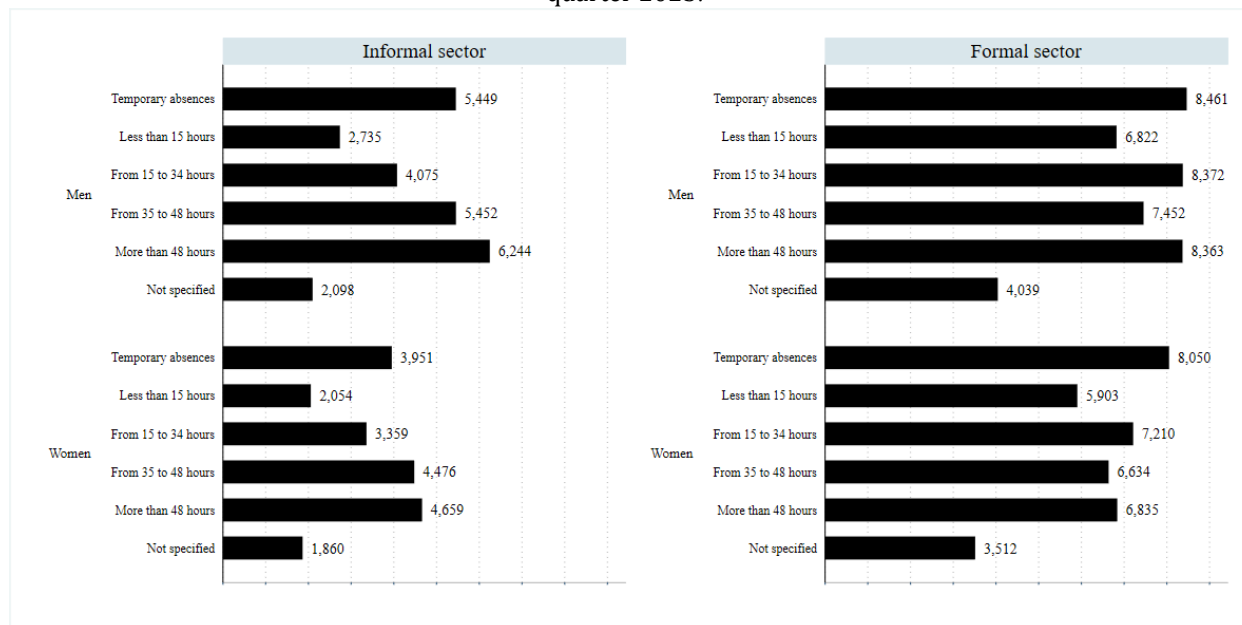


Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Of course, a consequence of the concentration of the female labor force in these forms of work is a widening of the wage gap. The analysis of the data observed in Figure 9 allows us to draw

conclusions in two ways: in relation to the wage gap between sectors and in relation to the gender wage gap.

Figure 9. Average income of the employed population by sector, gender and duration of workday 2nd quarter 2025.



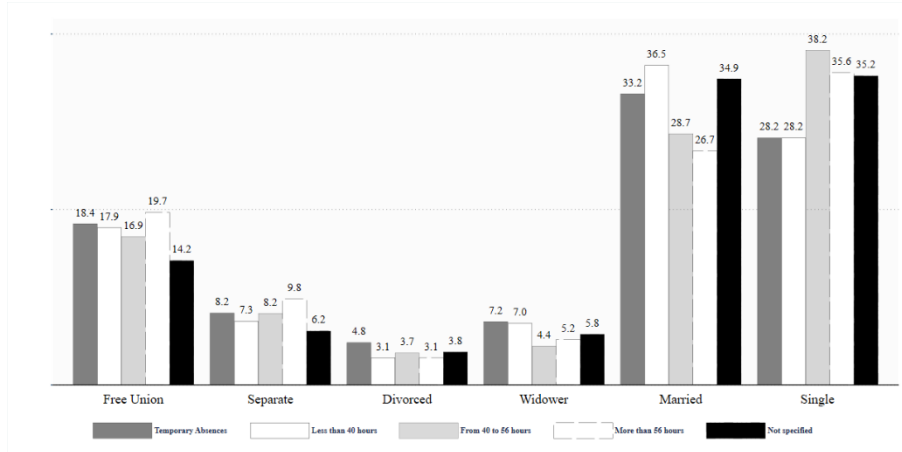
Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Regarding wage gap between formal and informal sector, in work activities of less than 15 hours, a woman in the informal sector barely earns 34% of what a woman in the formal sector earns; between 15 and 39 hours the wage gap decreases approximately 12 percentage points since the proportion raises to 46%. For full-time working hours, it can be concluded that the wage gap decreases significantly since a woman in the informal sector covers 67% of the salary of a woman in the formal sector. On the other hand, the gender gap for informal sector indicates a similar situation with larger gaps for partial jobs, however, the differences are smaller since a woman in less than 15 working hours, earns 75% of a man's salary, the ratio changes to 82 % in jobs from 15 to 39 hours and remains unchanged in full-time jobs. The responsibility of being the caregivers of the home and the type of education are two of the most important factors that condemn women to low-paying, part-time jobs and high vulnerability.

Women's traditional roles as caregivers, household managers and household workers have them in a vulnerable situation as they have to deal with reduced working hours. Furthermore, factors such as marital status, household head, number of children, and school level further limit the possibilities of insertion into the formal labor market. Loayza and Sugawara (2009) point out that married women often prefer to work in the informal sector due to the greater flexibility it offers, allowing them to take care of their family. According to Pedrero and Nieto (2003), divorced and separated women are those with the highest rates of participation in economic activity, with levels close to 80% compared to married or cohabiting women who have levels close to 40%. This aspect is confirmed in the actual Mexican reality since, as can be seen in Figure 10, 55.8% of single women

work between 40 to 56 hours a week, in contrast to the 44.6% and 48.4% of married and free union women respectively. (ENOE, 2023).

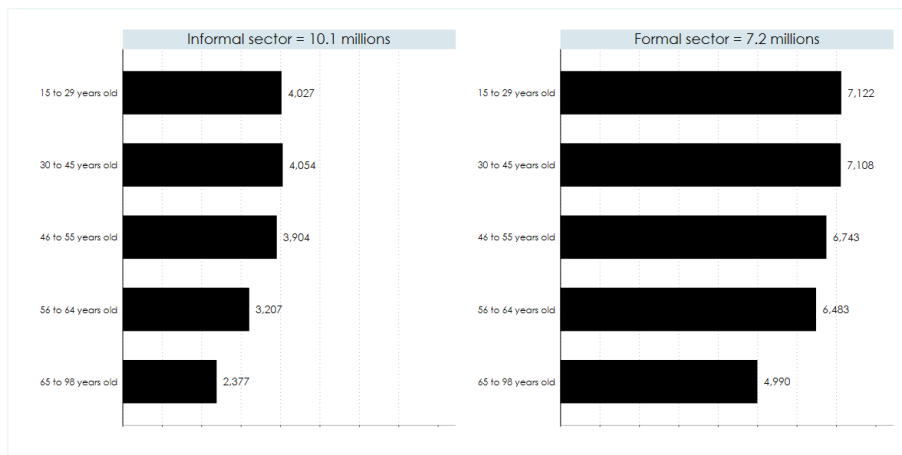
Figure 10. Women employed according to working hours and marital status, 4th quarter 2023.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

It is also relevant to notice that the labor participation of women with minor children is considerably lower in the formal sector compared to the informal one, (Loayza and Sugawara, 2009), since many of them cannot access childcare services even with formal jobs. In other cases, workers in the formal sector with better income can hire services that support their household tasks. The displacement of the female labor force to activities in the informal sector translates into a significant wage gap, which increases with the age of the worker, As shown in Figure 11, informal sector workers aged 15 to 45 earn, on average, only 57% of what women in the formal sector earn. This gap becomes even more pronounced in older age groups, where earnings in the informal sector drop to half—or even less—of those in the formal sector.

Figure 11. Average income of the employed women with one or more children 2nd quarter 2025.



Source: Own elaboration with data from the ENOE, INEGI.

Although atypical work forms can be a flexible option for women to find work, it is important to highlight that, as Carr and Chen (2004) point out, these activities, such as work from home, which initially allowed the female force incorporation into the labor market, often lead to women's marginalization in unskilled jobs with low pay and low productivity.

Atypical work forms and gender inequities in the labor market are crucial issues that require attention and action. It is essential to develop public policies that address these inequities and promote greater pay and labor equality for Mexican women, allowing them to access quality jobs and full working hours without sacrificing their role at home.

4. Methodology

The Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition consists of separating the potential wage differences between two study groups. The difference in average income is decomposed into a component explained by observable characteristics and an unexplained component, associated with differences in the returns to those characteristics. Similarly, this research seeks to explore the salary differences between the group of men and women who participate in the economically active population.

As described by Linthon-Delgado and Méndez-Heras (2022), to perform this decomposition, Mincer regressions are estimated for the wages of men and women separately as described in the following equations.

$$\ln W_i^H = \beta_0^H + \sum_{j=1}^n \beta_j^H X_{ji}^H + u_i^H$$

$$\ln W_i^M = \beta_0^M + \sum_{j=1}^n \beta_j^M X_{ji}^M + u_i^M$$

In the equation, the natural logarithm of income for men and women is represented by $\ln W$, the variable X represents the characteristics that influence salary income, β are the labor market returns to the characteristics of workers and μ is the error term. Performing the Oaxaca Blinder differential, the following result is obtained

$$\sum_j \beta_j^H \bar{X}_{ji}^H - \sum_j \beta_j^M \bar{X}_{ji}^M = \sum_j \beta_j^H (\bar{X}_j^H - \bar{X}_j^M) + \sum_j \bar{X}_j^M (\beta_j^H - \beta_j^M)$$

The first term represents the part of the wage gap that can be explained by differences in the observed characteristics of men and women, while the second term reflects the part of the wage gap that cannot be explained by differences in human capital and is normally attributed to discrimination.

For this research, the ENOE database was used for the fourth quarter of 2025, after filtering and cleaning the data, a total of 12,644 observations were used. The variables used were logarithm of income, as the dependent variable and, as explanatory variables, years of education (*Educ*), years of experience (*Exp*), hours worked per week (*Hrs*) and belonging to the formal/informal sector (*Form/inform*). The analysis was performed using the Python 3.14 programming language. The summary results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Decomposition of wage inequality

	Coef	Std.Err	P> t
<i>Total</i>	0.331498	0.004782	*
<i>Explained</i>	0.075547	0.002327	*
<i>Unexplained</i>	0.255958	0.004509	*

* Significant at 5%. Own elaboration with data of ENOE, INEGI.

The Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition results show a significant gender pay gap. The total difference in the logarithm of income is 0.331, which equates to approximately a 39% difference in favor of men. Most of this difference cannot be explained by observable factors (0.076 \approx 23%) between men and women, such as education, hours worked, age, and formal employment. The unexplained component reaches a value of (0.256 \approx 77%) this component reflects differences in the returns to these characteristics, that is, the way in which the labor market remunerates similar attributes between men and women is not equitable.

Table 2. Decomposition details (explained part by characteristic)

Variable	Coef	Std.Err	P> t
<i>Constant</i>	1.24451	0.094087	
<i>Educ</i>	-0.01414	0.001142	*
<i>Exp</i>	-0.00053	0.000181	*
<i>Hrs</i>	0.08894	0.001808	*
<i>Form/inform</i>	0.00136	0.001057	

* Significant at 5%. Own elaboration with data of ENOE, INEGI.

In Table 2, the differences by factor can be observed. The explained portion of the gender pay gap is primarily driven by differences in hours worked (.089 \approx 9.29%). This finding is consistent with the hypothesis that caregiving responsibilities constrain women's labor supply, limiting their ability to work full hours and thereby widening the wage gap. In contrast, education has a compensatory effect (-0.014 \approx 1.4%). The results suggest that women, on average, have higher levels of education than men, which contributes to partially reducing the pay gap.

The experience variable, virtually no impact on the decomposition, and the constant, although it shows the existence of structural differences, does not have statistical significance and therefore cannot be considered a weighty factor within the findings. Finally, regarding membership in the formal sector, although the coefficient has a positive sign—which would indicate that greater male participation in formal employment could contribute to widening the gap—this effect is also not statistically significant. Therefore, it is not possible to assert with sufficient evidence that formality is a relevant determinant in the explained component of wage inequality.

The results suggest that the explained part of the wage gap is mainly driven by differences in hours worked, while education tends to reduce inequality. However, even though women have similar or higher levels of education, this does not translate into comparable earnings. This points to the presence of other structural factors that limit how education is rewarded in the labor market, which is reflected in the unexplained portion of the gap. This result is consistent with Castro and Ayaviri-Nina (2025), who, through a bibliometric study, find evidence of discrimination—

particularly against women—that is not related to their abilities or skills but rather to characteristics associated with gender.

5. Economic policy challenges

We must not forget that the problem of wage gaps is caused by multiple factors, therefore, attention must be paid to various aspects of socio-economic policy. First, World Bank (2020) points out, this research has shown that the most important barrier to women's labor force participation is the role of caregiver assigned primarily to Mexican women. In this sense, it is of a great importance that the government and the private sector join efforts to provide reliable, quality, nearby and low-cost infant care services.

The use of childcare services in Mexico is low; only 5% of children between the ages of 0 and 2 attend daycare, compared to 35% in OECD countries. The main obstacles facing childcare services in Mexico include limited supply, high heterogeneity in service quality, and a lack of public trust due to inadequate regulation (OECD, 2017). This lack of affordable and reliable care limits women's participation in the workforce and restricts their ability to develop financial resilience. In this context, Hernández and Moreno (2025) show that having an emergency savings account is strongly associated with financial literacy and access to formal financial products; however, women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities and fewer dependents, face structural barriers to accumulating such precautionary savings. Therefore, expanding childcare infrastructure is not only a labor supply policy, but also a necessary support to improve women's long-term financial security and reduce their vulnerability to economic crises.

Expanding the supply and demand for care services can significantly increase women's labor force participation in the economy. As OECD (2017) reports, countries such as Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Switzerland achieve labor participation rates above 70% for women with children under three years of age, this fact is directly related to the attendance of children in childcare centers. The lack of affordable childcare is also a major obstacle that exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities within countries. In high-income countries, about 50% of children under 3 years of age attend childcare, the statistic changes to less than 30% in low-income countries. The closure of a large number of day care centers as a result of the COVID crisis highlights the importance of these services as parents have had to make greater efforts to combine childcare with their job responsibilities, while others have lost their jobs. (UNICEF, 2021)

On the other hand, the authority must face the challenge to achieve the equity law to strengthen and enforce laws and regulations that promote gender equity in the workplace, including pay discrimination eradication as well as the guarantee of equal pay for equal work. At the same time, it is a priority to generate the legislative means to encourage companies to implement gender equity policies, such as promoting women to leadership positions and adopting measures to reduce the pay gap. In the same way is imperative build and adopt instruments to establish monitoring and evaluation systems to measure progress in reducing informality and the gender pay gap and to adjust policies based on the results.

In terms of education, although we are very close to achieving educational equity, efforts must be redirected. Authorities could provide support for entrepreneurs, to offer training, financing and specific counseling for female entrepreneurs, promoting their participation in formal sectors and the

creation of successful businesses. Also, authorities should promote Non-Traditional education and labor Sectors to encourage women's participation in sectors that have historically been dominated by men, such as technology, science, and engineering, through scholarships, subsidies, and mentoring programs. These measures are essential not only to eliminate the gender pay gap, but also to promote a more fair and equitable society, where all people, regardless of their gender, can reach their full potential in the workplace. Gender equality is not only a fundamental right, but also a cornerstone for Mexico's sustainable development and prosperity.

We urgently call on the government and society as a whole to take concrete measures in order to allow the inclusion of women in the formal market, allowing them to enjoy a fair and equitable pay, job security, maternity rights, social benefit access, training and development opportunities, protection against gender discrimination, and long-term financial stability; and thus contribute to eliminating the gender pay gap in Mexico.

6. Conclusions

The descriptive statistical analysis carried out shows the existence of a significant gender wage gap, which is deepened due to several factors, such as the difference between the formal and informal sectors, the difference in the number of hours worked and the bias in the professional activity between men and women.

The existence of structural and social factors, such as the caregiving role assigned to women, limit women's participation in the economy formal sector this situation is worrying regarding its economic repercussions, and if not addressed, it will continue perpetuating the female population's vulnerability state, not only condemning their participation during their economically active life but also preventing them from a dignified and quality retirement. Informal labor market often lacks work protection and benefits, placing them in a vulnerable position to economic instability and crises. Lack of access to social security services and long-term savings opportunities further exacerbates gender inequalities in terms of economic empowerment and autonomy.

It is clear that there are alarming differences regarding income and working conditions between women and men in the informal labor market. This income disparity contributes to economic inequality and, as a result, limits women's access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and financial security.

It is important to comprehend that achieving gender equity in the workplace goes beyond simply eliminating pay discrimination; it requires a holistic approach addressing the structures and prejudices embedded in Mexican society. Only through a joint and committed effort can we achieve having a society where women enjoy equal opportunities, receive a fair payment, and play an active and equitable role in the formal labor market in Mexico. This is the path to a more fair and equitable society for everyone.

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