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MASTER'S THESIS

**GENDER PAY GAP: IMPLICATIONS FOR SLOVENIAN  
COMPANIES**

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ANA GERM

## **AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT**

The undersigned ANA GERM, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, (hereafter: SEB LU), author of this written final work of studies with the title GENDER PAY GAP: IMPLICATIONS FOR SLOVENIAN COMPANIES, prepared under supervision of DR. ANASTAS VANGELI.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 THE GENDER PAY GAP .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.1 Definition of the Gender Pay Gap.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.2 History of the Gender Pay Gap .....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.2.1 Pre-Industrial and Industrial Era .....	4
2.2.2 The Modern Gender Pay Gap.....	6
<b>2.3 Reasons for the Gender Pay Gap .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.3.1 Working Hours and Part-Time Work .....	8
2.3.2 Education and Occupational Segregation.....	9
2.3.3 Under-Representation in Leadership .....	10
2.3.4 Gender Bias .....	10
<b>2.4 Companies and the Gender Pay Gap.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2.5 The Importance of Closing the Gender Pay Gap .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.5.1 Government Initiatives and Directives for Closing the Gender Pay Gap .....	12
2.5.2 Companies' Initiatives and Policies for Closing the Gender Pay Gap .....	13
<b>2.6 Perception of the Gender Pay Gap .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.7 The Gender Pay Gap and the COVID-19 Pandemic .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.7.1 Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Gender Pay Gap Globally.....	17
2.7.2 Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Gender Pay Gap in the EU .....	17
<b>3 THE GENDER PAY GAP IN SLOVENIA.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3.1 The Gender Pay Gap Statistics .....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1.1 The Gender Pay Gap Among People with Different Education Levels .....	19
3.1.2 The Gender Pay Gap in Different Age Groups .....	20
3.1.3 The Gender Pay Gap in Different Sectors and Occupational Groups .....	20
3.1.4 The Gender Pay Gap in Slovenian Cohesion Regions .....	20

<b>3.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Public Sector .....</b>	<b>20</b>
3.2.1 The Gender Pay Gap in Public Sector by Education .....	21
3.2.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Public Sector Among Different Occupations .....	21
<b>3.3 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector.....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.3.1 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector by Education .....	22
3.3.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector Among Different Occupations .....	22
<b>3.4 Effects of COVID-19 on the Gender Pay Gap in Slovenia .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>3.5 The Gender Pay Gap Legislation and Policies in Slovenia.....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.5.1 The Gender Pay Gap Legislation .....	24
3.5.2 The Gender Pay Gap Policies in Slovenian Private Sector .....	25
<b>4 RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.1 Purpose and Goals.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>4.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>4.3 Research Design.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>4.4 Sample and Data Collection Procedure .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>4.5 Data Analysis Methods .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>5 RESULTS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>5.1 Sample Description .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>5.2 Descriptive Analysis .....</b>	<b>31</b>
5.2.1 The Right to Equal Pay for Equal Work .....	31
5.2.2 Existence of the Gender Pay Gap in Slovenia.....	31
5.2.3 Elimination of the Gender Pay Gap .....	32
5.2.4 Applying for a Job in a Company with the Gender Pay Gap.....	33
5.2.5 Motherhood's Influence on Women's Overall Lifetime Earnings.....	34
5.2.6 COVID-19 Pandemic's Influence on Employment and the Gender Pay Gap ...	35
5.2.7 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector.....	37

5.2.8 Likert Scale on General Views .....	43
5.2.9 Additional Considerations of Survey Respondents with Comments .....	45
<b>5.3 Hypotheses Testing .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>51</b>
6.1 Summary of Main Findings .....	51
6.2 Discussion and Practical Implications .....	58
6.3 Limitations and Future Research .....	61
<b>7 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>64</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Gender pay gap in Slovenia by sector.....	19
Figure 2: Gender structure of the sample .....	30
Figure 3: Sector of employment .....	31
Figure 4: Gender pay gap existence in Slovenia .....	32
Figure 5: Gender comparison: gender pay gap existence in Slovenia.....	32
Figure 6: The most effective way to eliminate the gender pay gap at the national level? ..	33
Figure 7: Would you apply for a job in a company with the gender pay gap?.....	34
Figure 8: Gender comparison: applying for a job in a company with the gender pay gap..	34
Figure 9: Does motherhood reduce women's overall lifetime earnings? .....	35
Figure 10: Most affected by the COVID-19 in terms of employment and job losses .....	36
Figure 11: Gender comparison: COVID-19's effect on employment and job loss.....	36
Figure 12: Most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of wage cuts .....	36
Figure 13: Gender comparison: most affected by the COVID-19 in terms of wage cuts ...	37
Figure 14: Employment structure of the company respondent works at.....	37
Figure 15: Gender pay gap existence in private sector.....	38
Figure 16: Gender comparison: the gender pay gap existence in private sector .....	38
Figure 17: Opportunities for promotion and rewards in the companies.....	39
Figure 18: Gender comparison: equal opportunities for promotions and rewards .....	39
Figure 19: Equal effort for equal pay and positions in the company .....	40

Figure 20: Gender comparison: equal effort for equal pay and positions in the company .	40
Figure 21: Advantages in the recruitment process in the company .....	41
Figure 22: Gender comparison: advantages in the recruitment processes .....	41
Figure 23: COVID-19 and the gender pay gap in the company.....	42
Figure 24: Gender comparison: COVID-19 and the gender pay gap in the company .....	42
Figure 25: Gender comparison: “I am paid enough for what I do.”.....	44
Figure 26: Gender comparison: equal position of genders, but higher pay for men.....	44
Figure 27: Gender comparison: men and women’s responsibilities .....	45
Figure 28: Gender comparison: family prioritization leads to women's lower earnings ....	45

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 1 .....	47
Table 2: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 2 .....	48
Table 3: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 3 .....	49
Table 4: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 4 .....	50
Table 5: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 5 .....	51

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Summary In Slovenian

Appendix 2: Questioner In English

Appendix 3: Questioner In Slovene

Appendix 4: Contingency Tables Used For Hypotheses Testings

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EU – European Union

ILO – International Labour Organization

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

UN – United Nations

EPIC – Equal Pay International Coalition

EUR – The Euro

USD – The United States Dollar

WEF – World Economic Forum

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The notion of receiving fair and equal treatment regardless of one's gender remains an unrealized aspiration. Despite multiple elimination efforts, inequality persists in almost all aspects of life, also in the labour market. Typically, women are positioned worse than men. The former are firstly discriminated in the employment process and, once securing a job, further in the workplace. The gender pay gap, which indicates wage disparity between men and women, is one of the most pressing work-related issues faced by female employees, who usually earn less than their male colleagues. The gender pay gap exists across countries in almost all occupations, industries, and educational levels, in private, public, and non-profit sectors (Eurostat, 2023d).

The gender pay gap is one of the most critical indicators of gender inequality, influencing women's position and opportunities in society. It is not just a problem of here and now. Its continuity is impactful throughout women's lives. On the global level, women are paid approximately 20% less on average than men for doing the same job (International Labour Organization, 2022a). Various factors contribute to the gender pay gap, such as occupational and educational segregation, working hours, underrepresentation in leadership positions, gender bias, and payment transparency. Closing the gender pay gap has been on the agenda of governments, organizations, and companies for decades, but the desired goal is yet to be reached. In most countries, the gap is wider in the private sector than in the public sector. This is due to the fact that companies have little to no legislations and policies that would regulate the area (Eurostat, 2023d).

Nevertheless, the trend is reversed in Slovenia. The gender pay gap in 2021 was higher in the public sector, standing at 11.8% compared to 7.2% in the private sector. Slovenia's overall pay gap in 2021 was 3.8%, which is one of the lowest in the EU (European Union) (SiStat, n.d.a). Even though Slovenia is prospering in comparison to other countries, the issue of the gender pay gap remains.

The main objective of this master's thesis is to examine the perception of the gender pay gap in the Slovenian private sector. The thesis will provide an overview of the gender pay gap in Slovenia, its causes and status quo, legislation on equal pay, and changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. By conducting a survey, this thesis aims to elaborate on employees' perceptions and personal experiences relating to the gender pay gap phenomenon and equal treatment of employees. The thesis also compares women's and men's views on the topic. The thesis findings will suggest possible measures and recommendations for companies, governments, and other actors to reduce the gender pay gap, consequently improving their economic position in the market.

The thesis discusses the following topics: First, it highlights the gender pay gap phenomenon, it illustrates its history, reasons behind it, people's perceptions of it, its trends, and benefits of closing it. It also includes the COVID-19 pandemic's correlation to the



gender pay gap. Secondly, it provides insights into the Slovenian government's legislation on the topic, policies and practices on eliminating the gender pay gap implemented by the Slovenian private sector companies, their effectiveness, and awareness about them. Thirdly, it explores employees' views on the gender pay gap in connection to motherhood, promotions and reward mechanisms, COVID-19 pandemic, and employment security. It also compares views of both genders. Lastly, it offers best practices and recommendations for closing the gap.

To achieve its objectives, the master's thesis utilizes the analysis of secondary and primary sources. The first part is theoretical, grounded in the systematical analysis of research papers, governmental documents, laws, scientific articles, monographs, official statistical data, reports analysis, and documents. The second part of the thesis is empirical, based on primary data obtained through a survey disseminated by the non-probability convenience sampling method.

The theoretical part of the thesis consists of chapters two and three. The second chapter focuses on the definition of the gender pay gap, a historical overview of the topic, the reasons behind the gender pay gap, companies' orientation in relation to the gender pay gap, the importance of closing the gap, and the gender pay gap perceptions. The third chapter focuses on the gender pay gap in Slovenia, more precisely on the legislation regulating the field, statistics, Slovenian private sector companies' policies including equality dimensions, and the gender pay gap in the public and private sector. Chapters two and three include overviews of the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the gender pay gap in the EU and Slovenia.

The empirical part of the thesis consists of chapters four, five, and six. Chapter four focuses on the research and describes the purpose and goals of the research, research questions and hypotheses, research design, sample and data collection procedure, and analysis methods. Chapter five describes and elaborates the results of primary data collection, includes sample description, descriptive analysis, and hypotheses testing. The thesis concludes with chapter six, which includes a summary of the main findings, practical implications, research limitations, and potential for future research.

## **2 THE GENDER PAY GAP**

### **2.1 Definition of the Gender Pay Gap**

Gender equality is defined by equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities of women and men, and girls and boys. Gender should not be the reason for any kind of discrimination. Interests, priorities, and needs of both genders should be considered at all times (UN Women, n. d.a). In the past few years, gender equality in the EU has increased significantly due to equal treatment legislation implementation, gender mainstreaming and different measures for women's advancement, etc. However, disparities still remain. Equality can be further increased by breaking down gender stereotypes, eliminating gender disparities in labour

markets, ensuring equal representation in all sectors, eliminating the gender care gap, achieving gender parity in decision making and politics, and closing the gender pay and pension gaps (European Commission, n.d.a).

The gender pay gap as one of the most important aspects for reaching gender equality is a prominent concern in the labour market. It is defined as the difference in average gross earnings per hour between men and women. The base for calculations is employees' salaries before income taxes and social security contributions are implied (European Parliament, 2020a). Often, it is expressed as a percentage of what men earn compared to women, and it is a sign of inequality among genders that has been present through different time periods and in different nations. It remains a notable issue in the journey toward achieving gender equality in the labour market and in society (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Unequal treatment and the gender pay gap are present between genders and within the gender subgroups. Thus, gender cannot be viewed as a homogenous group. The gender pay gap is contingent on age, race, ethnicity, family status, migration status, sexual orientation, and other factors influencing an individual's earnings (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.). The gender pay gap varies from sector to sector, occupation to occupation, positioning in the company, etc. Due to transparent wage grids and implemented national legislations, the gender pay gap is generally wider in the private sector compared to the public sector (Eurostat, 2023d).

Differences in the gender pay gap depth result from the various methods and indicator heterogeneity utilized for its measuring. Therefore, the analysis must take into account how the data was obtained. Most analyses compare the adjusted and unadjusted gender pay gap, which provides different statistics on earnings variations between genders (Deloitte, n.d.). The most commonly used measurement is the unadjusted gender pay gap. It is characterized as a disparity between men's and women's average gross hourly earnings and represented as a percentage of men's average gross hourly earnings. The calculation only applies to businesses or organizations that employ ten or more individuals (Eurostat, 2023b). The measurement excludes overtime work and is based on salaries before deducting income tax and security contributions. It does not account for any other potential factors that explain the difference in earnings among genders. By concentrating solely on gender, it discerns any systemic disparities (Deloitte, n.d.).

On the other hand, the adjusted gender pay gap, besides the factual data, considers other potential factors that could influence the earnings of women and men. It includes factors like seniority, job level, education, experience, and performance of a worker at his or her job, giving an insight into the reasons and potential explanations of the gender pay gap (Deloitte, n.d.). Above mentioned are both forms of controlled gender pay gap that measure the median wages of men and women having the same job and qualifications. On the other hand, the uncontrolled gender pay gap, also called the opportunity pay gap, measures the general median salary for all men and women regardless of their jobs and qualifications. The uncontrolled gender pay gap is usually higher than the controlled one and is usually used in

cross-national comparisons. In 2023, the calculated uncontrolled gender pay gap shows that women earn 0.83 USD for every 1 USD men make, and the controlled gender pay gap shows that women earn 0.99 USD for every 1 USD men make. According to Payscale, the highest controlled gender pay gap is recorded among bartenders, waiters and waitresses, physicians and surgeons, directors, religious and education workers, drivers, and sales workers (2023). In conclusion, with the same qualifications and doing the same work, women worldwide are still paid less than men for no attributable reason.

Over the last few years, the global gender pay gap has been gradually decreasing, with an approximate decline of one percentage point every four years. This trend highlights the slow progress observed over the past two decades (Henning & Stadler, 2023). With this speed, gender pay equity will be reached in 2058 (Wagner, 2015). Therefore, addressing the gender pay gap remains a significant policy concern, especially paired with other indicators of gender equality, such as labour force participation, education, and work experience (Henning & Stadler, 2023). The gender pay gap is not only temporarily affecting individuals. It lowers lifetime earnings, increases the risk of old-age poverty, and reinforces women's unequal position in society and the workplace (OECD, n.d.a).

## **2.2 History of the Gender Pay Gap**

### **2.2.1 Pre-Industrial and Industrial Era**

The gender pay gap, which still represents an enduring concern in today's labour market and society, has historical roots that stretch across centuries. The origins of wage disparities are traced back to ancient civilizations. Traditionally, in the context of human capital theory, differences in earnings between men and women are explained by differences such as age, education, and experience. Nonetheless, data gathered throughout the years indicates that these distinctions have a limited impact on the enduring nature of the gender pay gap. Women have increased their participation in the educational system, which translates into education level, hence no longer being one of the main reasons for the existence of the gender pay gap. Over the decades, the level of occupational segregation and wage structure became more relevant factors (Plantenga & Remery, 2006).

The distribution of labour between genders and occupational segregation were the most important causes of the gender pay gap in the pre-industrial era. Ester Boserup argues that devotion to labour played a significant role in shaping gender roles and further the economic status of women. Women's involvement in the workforce in pre-industrial times was limited. Men specialized in agriculture, while women primarily handled domestic tasks, such as childcare and household chores, for which they did not receive payments. The author contends that these gender role distinctions persisted even when economies advanced and the number of women in the labour market increased. Even though women started to work more and in a higher variety of working fields, wage inequalities did not disappear. Until

now, women found themselves in underpaid and less skilled occupations than men. Thus, social norms related to gender roles formed through history persisted (Sorgner, 2021).

The pay gap between women and men was enormous during the Industrial Revolution. The range fluctuated from one-third to two-thirds, contingent on the job's location and nature. Neoclassical economy at the time assumed that wage differences were the sign of different productivity levels between genders. However, the substantial size of the pay gap challenged the validity of the neoclassical assumption. The wage differences were too high to only depend on the productivity rate. Furthermore, the evidence shows that women and men with similar tasks and productivity levels were paid differently. Several other factors also put the theory in question, such as early trade union establishments and their involvements in the labour market, differentiation of job assignments, the rising idea of sex segregation, and the mothers' growing conflict between employment and staying at home to take care of children (Burnette, 1997).

The unequal pay during the Industrial Revolution was also justified by the idea of the family wage developed by trade union advocates. The phenomenon appeared in the 1820s and 1830s in America. The first predisposition for it was family survival – one family should earn enough to survive. As men were perceived as the primary family breadwinners, women's income was only complementary to men's. Women were seen as secondary wage earners in the labour market and society. Their primary role and tasks were positioned in the domestic environment. They had to take care of the family and reproduction. On the contrary, men's primary roles and tasks were outside the domestic environment, in the labour market (May, 1982).

The family wage principle meant that employers did not offer a living wage to women because they assumed that women were dependent on a man's wage and their income was not essential for survival (Burnette, 1997). Family wage encouraged employers to pay men high enough for them to be able to provide for their wives and children. The principle advocated protecting women from working, where they would supposedly suffer. With the growing needs of families, the primary family wage was not enough anymore. If women had to or wanted to stay at home and not participate in the labour market, fathers had to rely on their children's earnings (May, 1982).

Reformists started a movement to replace the principle of the family wage with the so-called living wage for men – a wage high enough to ensure health and decency for all family members without the need for women to work. At the time, working mothers were accused of not caring for their families and putting the needs of their children aside. People believed that women should not be a part of the labour force. They should remain in the household and take care of domestic affairs. The minimum principle did not pick up then, but it appeared later. The new version predicted minimum wages for both genders, but women's minimum wage was much lower and not high enough to sustain a family (May, 1982).

Occupational crowding was another common form of wage discrimination during the Industrial Revolution. Women were prevented from entering skilled jobs, such as medicine, and crowded in lower-skilled occupations, reducing their overall productivity and wages. One of the most presentable sectors of this was agriculture. The pay gap between men and women also appeared due to different educational opportunities. In most environments, women had minimal access to education (Burnette, 1997).

### 2.2.2 The Modern Gender Pay Gap

The modern pay gap is often linked to the demographic and societal changes brought about the Second World War. During the war, women started taking on new positions. Due to the extreme changes in needs, industry shifts, and conscription of men to the army, women were forced to join the labour market or change the field of their work to the industries sought after in times of war. Women started working in traditionally male jobs, such as manufacturing. The segregation between genders was lower than before, and women were somehow forced to work in prior unwelcoming sectors. They replaced men who had to serve in the military or were transmitted elsewhere. Statistical data shows that women's wages increased relatively during the war. Data from the ILO (International Labour Organization) shows that the increase did not only appear because of war. We have been facing an annual increase for a long time (Aldrich, 1989). Despite the increasing wages, the pay gap between genders remained, failing to decrease inequality (Gazeley, 2008).

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights drew attention to the gender payment disparity with Article 23, which instructed equal pay for equal work without discrimination. All people have a right to work, to choose their employment freely, to work in fair and favourable conditions, and to be protected from unemployment. All people also have the right to fair and favourable remuneration that ensures a dignified life for themselves and their families. Moreover, the Declaration (Article 23, Universal Declaration of Human Rights) included the right to form trade unions. The first international legally binding act that included the gender pay gap was the Equal Remuneration Convention, adopted in 1951, right after the Second World War by the ILO. It aimed to ensure equal remuneration for men and women workers whose work has the same value (Article 1, C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), 1951).

After the war, more precisely in 1960, the employment system was drastically transformed. This period is sometimes also referred to as a revolution. Women's participation in the working market increased significantly, their participation in formerly male-dominated sectors was exponentially higher, and they reached and exceeded men's college graduation rates. Some forms of gender-based discrimination in the employment and education system became illegal. The change in policies also resulted in more women participating in politics. The changes improved women's overall position in the labour market and society, but the improvements were unevenly distributed, affecting some groups of women more than others. The developments can be mainly assigned to women who demanded equality in all spheres

of life, including equal pay for equal work. With the help of institutional and cultural forces, their efforts helped tighten the gender pay gap and restructure the labour market's structural inequalities (England, 2010).

Various countries have implemented distinct legal measures to protect workers against discrimination, including gender-based pay discrimination. Women started to gather in labour unions that advocated equal pay for everyone. Women's associations and movements have encouraged legislators to draft laws that reduce the gender pay gap (Khattar & Estep, 2023).

Most recently, in 2015, gender mainstreaming and with it ensuring equal pay for work of equal value was included in the UN (United Nations) Sustainable Development Goals desired to be achieved by 2030 (Lecerf, 2022). In 2017, the ILO, the UN Women, and the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) established the EPIC (Equal Pay International Coalition) to achieve equal pay for men and women worldwide. It aims to support governments, employers, workers, and workers' organizations in achieving gender pay parity. EPIC is currently the only multi-stakeholder partnership between countries, national workers' and employers' associations, private sector companies, and civil society organizations that work to reduce the gender pay gap on global, regional, and national levels. It operates per the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to close the gender pay gap by 2030. Slovenia is currently not a member (EPIC, n.d.).

In 2020, on 18th September, we celebrated the first International Equal Pay Day, marked by the UN to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. On that day, international leaders committed to taking actions that would close the gender pay gap. EPIC also encouraged countries to include gender pay parity in their COVID-19 recovery policies. International Pay Day in 2022 focused on pay transparency as one of the most efficient tools for identifying and closing the gender pay gap, further decreasing gender inequality in the labour market and society (Lecerf, 2022).

Feminist movements continue their fight against pay disparity between genders. Despite the law and policy follow-ups, the gender pay gap is still an issue in the labour market. Various factors that influence it are explained in the next chapter.

### **2.3 Reasons for the Gender Pay Gap**

The reasons for the pay gap between men and women are complicated and intertwined. Many factors must be considered when explaining the problem, and many remain unexplained (European Parliament, 2020b). In search of its causes, we differ among measurable objective factors such as the level of education, working time, occupational segregation, performance, skills, and experiences of an individual, and unmeasurable factors that include gender bias (International Labour Organization, 2022a). Most authors point out the below-discussed

factors: working hours and part-time work, education and occupational segregation, under-representation of women in leadership, and gender bias.

### 2.3.1 Working Hours and Part-Time Work

Working fewer hours or only part-time can decrease an individual's overall income. The decision for lower participation in the working market can be made individually. However, it can also be a consequence of being unable to get a full-time job due to personal attributes or conditions (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

ILO emphasizes that more women, compared to men, work part-time. That was the case in 68 out of 73 countries considered in the Global Wage Report 2018/2019: What lies behind the gender pay gaps (International Labour Organization, n.d.). In the EU, the number of women working part-time is much higher than that of men. In 2022, 17% of employed people in the EU worked part-time, which is the lowest percentage since 2009. Among employed women aged between 55-64, 41% of them worked part-time, and among employed women with children, 60% of them worked part-time. Women with lower education were more likely to work part-time than women with higher education. In comparison, only 7.6% of employed men worked part-time in 2022. Men who obtained medium-level education or had children were the least likely to work part-time. Only 4% of employed men with children worked part-time (Eurostat, 2023c).

Women decide or are forced to be part-time workers due to less work experience, lower education, and lower commitment to employment, deriving from personal preferences or family constraints (Matteazzi et al., 2017). Women are more likely to be expected to balance their work and family duties than their male partners, which means that they can dedicate less time to their jobs. This hinders their progress regarding rewards and promotions in the workplace (Partington, 2018). Women are more likely to look for more flexible jobs to accommodate childcare, resulting in fewer benefits than women or men working full-time (International Labour Organization, n.d.). The part-time wage penalty is further explained by the fact that most part-time jobs are concentrated in low-paying sectors and industries (Matteazzi et al., 2017).

Furthermore, women are more likely to take longer breaks from employment to raise children or take care of elderly family members. Leaving work for a more extended period of time slows down the process of progression and advancement in the company. By taking more time off work, people risk falling behind, which decreases their chances of getting promoted. The problem of leaving work to care for children is more frequent in countries that do not have a well-organized and affordable childcare system (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Additionally, women are, in comparison to men, less likely to change jobs in their careers, which further decreases their lifetime earnings as changing a job often means getting a higher payment (OECD, n.d.a).

Lastly, unemployment can also increase the gender pay gap. The unemployment penalty represents the difference in earnings between an individual who is employed at the time of the job offer and an individual who is not. The penalty increases when people are unemployed for a longer period. Women face wider gaps compared to men. For women who have been unemployed for a maximum of three months, the uncontrolled gender pay gap is 0.85 USD; for women who have been unemployed for more than two years it is 0.79 USD. Being an employed woman decreases the chances of getting a higher-paid or higher-level job. The gender pay gap was the widest among those who chose childcare as the main reason for unemployment (Payscale, 2023).

### 2.3.2 Education and Occupational Segregation

In the past, education level was significant in explaining the gender pay gap. Women were less involved in the education processes than men and were, thus, less educated. Over the years, the trend has changed. Statistical evidence shows that women currently obtain higher education rates on all academic levels compared to men and are at the same time almost equally involved in the education processes (Langdon & Klomegah, 2013). Eurostat's research from 2022 shows that 48% of women and 37% of men aged between 25 and 34 attained tertiary education in the EU (2023b). Given this context, education level can no longer solely explain the pay gap between genders.

Some scholars later refocused their studies and developed a theory advocating that the gender pay gap results from women and men choosing different fields of study. According to them, both genders have different occupational preferences and, therefore, choose different educations. Their choice leads to gender segregation and can further contribute to the gender pay gap in the workplace (Langdon & Klomegah, 2013).

Two main types of segregation influence the gender pay gap. The first one is horizontal segregation, which describes the concentration of one gender in different working sectors and occupations. Women tend to be more represented in the low-paying fields and men in higher-paying fields. The other form of segregation is vertical segregation, which explains the concentration of genders on different job levels. Men are more represented in higher job levels, such as management and leadership positions, while women concentrate below these (OECD, n.d.a).

Various studies have shown that women are advancing in studies and professions perceived as male-dominated, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Even though the representation of both genders in these occupations is getting more equal, women still lag in taking up higher-paid positions and being promoted to higher-level jobs (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Comparing women's and men's occupational achievements and earnings demonstrates that women still have a secondary economic position even though they represent the majority of employees. Women are a dominant employee group in the so-called female occupations.



Such occupations are usually undervalued and on average paid less than the so-called traditional men's jobs. Additionally, companies that mainly employ women tend to have lower average wages compared to those mainly employing male workers (Polachek, 1987). The highest percentage of women is found in occupations that align with gender stereotypes, appropriating care and service. Women prevail in healthcare, education, libraries, personal care services, office administrative support, and community and social services. The most minor uncontrolled gender pay gaps are recorded in healthcare, while the highest are in education and libraries. Among these sectors the controlled gender pay gap is closed in education and libraries (Payscale, 2023). The latest studies have shown that women are advancing in studies and professions usually perceived as male-dominated, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

### 2.3.3 Under-Representation in Leadership

Leadership positions are mostly occupied by male workers. Significantly fewer women are managers or leaders, especially at the highest levels (International Labour Organization, n.d.). Task assignment bias puts women in positions that are less visible on the outside, meaning they are less likely to be promoted or be exposed to new opportunities (Turkan et al., 2021). Even when women are managers, they usually have a more supportive function and manage departments perceived as less important, like human resources and financial administration (International Labour Organization, n.d.). In 2020, less than 8% of CEOs in EU companies were women. Their hourly wage was 23% lower compared to men's, making it the profession with the widest pay gap in the EU (European Commission, n.d.b). Scholars stress that more women in leadership positions within companies and organizations will lead to significant progress in reducing the gender pay gap. Women have a unique perspective and firsthand experience of the challenges women encounter in the working environment. Their personal experience in the working market encourages them to make a difference and implement policies that reduce the gender pay gap and discrimination in the workplace (Georgeac & Rattan, 2019).

### 2.3.4 Gender Bias

Gender bias represents the unexplained part of the gender pay gap. Scholars discovered that the explained objective factors are not the only ones influencing the gap. The most significant part of it remains unknown and unaccounted for. A job done by women is commonly perceived as less valuable than the same job performed by men (International Labour Organization, n.d.). The problem with gender bias is that it is, in most cases, subconscious. It is often based on stereotypes and typical characteristics, an oversimplified image of men and women upon which we unconsciously decide about the qualities of an individual (Elsesser, 2018). It is often connected to individuals' perceptions of typical male and female jobs (Gregorčič et al., 2020). For example, research shows that employers tend to pay male employees higher salaries than female employees with the same qualifications (Elsesser, 2018). The bias presents a big problem as it exists outside the regulations targeting

the gender pay gap and discrimination. Thus, it is hard or even impossible to call out and eradicate it (Gregorčič et al., 2020).

## **2.4 Companies and the Gender Pay Gap**

The gender pay gap is one of the main indicators of gender inequality in the workplace and in general, in society. Even though countries have implemented policies that prohibit pay discrimination based on gender and instruct equal pay for equal work, the gender pay gap is still present in both the public and private sectors (International Labour Organization, n.d.). In most countries, the gender pay gap is higher in the private sector compared to the public one. The reason for that could be higher payment transparency in the public sector. In most countries, wages in the public sector are public, while private companies usually do not share data on their wages, and can therefore, without being noticed, generate pay differences between genders (Stewart, 2014). Another reason for a higher pay gap in the private sector is the fact that it employs more women than men while the situation is reversed in the public sector, which is mainly male-dominated. The research conducted by Bureaucracy Lab in 2019 showed that women were outnumbered by men in the private sector in 130 countries, but in the public sector women outnumbered men in 55 nations (Turkan et al., 2021).

One of the reasons that the gender pay gap still exists is a lack of understanding of the term "equal pay for equal work". Companies should value job positions in their companies fairly. The same payments should be ensured for people who work in similar or identical positions that require the same level of skills, training, effort, and responsibility, and also for those working in similar conditions (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.). Considering higher achievement of equality, private sector can be inspired by the public sector's policies and practices, aiming to ensure equal treatment of men and women in the labor market (Turkan et al., 2021).

With globalization, multinational firms have increased their influence. They are seen as one of the most important actors in the world economy, resulting in the influence on the gender pay gap on the local, regional, and eventually the global level. WEF's (World Economic Forum) research conducted in 13 countries discovered that the gender pay gap in developed countries is lower in multinational companies compared to domestic companies. On the other hand, the situation is reversed in the developing countries. In developed countries the gender pay gap in multinational companies was 25% lower than in domestic companies and in developing countries the gender pay gap was 110% higher in multinational companies than in domestic ones (World Economic Forum, 2020). Considering this, it is suggested that multinationals have a positive impact on the gender pay gap in developed countries and on the other hand worsen it in developing countries. By implementing non-discriminatory practices in their subsidiaries all over the world they set a good example for the domestic companies and encourage the spillover effect. However, positive effects are not always the case (UNCTAD, 2021).

## **2.5 The Importance of Closing the Gender Pay Gap**

Precise measures in various fields are needed to achieve complete equality among genders in the workplace. We need to prevent the deepening of the gender pay gap and increase the possibility of its complete elimination (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.). Closing the gender pay gap is beneficial for many reasons. It reduces inequality in the labour market and in society and, at the same time, increases the company's performance, which has the potential to boost the national and global economy (O'Donnell et al., 2020). A project on the social and economic benefits of equal pay between women and men in Portugal concluded that reducing the gender pay gap increases the Gross Domestic Product and reduces the incidence of poverty on the national level (Iceland Liechtenstein Norway grants, n.d.). Gender pay parity should be one of the company's most important goals (O'Donnell et al., 2020). According to empirical research, achieving it must be encouraged nationally and internationally.

By closing the gender pay gap, companies not only increase their performance but also increase their employees' satisfaction, commitment, and motivation. If people feel valued and fairly treated in their workplace, their affiliation with the company increases, which further boosts their performance and productivity. On the contrary, when employees feel undervalued and underpaid, their commitment to the company is lower, which decreases the company's profits. Including gender parity in the company's policies and directives increases the company's reputation on the inside and outside. Such a company is viewed as advanced and innovative. It attracts more potential employees and customers while also being more attractive to shareholders, stakeholders, and investors. The image of such companies has the potential to attract and hire the best from the available talent pool (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.).

The closing of the gap will thus come from combined work between governmental bodies and companies in the private sector.

### **2.5.1 Government Initiatives and Directives for Closing the Gender Pay Gap**

Governments should be the first to implement additional policies and legislation for closing the gender pay gap. The public sector should set an example in demonstrating higher gender equality. Its actions can encourage private sector companies to follow their lead. At the same time, closing the gender pay gap in the public sector will further lead to the reduction of overall gender pay gap in society – directly and indirectly by firms imitating the state's actions (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

Moving forward, the gender pay gap can be decreased by legislating a minimum living wage – a wage that is high enough to cover all living costs, including food, clothes, housing, and other essentials. This will not only improve the overall financial status of women, who are usually the ones that work in the lower-paid sectors, but will have a positive effect on both genders. Furthermore, governments should implement policies and programs that reduce sex

segregation and decrease the gender pay gap by providing bonuses and benefits to companies that employ more women than men and work by gender-neutral policies. Tightening the gender pay gap can also be achieved with governments financing different trainings and seminars that enable women's cross-sector movement to occupations that are currently male-dominated, their promotion to higher job levels, and increase overall equality in the workplace. Investing in social protection, parental leave, and other public services can also be a beneficial tactic (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

Promoting pay transparency is another practice that shrinks the gender pay gap. If companies are required to show the data on their pay information to legal authorities, it is less likely for them to pay women and men who occupy the same positions differently. Higher transparency will also decrease gender bias in pay awareness and lead to its overall elimination (European Council, 2023a).

The EU also acknowledges the importance of pay transparency. In 2021 the European Commission introduced the Directive on Pay Transparency which includes four different transparency measures: First, pay-transparency for job-seekers, which means that employers or human resources teams will have to set the wage before the interview and would not be able to ask the potential employees about their previous earnings. Second, the right to information for employees, which enables workers to obtain data on their pay level and the average pay level of different groups employed in the company. Third, reporting on the gender pay gap, which obligates employers with 100 or more employees to publish data on the gender pay gap in their company. Fourth, joint pay assessment where the reported gender pay gap is 5% or higher and employers cannot justify it with objective criteria. The Directive also ensures better access to justice for the victims of unequal treatment. It predicts the compensation for workers who suffered unequal treatment, the burden of proof on employers who did not obey transparency obligations, and better access to equality bodies and workers' representatives. Sanctions for not acting according to the directive also include fines (European Commission, 2022). The directive was adopted by the European Council on the 24th of April 2023 (European Council, 2023b).

#### 2.5.2 Companies' Initiatives and Policies for Closing the Gender Pay Gap

Companies' views on the gender pay gap differ. The government's position on the topic plays a crucial role in shaping companies' approaches to it. If governments have strict rules on gender equality, the possibility of companies including them in their legislations and policies is higher than in cases of loose regulations (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.).

Due to the discovered benefits of closing the gender pay gap, companies should implement policies against gender discrimination regardless of the government's legislation and directives. Closing the gender pay gap should not only be their moral goal but also an economic one. Research shows that companies with a lower gender pay gap are more

economically successful than those with a higher one. By closing the gap, companies increase their skill diversity and intelligence capacity (O'Donnell et al., 2020). A greater inclusivity further increases the company's productivity and overall economic performance (Lytle, 2019).

To eliminate the gender pay gap, companies should employ more women and change the company's current structure in which men prevail in top positions. Research has shown that companies with women in top positions have higher net profits than the ones featuring men. Closing the gap is also favourable for brand image. If companies are known for their high gender pay gap, they are less likely to recruit top hires. Discrimination of the company's employees can cause lawsuits, which worsens company publicity (Abbas, n.d.). With more and more activists fighting for gender payment parity, the issue is gaining importance. It became one of the factors influencing individuals' decisions about applying for a job. Moreover, it also influences consumers' purchasing decisions. The topic is crucial for younger generations, some of the most prominent advocates for equal treatment of men and women (Lytle, 2019).

To make changes, companies should first be aware of the problem. If they do not see the gender pay gap as a problem and do not take it seriously, they will not try to address it. The awareness can be raised with the help of governments or employees and by collecting data on compensations and earnings of men and women employed in the company (Lean in, n.d.).

After obtaining the data and seeing the existence of the gender pay gap, companies should start working on its elimination. Eliminating the gender bias should already be present in the recruitment process. Criteria for employment should not be based on the gender of the potential employees but on their qualities, knowledge, and skills needed for the position they are applying for (O'Donnell et al., 2020). Blind hiring, in which employers do not know the gender of the applicant and can solely decide upon the candidate's skills, education, and other qualities required for the job, can eliminate gender bias in the recruitment process (Fath, 2023). The recruitment process should not include questions regarding the candidate's salary history. Some companies have used the lower wages of a candidate in the past as an excuse for lower wages in the new company. Employers should be transparent regarding the salary before the commencement of the recruitment and should refrain from adjusting it when deciding upon a candidate. An individual's base salary should reflect his or her education, skills, and experiences (Wack, 2023).

The possibility of closing the gap is also higher if companies commit to a more gender-balanced employment structure and promote more women to leadership positions. According to studies, having more women in decision-making positions improves the position of all women in the company. Women tend to implement more gender-equal policies in the work environment and encourage gender analysis of the company that uncovers potential inequality and issues female employees face in the office (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

The second step for the companies is to ensure equal pay for equal work. To do that, companies should monitor both genders' earnings, parental statuses, and other demographic factors influencing employees' wages (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

As mentioned above, payment transparency is crucial in eliminating the gender pay gap. Higher transparency lowers the gender pay gap and enables employees, including women, to better and easier negotiate salaries and demand equal pay for equal work (O'Donnell et al., 2020). It also decreases the information asymmetry between actors in the working market (International Labour Organization, 2022b). Companies need to offer pay transparency to ensure job applicants or employees recognize that they are treated fairly and equally compared to other employees. Additionally, they cannot address the problem and ask for improvement. Without knowledge about the existing gender pay gap, the gender bias in payments continues (European Council, 2023b). Being transparent includes sharing the employment and payment criteria of the company publicly and guaranteeing that all the processes are transparent, fair, and non-discriminatory. Studies show that with higher pay transparency, the overall earnings of the company's employees increase. In this case, women face a higher salary increase in a shorter period. Beside higher motivation and greater productivity, team dynamics improvement is also shown (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women, n.d.). Employees who can talk to each other about their salaries are more relaxed in the working environment than the ones who do not, which increases the overall atmosphere and connectivity among the employees in the company (European Council, 2023b). Upon pay transparency, equal and transparent reward and promotion systems should also be included in the company's policies, which ensures all promotions and rewards are evidence-based (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.).

Some downsides of implementing payment transparency policies are the increased costs and burdens for administration workers. Additionally, information sharing can be negatively used by other competitors in the market. Another concern is violating an individual's right to privacy if they publicly expose their wage (International Labour Organization, 2022b).

Companies can also reduce the gender pay gap by implementing mentorship and sponsorship programs that support employees, focusing on women and other groups that face discrimination (O'Donnell et al., 2020).

The next important thing is to support mothers and incorporate family-friendly, gender-neutral policies. Providing support during parental leave is one of the crucial points, especially in countries with legal requirements for paid parental leave. Mothers and fathers should be able to return to work after the end of their parental leave without facing career setbacks (O'Donnell et al., 2020). Companies should support flexibility and work-life balance, enabling parents to simultaneously manage family and work-related responsibilities (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.).

## 2.6 Perception of the Gender Pay Gap

Each individual perceives the gender pay gap phenomenon, its causes, and the need for its closing differently. A small proportion thinks it does not exist. The gender pay gap awareness varies from country to country or from one society to another. Research shows that people who view gender roles more traditionally tend to perceive the gender pay gap much less than those with a more egalitarian relationship towards gender roles (Duehr & Bono, 2006). A survey conducted in five European countries (Bulgaria, Austria, Greece, the Czech Republic, and Italy) showed that women are likelier to have a more equal view of society than men. Men's views tend to be more stereotypical compared to women's. Different gender orientation affects the perception of gender roles, leading to different career choices and the gender pay gap. Another discovery was that the glass ceiling and glass escalator phenomena favour men and older individuals. Especially in organizational structures, managerial positions are occupied by individuals with negative gender orientation. The survey also discovered that a country's economic and social policies influence the population's perception of differences among genders and their relation to the gender pay gap (Lausi et al., 2021). When governments are addressing the issue of the gender pay gap and are fighting for greater gender equality, people tend to trust them more and see them as fairer. According to the survey on citizens' perceptions of closing the gender pay gap, if governments include gender equality in their policies and guidelines, their citizens' relationship towards it improves. The survey showed that, in general, respondents care about gender equality in the workplace and are supportive of policies and guidelines that try to eliminate them. Gender pay parity should be promoted and ensured regardless of people's work performance (Hamidullah et al., 2021). Overall, women's monthly earnings in the mentioned countries were lower than men's, and at the same time, women's perception of a fair monthly wage was also lower than men's. It can be assumed that women accepting lower wages comes from their own lower work value assessment. If women see themselves as less professionally desirable, they will accept a lower salary than men for the same position (Lausi et al., 2021).

An individual's perception of the gender pay gap can also vary based on an individual's political orientation, income, height, and age. For example, another research conducted in the United States of America shows that women, older Americans, and Democrats are more likely to be aware of the gender pay gap. On the other hand, younger adults, Republicans, and people with higher incomes are less likely to think the gender pay gap exists. Additionally, most respondents do not think skills and education are an essential factor that results in the gender pay gap, nor are an individual's negotiation skills. Most Americans involved in the survey perceive the gender pay gap as a result of employer's discrimination towards employees (Hill & Silva, 2005).

Some people validate the gender pay gap with occupational differences between men and women. Women are more likely to work in lower-paying industries dominated by women. If they decide to work in a male-dominated industry, they will possibly obtain lower wages

than their male colleagues in the same positions. Research shows that seeking employment in women-dominated industries gives women higher advantages and increases their possibility of earning a higher wage and being promoted compared to seeking employment in male-dominated ones. The research concludes that women are not to blame for not earning more. The reason for the gender pay gap is seen in unequal opportunities for women in every aspect of their lives, including education, training, and career choices (Schieder & Gould, 2016).

According to a survey conducted in the United States of America in 2019, 46% of American men and 30% of American women think the gender pay gap is made up for political purposes. They do not see it as a legitimate issue. More than a quarter of respondents thought that gender pay gap reports exaggerate the situation, and 16% of people asked see it as fake news (Renzulli, 2019).

## **2.7 The Gender Pay Gap and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### **2.7.1 Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Gender Pay Gap Globally**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected society, but according to data, women were the most affected in terms of financial security, representation in sectors, and division of housework (Queisser, 2021). Women remain the household members with the more significant share of the unpaid domestic work and childcare responsibilities. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased the amount of women's unpaid work compared to men (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). Before the COVID-19 pandemic women spent approximately 26 hours per week on childcare, but since the beginning of the pandemic the time spent on childcare increased to approximately 31 hours per week. Men's time spent on childcare increased from 20 to 24 hour since the beginning of the pandemic (Lacey & Bricker, 2021).

Additionally, during the pandemic, women were more exposed to the risk of depression and anxiety symptoms, which could possibly be related to their working situation (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic women's mental health worsened for 10% more compared to men's. In addition, almost twice as many mothers as fathers report worsening mental health in the same period (Lacey & Bricker, 2021).

COVID-19 worsened women's position in the work market and pushed back the progress toward gender equality in the past couple of years (United Nations, 2022). Social, economic, and gender inequalities have deepened, and society has faced short-term and long-term challenges. Due to the lack of the policies that address such declines, society faced an even bigger setback of the progress already made (Queisser, 2021).

### **2.7.2 Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Gender Pay Gap in the EU**

The pandemic has caused a monumental economic downfall, impacting all areas of life. The effects were primarily negative, but we cannot tell if it directly influenced the gender pay



gap or not and whether its effect was positive or not. In 2019, the gender pay gap in the EU stood at 13.7%. In 2020 it decreased to 12.9%, and in 2021 it further decreased to 12.7% (Eurostat, 2023a). According to the statistics, we can conclude that the gender pay gap has narrowed despite the pandemic. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic did not increase the gender pay gap, but it may be the reason why it narrowed less compared to the year before. Even if no significant connection between the gender pay gap and the COVID-19 pandemic is detected, the COVID-19 pandemic has left other negative impacts on the working environment, which decreased gender equality in the workplace and women's overall position in society.

It led to the most significant decrease in working hours in the EU since 2006. In most EU countries, the decrease was more considerable for women compared to men. In the pandemic's first wave, the overall employment of female EU citizens decreased by 2.2 million and of men by 2.6 million, which is proportionally the same for both genders. Employment increased during the summer, but the proportions were no longer equal. The number of men to be reemployed was more than twice as high as the number of reemployed women, which means that the unemployment among women increased compared to the pre-COVID-19 period (EIGE, n.d.). The most affected during the pandemic was the service sector, which in the EU predominantly employs women and where the average earnings are lower compared to other sectors (Eurofound, 2021). Women also represent most of the EU healthcare workforce (two-thirds globally), meaning they were much more exposed to the infection than men during the pandemic (Queisser, 2021).

The pandemic also increased the amount of unpaid work, in most cases done by women. Many had to quit their jobs to be able to take care of their children or elderly relatives. Women quitting their full-time jobs and reducing their working hours can result in lower lifetime earnings, which has a long-term adverse effect on gender inequality (Queisser, 2021).

### **3 THE GENDER PAY GAP IN SLOVENIA**

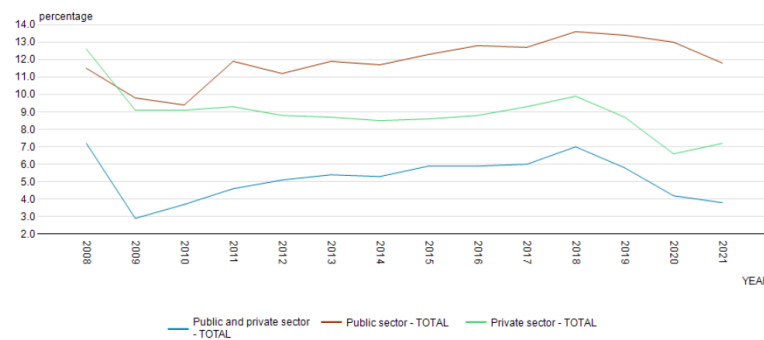
#### **3.1 The Gender Pay Gap Statistics**

The gender pay gap differs from country to country. In 2021, the overall EU gender pay gap stood at 12.7% in favour of men. That means that per hour, women earned 13% less on average compared to men. Next to Luxembourg, Romania, Italy, and Poland, Slovenia is one of the five EU members with a pay gap lower than 5% (European Commission, n.d.b).

As shown in Figure 1, the gender pay gap in Slovenia has been fluctuating yearly. It has been lower than the EU average throughout all the years noted on the graph. In 2010, it reached 3.7% and constantly increased until 2019, when the downward trend started (Eurostat, 2023a). In 2019, the gender pay gap stood at 5%, in 2020 at 4.2%, and in 2021 at 3.8% (SiStat, n.d.d). The latest data on average monthly earnings of individuals employed

in Slovenia are from 2020. In 2020, the average monthly salary was 1 252 EUR, which was 5.4% higher compared to the previous year. Men, on average, received a slightly higher income (0.7% above average monthly earnings), and women a slightly lower income (0.8% below average monthly earnings). According to the Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office, women's average monthly net earnings increased more than men's (Seljak, 2021).

*Figure 1: Gender pay gap in Slovenia by sector*



*Source: SiStat (n.d.a).*

The gender pay gap in the labour market does not stop with an individual's retirement. The gap transmits to an even higher pension gap among men and women. In 2019, the pensions gap in the EU was 39%, 24% in Slovenia. All poverty analyses in Slovenia conclude that women are more likely to face poverty than men of all ages. The possibility rises sharply, particularly after the age of 60, and reaches the highest level at 75 and over. In this age group, one out of three women lives in poverty (Pavlič, 2019).

The following chapters include the statistical data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia. Statistics cover all persons employed full-time by a legal or natural person in a given year who earn at least 90% of the annual minimum wage in the year. Self-employed persons are not included in the sample. The pay gap is calculated as one hundred times the difference between the average gross monthly earnings of men and the average gross monthly earnings of women divided by the average gross monthly earnings of men. The gender pay gap is calculated in the same way irrespective of the group considered and the method of calculation is the same (Seljak, 2023). Average salaries are not additive, as they are calculated based on the sum of all salaries in a given year divided by the number of persons who received a salary. The masses of salaries and the number of persons receiving them vary between years and different levels. Therefore, a weighted average should be calculated, taking into account the number and values of the occurrences. As these are derived indicators, they cannot be directly compared with each other.

### 3.1.1 The Gender Pay Gap Among People with Different Education Levels

Pay discrimination based on gender is present regardless of the education level individuals obtain, and it is higher in the employment groups of individuals with higher education. The

overall gender pay gap in 2020, including private and public sector employees with tertiary education, was 15.9%. Women with tertiary education faced the most significant gender pay gap. Their earned average was 1 529 EUR per month, while men with the same level of education received an average of 1 774 EUR per month. The differences in monthly earnings between genders in 2020 were lower among individuals with upper secondary education. Men earned approximately a bit more than 1000 EUR while women earned an average of 977 EUR. The gender pay gap, including the private and public sectors, was 11.1%. The gender pay gap between employees with upper secondary education in the public sector accounted for 20.9%, which is the highest proportion comparing pay gaps and educational levels in the public sector. In 2020, the gender pay gap between employees with basic education or less was 10.6%. Both genders, on average, earned less than 1000 EUR per month. Men earned 832 EUR and women 917 EUR (Seljak, 2021).

### 3.1.2 The Gender Pay Gap in Different Age Groups

Monthly net earnings in 2020 for individuals younger than 35 were lower than the national average. Both men and women earned less due to the overall lower educational levels. Average monthly earnings in the age group from 14 to 24 years were 878 EUR, and in the age group from 25 to 34 years 1 080 EUR. Individuals aged between 35 and 44, on average, earned around the average monthly payment in Slovenia (1 252 EUR). Men received, on average, 30 EUR more and women 30 EUR less than the average wage. Women aged 65 and above earned the highest average monthly payments. Their net earnings were higher compared to men's. Women, on average, earned 1 947 EUR and men 1 912 EUR. That is the only age group in which women surpassed men (Seljak, 2021).

### 3.1.3 The Gender Pay Gap in Different Sectors and Occupational Groups

The gender pay gap in Slovenia is the highest in the financial and insurance sectors, followed by human health and social work activities. In 2021, the gender pay gap in financial and insurance activities was 25%, and in human health and social activities, it accounted for 20.4%. The lowest gender pay gap was measured in the arts, entertainment, and recreation activities (-0.7%) (SiStat, n.d.e).

### 3.1.4 The Gender Pay Gap in Slovenian Cohesion Regions

The highest gender pay gap in 2021 was recorded in the Gorenjska statistical region with 6.7%, followed by the Pomurska region with a 6.3% gender pay gap. The lowest pay gap was measured in South-Eastern Slovenia (1.1%), followed by Central Slovenia with a 1.9% gender pay gap (SiStat, n.d.c).

## 3.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Public Sector

The gender pay gap in the Slovenian public sector in 2021 stood at 11.8%, which is lower than the previous year. Slovenian public sector employs 261 300 employees, and 165 664 or

63.4% are women (Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije, 2023). More women are employed in the public sector compared to men due to higher job security, more days of paid vacation, and more paid days of absence due to personal circumstances. Working in the public sector makes it easier for women to raise a family alongside their job. On the other hand, the downsides of working in the public sector are lower wages and fewer career opportunities (OECD iLibrary, n.d.).

According to the statistics from 2010 to 2021, the gender pay gap in the Slovenian public sector was the highest in 2019, when it reached 14.6%, and the lowest in 2010, when it reached 9.4%. Throughout all the years, the gender pay gap in Slovenia was lower in the private sector compared to the public one (SiStat, n.d.a). Statistical data also shows that the overall gender pay gap in Slovenia in 2021 was lower than overall gender pay gaps in the public and private sector separately, for more accurate data weighted average should be calculated.

### 3.2.1 The Gender Pay Gap in Public Sector by Education

The gender pay gap in the public sector varies between groups of individuals with different levels of education. The trend shows that the gender pay gap between 2008 and 2021 was the highest among individuals with basic or lower education. It varied between 18.7% (in 2021) and 27.8% (in 2015). The lowest gender pay gap was noted among individuals with tertiary education. It varied between 16.6% (measured in 2021) and 20.6% (measured in 2008) (SiStat, n.d.a).

### 3.2.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Public Sector Among Different Occupations

The gender pay gap in the public sector differs between occupational groups. The Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office divides individuals into nine occupational groups: managers; professionals; technicians and associate professionals; clerical support workers; service and sales workers; skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers; craft and related trades workers; plant and machine operators, and assemblers; and elementary occupations. In 2021, the gender pay gap in occupational groups varied between -0.3% and 34.4%. The highest gender pay gap was measured in the occupation group of plant and machine operators and assemblers and the lowest in the occupational group of clerical support workers (SiStat, n.d.d). Available data shows that from 2010 to 2021, the highest gender pay gap in a particular occupation was measured in 2015 among plant and machine operators when it reached 41.4%. This group has the highest average pay gap among all occupational groups through the years. The lowest gender pay gap was in the occupation group of skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers (SiStat, n.d.d).

## 3.3 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector

According to the last available data from February 2023, Slovenian private sector employs around three-quarters (73.5%) of the active workforce. There are around 687 700 individuals

employed in the private sector, 261 060 or 38% of those are women (Statistični Urad Republike Slovenije, 2023).

The gender pay gap in the Slovenian private sector from 2008 to 2021 (latest available data) varied from 6.6% to 12.6%. The lowest was measured in 2020 and the highest in 2008. In 2021 gender pay gap was 7.2%, which is higher than the year before (6.6%) (SiStat, n.d.a).

### 3.3.1 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector by Education

The gender pay gap in the private sector varies between groups of individuals with different levels of education. The trend shows that the gender pay gap between 2008 and 2021 was the highest among individuals with a tertiary education, between 17% (measured in 2014 and 2015) and 22.1% (measured in 2008). The lowest gender pay gap was noted among individuals with upper secondary education. It varied between 11.3% (measured in 2020) and 14.8% (measured in 2008) (SiStat, n.d.a).

In 2021, the gender pay gap among employees with basic or lower education was 10.8%, between men and women with upper secondary education 11.9%, and between men and women with tertiary education level 18%. Compared to the year before, the gap tightened among individuals with basic or lower and tertiary education and increased among individuals with upper secondary education. The gap between genders was lower in the private sector compared to the public one (SiStat, n.d.a).

### 3.3.2 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector Among Different Occupations

Similarly to the public sector, the gender pay gap in the private sector varies between occupational groups. In 2021, the gender pay gap in occupational groups varied between 13.4% and -1.4%. It was the highest in elementary occupations and the lowest in the clerical support workers group. The data shows that from 2010 to 2021, the highest gender pay gap was measured in 2010 in craft and related trades workers when it reached 18.7%. From 2010 to 2021, the average pay gap in occupational groups through the years was the highest in the craft and related trades workers group (16.6%) and the lowest in the occupational group of managers (3.6%) (SiStat, n.d.d). The most stable sectors regarding the gender pay gap are the ones where women dominate the employment structure. However, regardless of the representation, men in such sectors still occupy higher-paying jobs (Gregorčič et al., 2020).

## 3.4 Effects of COVID-19 on the Gender Pay Gap in Slovenia

The gender pay gap in Slovenia in 2019 stood at 7.9%. In 2020, it decreased to 3.1%; in 2021, it again increased to 3.8%. As we can see, the gender pay gap narrowed in the year of the pandemic and then again increased a year after (Eurostat, 2023a). According to the data read, we cannot say whether the reason for such fluctuation is the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Employment Service of the Republic of Slovenia has experienced an incredible increase in unemployment rates during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Between March and April 2020, there were 22 267 new unemployed people. Comparing the data to March and April 2019, the unemployment in the same period in 2020 was 123% higher. The majority of employees were the ones whose employment was terminated for a fixed period. The hospitality, tourism, transport, manufacturing, and trade markets were most affected. The least affected were the health and social care departments. Employment in these two sectors increased overall (Zavod RS za zaposlovanje, 2020). Women represent more than 80% of health and social care workers in Slovenia and, on average, earn 8% less than men working in the same sector (Pavlič, 2020).

The pandemic significantly affected women who work from home and have children. In cases where the partner earns more, many women decided to stay at home while their partners continued with full-time employment. Such organization of work enabled them to obtain higher possible joint earnings. The women who sacrificed their careers and lost a part of their income simultaneously lost some independence. They were also the ones who took upon a more significant share of housework. The research suggests that overall, women's societal position has worsened (Pavlič, 2020).

According to the Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office, the gender pay gap in the private sector decreased during the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 compared to the year before. In 2019, Slovenia faced an 8.7% gender pay gap that was lowered from 2.1% to 6.6% in 2020. In 2021, the gender pay gap increased again to 7.2%. According to the available data (from 2008 to 2021), during the pandemic in 2020, pay discrimination among genders in Slovenia was the lowest (SiStat, n.d.a).

The highest gender pay gap in 2020 was among people with tertiary education. It stood at 18.3%. The group was also the only one that had the highest gender pay gap in comparison with the gap the year before and the year after. People with basic or lower education faced the lowest gender pay gap at 11%, which, compared to the year before, was lower by 3.5% and higher compared to the year after by 0.2%. Employees with upper secondary education faced an 11.3% gender pay gap during the emergence of the pandemic in 2020, which was also the lowest in comparison with the year before (13.6%) and the year after (11.9%) (SiStat, n.d.a).

Among groups of people employed in different occupations, the gender pay gap during 2020 was the highest in the elementary occupations group (13.4%) and the lowest in the group of clerical support workers (-1.4%). Compared to the previous year, the gap was tighter in both groups. Compared to 2019, the gap in 2020 decreased in occupational groups of professionals by 1.9%, technicians and associate professionals by 2.7%, clerical support workers by 3.5%, service and sales workers by 2.1%, skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers for 0.1% and in elementary occupations for 3.8%. It increased in occupational groups of managers at 1.1%, craft and related trade workers at 6.3%, and the

group of plant and machine operators and assemblers at 2.9%. In 2021, the year after the pandemic, managers faced a 1.2% increase, service and sales workers a 0.2% increase; and skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers a 0.6% increase in the gender pay gap. The gender pay gap decreased in occupation groups of professionals, plant and machine operators, assemblers, and technicians and associate professionals by 0.2%, in the group of craft and related trade workers by 1.1%, and in elementary occupations by 0.4% (SiStat, n.d.b).

### **3.5 The Gender Pay Gap Legislation and Policies in Slovenia**

#### **3.5.1 The Gender Pay Gap Legislation**

The Slovenian laws strongly prohibit any discrimination based on gender. The Slovenian Constitution in Article 14 ensures equal human rights and fundamental freedoms and prohibits discrimination based on personal attributes, including gender. Article 49 also ensures the right to equal employment opportunities (Ustava Republike Slovenije).

Furthermore, equality among genders is included in the Protection Against Discrimination Act. It obliges “all state bodies, local authorities, holders of public powers and legal and natural persons to ensure protection against discrimination or equal treatment of all persons in all areas of decision-making, in legal transactions and all their other activities or conduct towards third parties, in particular about (among others) terms and conditions of employment, including the duration of employment and wage” (Article 2, Zakon o varstvu pred diskriminacijo). Discrimination based on gender is also prohibited by the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2023).

In Slovenian laws and policies, wage inequality was first mentioned in 2001 within the National Labor Market and Employment Development Programme 2006. It included measures to increase women’s participation in education and training programs, support women’s entrepreneurship, reduce segregation in the labour market, and eliminate wage inequality between men and women (Robnik, 2016). One year later, in 2002, the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act introduced gender mainstreaming into the Slovenian national legislation. The gender equality perspective was included in all Slovenian legal frameworks. The Act’s main goal was to improve women’s position in society and to create equal opportunities for both genders in politics, economics, education, and life in general. It also established the Advocate for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men organ that operated until 2008. Its main task was to hear cases of gender-based discrimination (Humer et al., 2015).

Gender equality was also precisely monitored by the governmental Office for Equal Opportunities (Humer et al., 2015). Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act persisted as the key legal instrument for ensuring gender equality in the Slovenian public sector. Based on the act, the first national program on gender equality was adopted in 2005. It instructed

gender mainstreaming to be implemented through all policy areas (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.).

In 2004, an Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment Act came into force. Its main aim was to ensure equal treatment in all life spheres, focusing on employment, relations, participation in trade unions and interest associations, education, social security, and access to and supply of goods and services. It prohibited direct and indirect discrimination (Humer et al., 2015). In 2008, the Advocate for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men organ was replaced by a single Advocate of the Principle of Equality. 25% of its work at the time was dedicated to tackling issues in the field of gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). In 2012, the governmental Office for Equal Opportunities shut down, and all its tasks were transferred to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs' newly established Equal Opportunities and European Coordination Service (Humer et al., 2015).

Currently, the tasks regarding equal treatment of genders are carried out by the Equal Opportunities Division at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The division works together with the EU and other international organizations and civil society to empower women and eliminate gender inequality (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, n.d.). Implementing gender equality practices in Slovenia is mainly done within EU-funded projects (Humer et al., 2015). According to the United Nations Women, 91.7% of Slovenia's legal frameworks promote and enforce gender equality and monitor it under the Sustainable Development Goals indicator (UN Women, n.d.b).

### 3.5.2 The Gender Pay Gap Policies in Slovenian Private Sector

Managers' Association of Slovenia is one of the critical actors encouraging equal treatment of men and women in the private sector. It aims to develop non-discriminatory policies and directives. In 2012, the Association published the guidelines for equality promotion. The document mainly focuses on the equal representation of women in leadership positions and acknowledges its positive effects on growth, profits, and productivity. It highlights the top fields that require a transformation to achieve equality, such as working hours, work organization, workplace, information and communication policy, leadership skills, staff development, pay structure, rewards system, and services for families. All of them are included in a step-by-step guide for higher integration of women into companies' business strategies. They pointed out two dimensions that influence the implementation process. The first one is the required resources, such as time, money, and people, and the second one is the needs and employment habits of the employees. Among all, leadership motivation is recognized as the most vital in the inclusion policy implementation in private companies. If the leadership supports and acknowledges the benefits of equal treatment, the possibility of implementation is higher (Blatnik et al., 2012).



The Managers Association of Slovenia also rewards certificates to the companies which encourage equal treatment. An Include.all Certificate can be obtained by Slovenian companies that ensure gender balance in the leadership positions. The origin of the Certificate goes back to 1992 when the Association introduced the Women-Friendly Company Award, which was renamed to the Women Managers Friendly Company in 2002 and, in 2017, replaced with the Include.all Certificate that is based on gender diversity and balance. To obtain the prize, the company has to fulfil the following requirements: at least one-third of each gender representatives in leadership and management positions; employs 40 or more people; advocates diversity; and has achieved excellent business results over the past three years. Currently, 30 companies hold the Certificate (Združenje Manager, n.d.).

The Family Friendly Enterprise Certificate is the second Certificate encouraging equal treatment of both genders. It encourages socially responsible behaviour in enterprises and organizations. A project conducted by the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, showed that managers usually do not consider the work-life balance of their employees. They should not discuss family matters at work. The Certificate aims to eliminate discrimination against (potential) parents in the workplace and the labour market, provide guidelines and tools for companies to enable better work-life balance, and recognize companies with a positive relation to work-life balance publicly. To obtain the Certificate, eight areas are inspected: working hours; work organization; post (place of work flexibility of the post); information and communication policy; management skills (strategy and philosophy); human resources development; payment structure and awards for achievements; and family services (Certifikat Družini prijazno podjetje, n.d.a). In 2022, there were 229 holders of the Certificate, and all together, 300 Slovenian companies and organizations that employ more than 120,000 employees obtained it (Certifikat Družini prijazno podjetje, n.d.b).

Another project encouraging gender equality and inclusion in the Slovenian private sector is the Diversity Charter Slovenia. It is signed by more than 215 Slovenian companies that employ more than 40 000 people and have committed themselves to developing organizational culture based on equal opportunities, mutual respect, acceptance, and inclusion of diverse employees, creating a diverse and inclusive workplace that will avoid any kind of discrimination; taking into the consideration and dissemination diversity principles at all levels; identifying clients' diversity; creating a diversity policy; and disseminating and communicating the loyalty to the Charter (Listina Raznolikosti Slovenija, n.d.).

## **4 RESEARCH**

### **4.1 Purpose and Goals**

The primary purpose of this master's thesis is to examine individuals' attitudes toward the gender pay gap and its existence in general and in the company they work at. The emphasis

of the research is on the Slovenian private sector. However, in the part on general views, the research also includes views of people employed in the public sector and those who are self-employed or unemployed to obtain a more insightful analysis of the topic and to enhance the depth of the study's findings. The data collected will offer valuable insights and overview of people's perceptions of the gender pay gap phenomenon in Slovenia, which can help understand the reasons behind it and improve the strategies for its reduction. The gender pay gap can only be closed by applying a holistic approach, including all potential aspects of the phenomenon.

The main goal of the survey is to obtain an overview of how people perceive the gender pay gap, to compare the attitudes towards the gender pay gap among women and men, and to find correlations between individual's attitudes and experiences towards the gender pay gap. Based on the findings, the research aims to provide recommendations to close the gender pay gap, with an emphasis on the role Slovenian companies can play in the process.

## **4.2 Research Questions and Hypotheses**

Five research questions and five hypotheses were developed during the secondary data research. The list of tested hypotheses and set research questions are presented below.

The gender pay gap is not a new phenomenon; there have been multiple attempts to close it, but it is still present in the private and public sectors worldwide and in Slovenia. Women and men are still not treated equally. People's perceptions of the gender pay gap vary. Thus, the research aims to learn how Slovenians perceive the gender pay gap phenomena on the national level and in the company they work at.

- RQ1: How are people viewing the gender pay gap phenomena in general and on the national level?
  - H1: People who think men and women should be paid the same for the same work are more aware of the gender pay gap.
  - H2: Individuals working in the private sector are more aware of the unequal treatment of men and women than individuals in other sectors.

The gender pay gap exists in both private and public sectors. However, it is usually higher in the private sector due to lower pay transparency, lack of legislation, employers' preferences, and employment structure (Stewart, 2014).

- RQ2: Do workers of different gender in the private sector have different opportunities and are treated differently based on gender?
  - H3: Individuals working in the private sector are more aware of the gender pay gap than those in other sectors.

- H4: Private sector employees who believe that there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in their company also believe that men have better opportunities for promotion and obtaining rewards in the company.
- H5: Employees who believe a gender pay gap in the workplace in favour of men believe that women should work harder and take additional training to achieve equal pay and status in the company.

The gender pay gap is prohibited by different laws and policies on national and global levels, but at the end the implementation is left to the companies, as they decide on their own whether they will follow the legislation or not. Some companies follow the laws but do not have particular policies and guidelines on the gender pay gap, while others implement additional gender pay gap strategies in the workplace. The survey aims to determine if the company's employees are aware of policies and guidelines that include equal treatment of men and women and how they are implemented in the company's working culture.

- RQ3: What are companies operating in the private sector doing in order to reduce the gender pay gap? Are their attempts effective?

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced all spheres of life. It has changed the world and reduced gender equality on almost every level. Research shows that women were more effected by the pandemic than men (Queisser, 2021). The research shows there are no direct correlations between the gender pay gap and the COVID-19 pandemic.

- RQ4: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the gender pay gap phenomena nationally and in private companies?

Perceptions of the gender pay gap among genders differ. Women, who are the ones more affected by the gender pay gap, view the gender pay gap and the reasons for it differently than men (Renzulli, 2019). Also, according to statistics, their awareness is higher (Vasilescu et al., 2019).

- RQ5: How do women and men view and reflect on the gender pay gap phenomenon?

### **4.3 Research Design**

The thesis is based on primary and secondary sources analysis. It aims to provide recommendations for companies, governments and other actors wanting to close the gender pay gap upon the gathered data on individual attitudes toward the gender pay gap. The first part of the thesis provides the theoretical framework of the gender pay gap, its causes, correlated statistics and ways of closing it. It focuses on the gender pay gap as a global phenomenon and, more precisely, on the gender pay gap in Slovenia. The second part of the thesis consists of original empirical work. It is based on primary data analysis and includes a quantitative research study based on primary data collection that was done through a

survey. The mentioned method was chosen to understand employees' perceptions of the gender pay gap.

#### **4.4 Sample and Data Collection Procedure**

The data was collected via an online questionnaire created on the platform 1KA. It was then transmitted via link to the potential respondents. An online survey was used for multiple reasons. The dissemination is much faster, and the costs of it are much lower. Online surveys enable people to fill them in any time they want and on any device they have access to (Szolnoki & Hoffmann, 2013), which increases the number of responses. The combination of the convenience sampling method and network sampling with its subtype snowball sampling was used. Convenience sampling is one of the prevailing non-probability approaches to research. Respondents of such sampling are individuals at hand with whom you hold social ties. In network sampling, the respondents forward the survey to the contacts in their network, which provides additional units to research (El-Masri, 2017). The survey was sent to members of my social circle, acquaintances and posted online on social media channels. Potential respondents were asked to identify potential additional subjects and forward the survey to them, such method is also known as a snowball sampling (Oregon State University, 2010).

The survey was active from September 11th 2023 to September 19th 2023. Altogether, the survey received 405 responses, 342 of which were valid, meaning they were filled in completely. 137 respondents worked in the private sector, 205 worked in the public sector, were self-employed or unemployed, and only fulfilled the demographic and general part of the survey. Before respondents started to fill out the survey, they were familiarized with its topic and purpose. They were assured that their responses were entirely anonymous and would be used only for research purposes. Such an approach enabled obtaining more honest and realistic information.

The survey was originally conducted in Slovene since the targeted audience works in Slovenia. In this thesis, an English translation is used. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 2. The main focus were the Slovenian private sector employees, but the survey also included public sector employees, self-employed individuals and unemployed people to gather more different perspectives. The survey instruments were chosen based on the research of the field and instruments used in other research on the topic.

The survey consists of general demographic questions (gender, age, education level, sector you work at, field of work), followed by 18 questions, 9 of them general that display to all respondents regardless of the sector they work in, and 9 of them that only display to the people that work in the private sector. The last general question of the survey used the 5-point Likert scale – a rating system ranging from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree” which measures people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions (Jamieson, n.d.). In the survey, respondents had to state to which degree they agreed or disagreed with the 4 written

statements. At the end of the survey, there was also a space in which respondents could write their additional considerations.

General questions aimed at gaining the individual's general view on the gender pay gap and the situation in Slovenia. Respondents were asked about equal pay for equal work, the gender pay gap existence in Slovenia, its importance when searching for a new job, motherhood's influence on women's careers and COVID-19 consequences for gender equality. The questions for the private sector employees aimed at obtaining data on the employees' views of the gender pay gap in the company they work at. Firstly, respondents were asked to declare in which industry they work and what is their position in the company they work at. Other questions focused on the equal treatment of men and women in the company they work at, the gender pay gap situation after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the existence of policies and guidelines that promote gender equality in the company.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis Methods

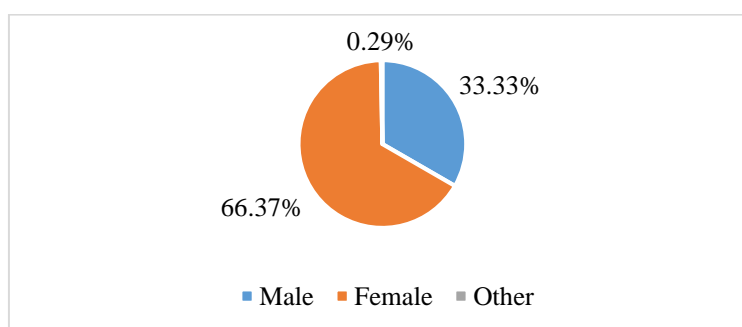
The responses obtained were analyzed with SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel. The relationship between dependent and independent variables was measured and explained with a descriptive method, and hypotheses were tested with the Chi-Square Tests.

### 5 RESULTS

#### 5.1 Sample Description

In total, the survey received 405 responses. 342 respondents finished the survey and were included in the sample. 66.37% of the respondents are women and 33.33% are men. Only one respondent chose the answer other (0.29%) and their answers will not be included in the gender comparison analysis, because other is not representative. See Figure 2.

*Figure 2: Gender structure of the sample*



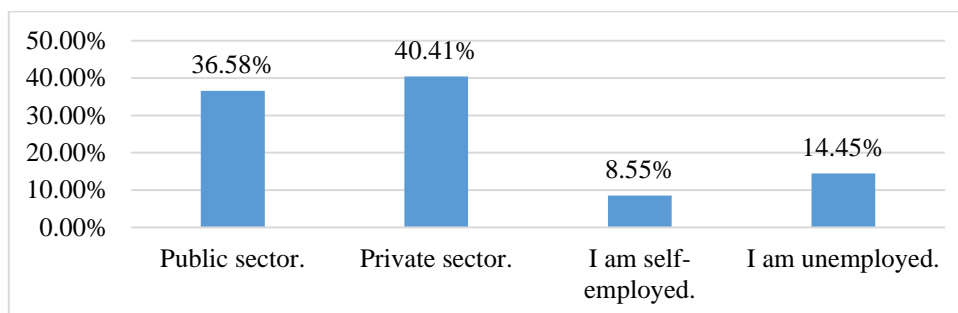
*Source: own work.*

33.04% of the respondents are aged 30 or younger, 46.02% between 31 and 50, and 20.94% are 51 or older. The mean age of respondents is 39 years. The youngest person in the sample is 17 years old, and the oldest is 80 years old. Three respondents did not answer the question.

73.82% of people included in the sample have tertiary education, 25.88% of them have upper secondary education, and 0.29% have basic education or lower. Two respondents did not answer the question.

Most of the people in the sample are employed in the private sector (137), 124 work in the public sector, 49 people who completed the survey are unemployed, and 29 are self-employed. Three respondents did not answer the question. See Figure 3.

*Figure 3: Sector of employment*



*Source: own work.*

## 5.2 Descriptive Analysis

After the analysis of the demographic data followed by the general question about the gender pay gap existence and people's perceptions of the gender pay gap phenomenon, how to close the gender pay gap, and how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the gender pay gap. Afterwards, the analysis focuses on the private sector employees and the gender pay gap phenomena in Slovenian private sector companies. The survey concludes with the 5-point Likert scale on respondent's general views. It was displayed to all respondents.

### 5.2.1 The Right to Equal Pay for Equal Work

The respondents were asked for their opinion on equal pay for equal work for both men and women. The majority of respondents believe that men and women should be paid equally for equal work (94.15%), 3.22% think there is no need for equal pay among genders, and 2.63% are unsure about the question.

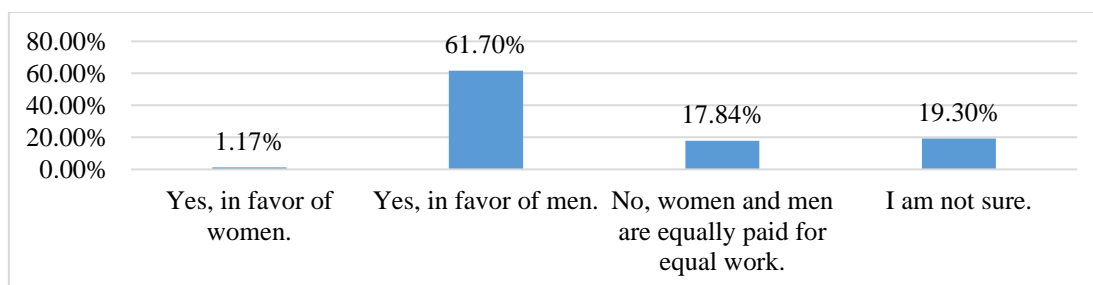
The question was answered by 342 respondents; 114 were men, and 227 were women. 88.6% of male and 96.92% of female respondents think that women and men should be paid equally for equal work. 6.14% of men and 1.76% of women respondents think that should not be the case. 5.26% of men and 1.32% of women are unsure about the answer.

### 5.2.2 Existence of the Gender Pay Gap in Slovenia

The next question focused on the existence of the gender pay gap in Slovenia. The majority of respondents think that there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in Slovenia (61.7%),

and 17.84% believe that men and women are paid equally for equal work, which means they do not think the gender pay gap in Slovenia exists. 1.17% of survey respondents believe that in Slovenia, there is a gender pay gap in favour of women. 19.3% of survey respondents are unsure about the existence of the gender pay gap in Slovenia. See Figure 4.

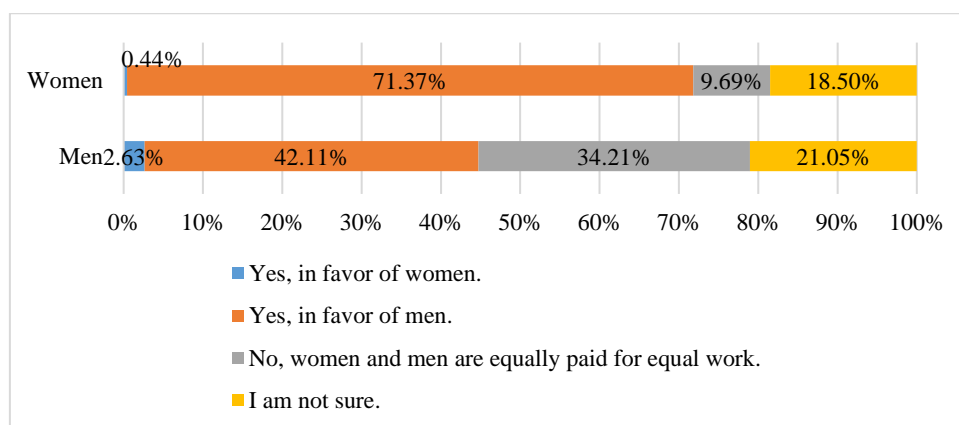
*Figure 4: Gender pay gap existence in Slovenia*



*Source: own work.*

The question was answered by 342 people; 114 of them were men, and 227 were women. 71.37% of women and 42.11% of men think that the gender pay gap in Slovenia exists in favour of men. 34.21% of men and 9.69% of women think that men and women are equally paid for equal work. 2.63% of men and 0.44% of women asked believe that the gender pay gap in Slovenia exists in favour of women. 18.5% of female and 21.05% of male respondents are not sure whether the gender pay gap in Slovenia exists or not. See Figure 5.

*Figure 5: Gender comparison: gender pay gap existence in Slovenia*



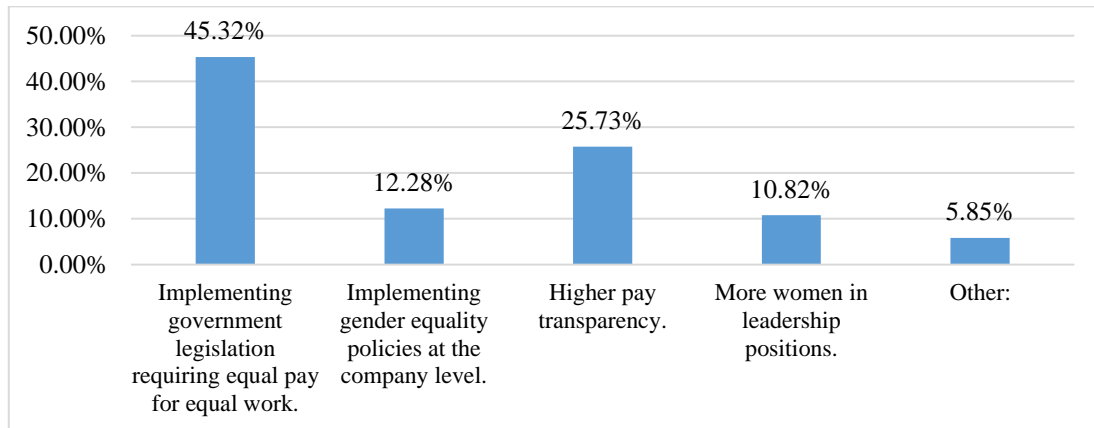
*Source: own work.*

### 5.2.3 Elimination of the Gender Pay Gap

Respondents were asked about the most effective ways for the gender pay gap elimination on the national level. 45.32% of respondents say that the most effective way to close the gender pay gap is to implement governmental legislation requiring equal pay for equal work, 25.73% say that higher pay transparency would solve the gender pay gap problem, 12.28%

say that implementing gender equality policies at company level would eliminate it, and 10.82% say that the most effective way would be to have more women in management positions. 5.85% of respondents chose the answer other. Some additionally suggested solutions were social change that will encourage women to take typical male positions and vice-versa, and equal representation of women and men in equal positions. Some people also answered that the gender pay gap does not exist and cannot be eliminated. See Figure 6.

*Figure 6: The most effective way to eliminate the gender pay gap at the national level?*



*Source: own work.*

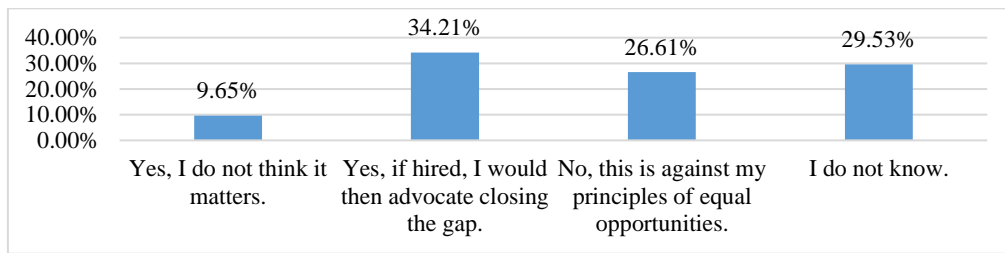
The question was answered by 342 people; 114 were men, and 227 were women. 48.25% of male and 44.05% of female respondents think implementing government legislation requiring equal pay for equal work is the most efficient way to eliminate the gender pay gap. 7.89% of male and 14.54% of female respondents believe implementing gender equality policies at the company level is the most effective. 26.32% of male and 25.11% of female respondents think higher pay transparency is the key. 5.26% of men and 13.66% of women who answered the question believe that putting more women in leadership positions will close the gender pay gap the fastest.

#### 5.2.4 Applying for a Job in a Company with the Gender Pay Gap

To find out people's intentions when applying for a new job, they were asked if they would apply for a job if they knew that the company does not pay men and women equally, meaning there is a clear sign of the gender pay gap. One third of respondents (34.21%) would apply for a job in a company where they know there is a gender pay gap and would advocate for closing the gap in case they are hired later. 9.65% of people would apply for the job because the gender pay gap is, in their opinion, not significant when applying for a job. This means that 43.86% of people participating in the survey would apply for a job at a company with a known gender pay gap. 29.53% do not know whether they would apply, and 26.61% of the survey's respondents would not apply for a job in a company where they would know the gender pay gap exists. See Figure 7.



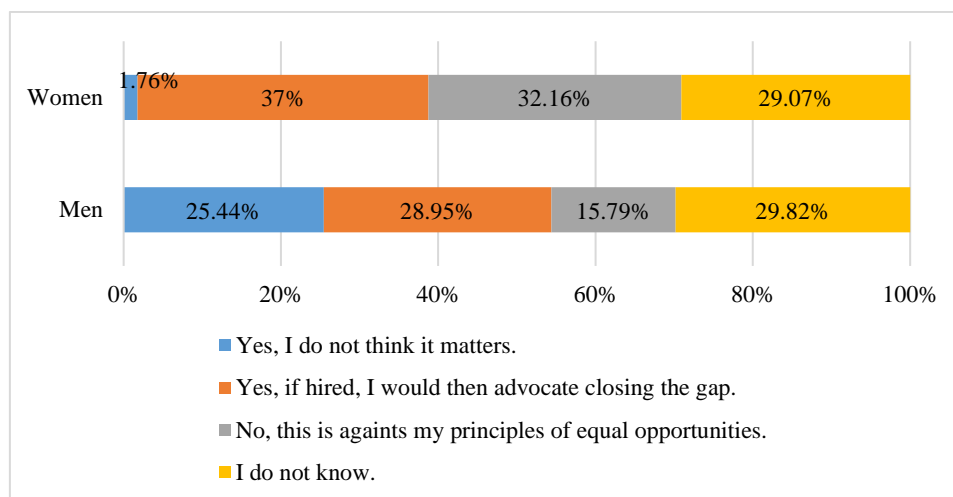
Figure 7: Would you apply for a job in a company with the gender pay gap?



Source: own work.

The question was answered by 342 people; 114 were men, and 227 were women. 25.44% of men and 1.76% of women answered that they would apply for a job because the existence of the gender pay gap is not important to them. 28.95% of male respondents and 37% of female respondents will apply for a job and will later advocate for the gender pay gap closing. 15.79% of male and 32.16% of female respondents would not apply for the job because this is against their principles. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: Gender comparison: applying for a job in a company with the gender pay gap



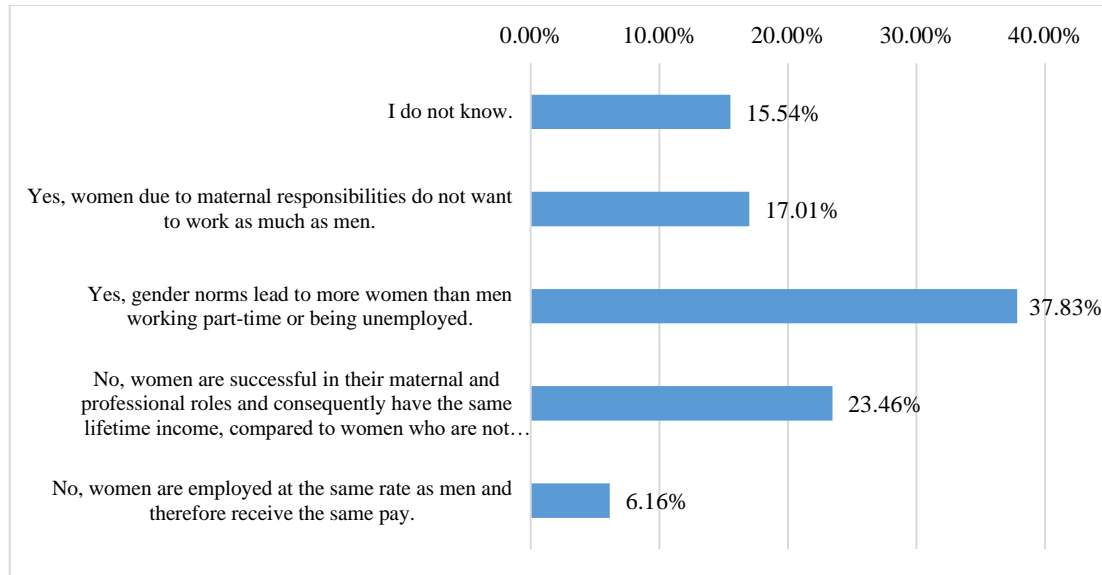
Source: own work.

### 5.2.5 Motherhood's Influence on Women's Overall Lifetime Earnings

Wanting to gain a clearer picture of people's perceptions of motherhood in the working environment, respondents were asked if motherhood influences women's lifetime earnings and what is the reason behind mothers earning less compared to their female colleagues without children or men. Altogether, 54.84% of survey respondents believe that motherhood reduces women's overall lifetime earnings. 37.83% of them believe that the reason lies in gender norms that lead to more women than men working part-time or being unemployed, and 17.01% of the respondents believe that women, due to maternal responsibilities, are less willing to work compared to men. 29.62% think motherhood does not reduce women's total

lifetime earnings. 6.16% think that women are employed at the same rate as men and, therefore, receive the same pay, and 23.46% think that women are successful in their maternal and professional roles and consequently have the same lifetime income as men or women without children. One person did not answer the question. See Figure 9.

*Figure 9: Does motherhood reduce women's overall lifetime earnings?*



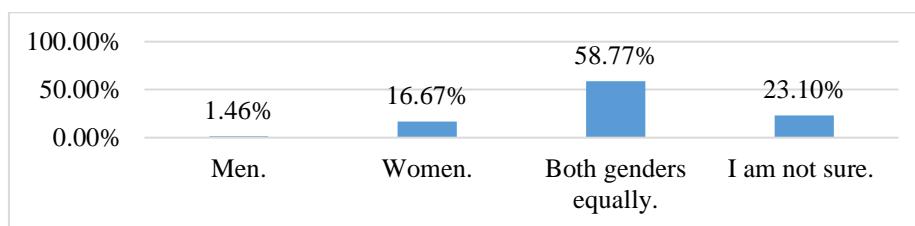
*Source: own work.*

The question was answered by 342 people; 114 of them were men, and 227 were women. 13.16% of male and 2.65% of female respondents think that women are employed at the same rate as men and, therefore, receive the same pay. 20.18% of male and 25.22% of female respondents believe women are successful in their maternal and professional roles and consequently have the same lifetime income as women who are not mothers or men. 28.95% of men and 42.48% of women who answered the survey think that gender norms lead to more women than men working part-time or being unemployed, which reduces women's overall lifetime earnings. 15.79% of men and 17.70% of women who answered the survey believe that women, due to maternal responsibilities, do not want to work as much as men and, as a result, earn less in their lifetime. 21.93% of male and 11.95% of female respondents chose the answer "I do not know."

#### 5.2.6 COVID-19 Pandemic's Influence on Employment and the Gender Pay Gap

The following two questions are aimed at gaining perspective on how people see the COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on the job market regarding employment, job losses, and the gender pay gap. More than half of the people asked (58.77%) believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected both genders equally in terms of employment and job losses. 16.67% think it has affected women more than men, and 1.46% believe it has affected men more than women. See Figure 10.

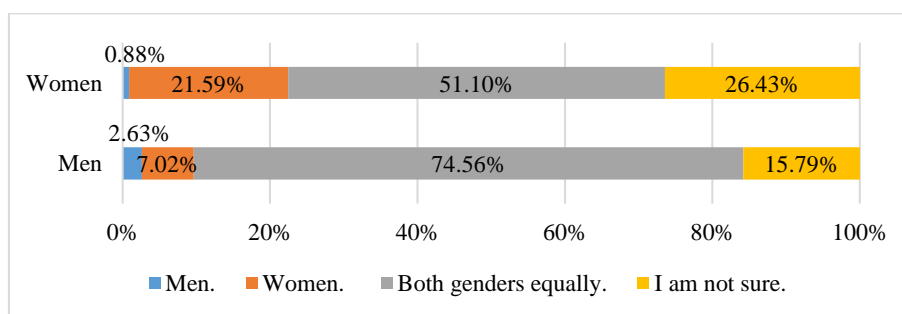
Figure 10: Most affected by the COVID-19 in terms of employment and job losses



Source: own work.

The question was answered by 342 people; 114 of them were men, and 227 were women. Considering employment and job losses, 2.63% of male and 0.88% of female respondents think men were the most affected by the pandemic. 7.02% of men and 21.59% of women who answered the question believe women were the most affected. 74.56% of male and 51.10% of female respondents think both genders were equally affected. See Figure 11.

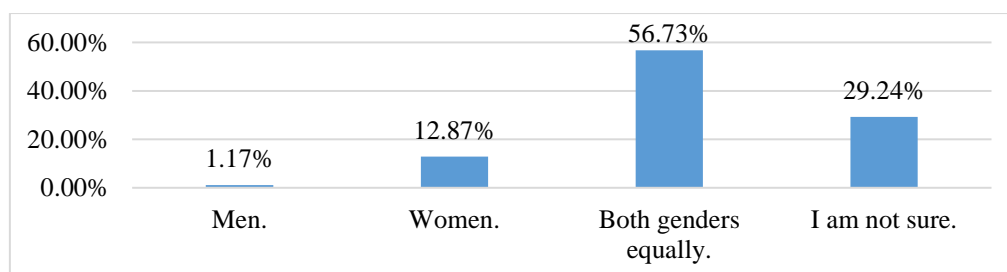
Figure 11: Gender comparison: COVID-19's effect on employment and job loss



Source: own work.

In terms of wage cuts, more than half of the respondents (56.73%) believe that both genders were equally affected. 12.87% think that women were more affected than men, 1.17% think that men were more affected, and 29.24% are not sure. See Figure 12.

Figure 12: Most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of wage cuts

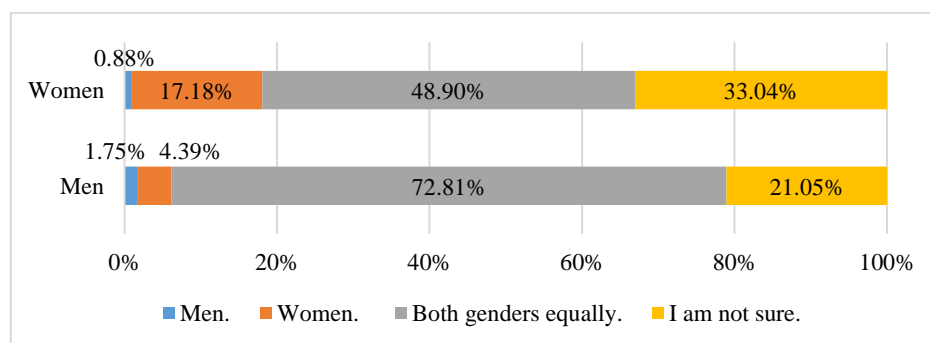


Source: own work.

The question was answered by 342 people; 114 of them were men, and 227 were women. 1.75% of male and 0.88% of female respondents think that men were the ones who suffered

the most due to the COVID-19 pandemic wage cuts. 4.39% of male and 17.18% of female respondents think that women were the ones that were affected the most. 72.81% of men and 48.90% of women think both genders were affected equally. See Figure 13.

*Figure 13: Gender comparison: most affected by the COVID-19 in terms of wage cuts*



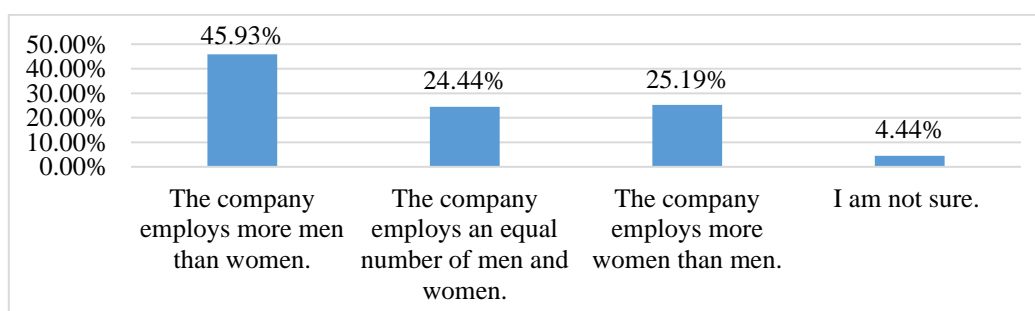
*Source: own work.*

### 5.2.7 The Gender Pay Gap in the Private Sector

The following questions focused on the gender pay gap phenomena in Slovenia's private sector companies.

The first question focused on the employment structure in the company the respondent works for. Just under half of the respondents say their company employs more men than women (45.93%), 24.44% say that their company employs the same number of men and women, and 25.19% say that their company employs more women than men. 4.44% of the respondents are still determining. As we can see, the majority of the companies that respondents work at mostly employ men. Two people did not answer the question. See Figure 14.

*Figure 14: Employment structure of the company respondent works at*



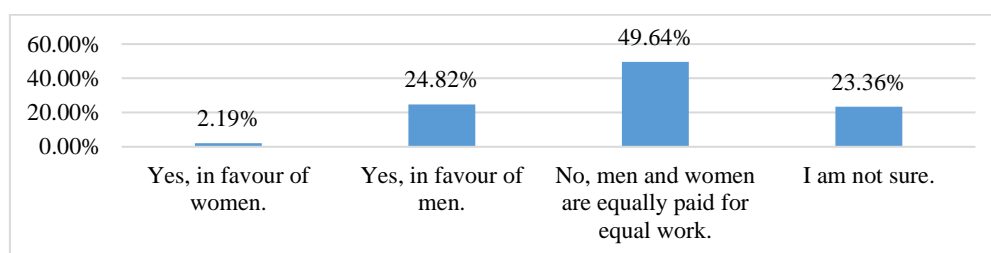
*Source: own work.*

The question was answered by 135 people; 60 of them were men, and 74 were women. 56.67% of male and 36.49% of female respondents think the company they work at employs more men than women. 28.33% of men and 21.62% of women who answered the question

think the number of men and women in their company is the same. 8.33% of male and 39.19% of female respondents think the company they work for employs more women than men. 6.67% of male and 2.7% of female respondents are not sure.

The second question checked if the gender pay gap exists in the company respondents work at. 49.64% agreed that men and women are equally paid for equal work at the company. 24.82% think that the gender pay gap exists in favour of men, and 2.19% that the gender pay gap exists in favour of women. 23.36% of respondents are not sure whether the gender pay gap exists in the company they are employed in or not. See Figure 15.

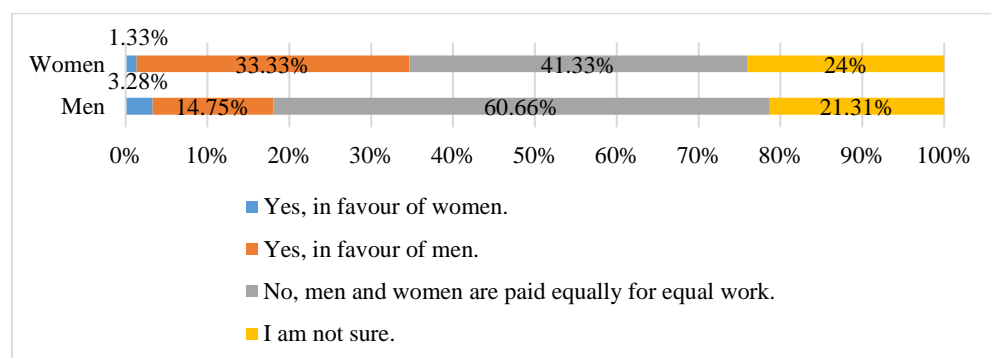
*Figure 15: Gender pay gap existence in private sector*



*Source: own work.*

The second question was answered by 135 people; 60 were men, and 74 were women. 3.28% of male and 1.33% of female respondents believe that the gender pay gap exists in favour of women. 14.75% of men and 33.33% of women who answered the question think there is a gender pay gap in favour of men. 60.66% of male and 41.33% of female respondents believe that men and women are paid equally for equal work. 21.31% of male and 24% of female respondents are not sure about the topic. See Figure 16.

*Figure 16: Gender comparison: the gender pay gap existence in private sector*

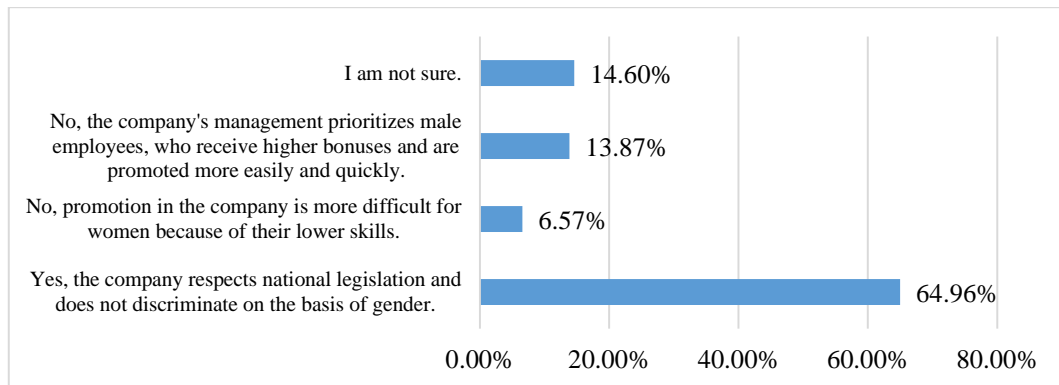


*Source: own work.*

The next question looked into the promotions and reward system in the company respondents are employed in. More than half of the respondents believe that their company respects the national legislation and does not discriminate based on gender (64.96%). Men and women employed in the company have equal opportunities for promotion and rewards. Altogether,

20.44% of respondents believe their company does not offer equal opportunities for employee promotion and rewards. 6.57% think that women find it more difficult to be promoted or get rewards for their work due to their lower skills, and 13.87% think this is because management prioritizes men, who receive higher rewards and are promoted more easily and quickly. 14.6% of people asked were not sure. See Figure 17.

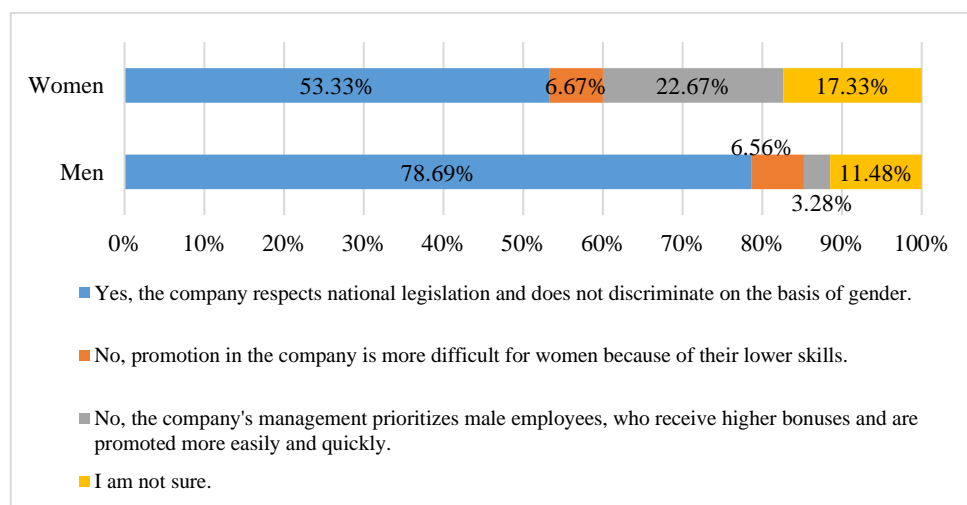
*Figure 17: Opportunities for promotion and rewards in the companies*



*Source: own work.*

137 people answered the question; 61 were men, 75 were women. 78.69% of male and 53.33% of female respondents think their company respects national legislation and does not discriminate based on gender, both genders have equal opportunities for promotion and rewards. 6.56% of men and 6.67% of women asked believe that promotion in the company is more difficult for women because of their lower skills. 3.28% of male and 22.67% of female respondents think that the company's management prioritizes male employees, who receive higher bonuses and are promoted more easily and quickly. 11.48% of male and 17.33% of female respondents are not sure. See Figure 18.

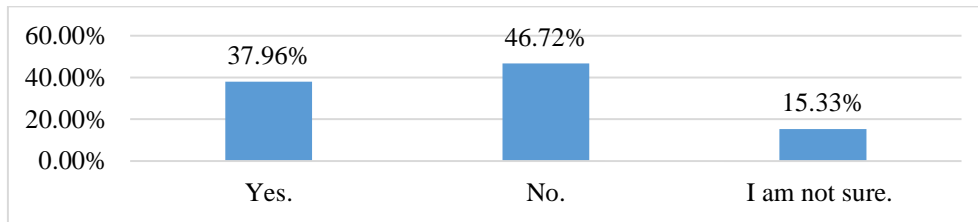
*Figure 18: Gender comparison: equal opportunities for promotions and rewards*



*Source: own work.*

The fourth question for people employed in the private sector focused on the amount of work women and men have to do in order for them to be paid equally and obtain equal positions in the company they work at. Just under half of the respondents think that women do not need to work more than men in order to receive equal pay and occupy the same position in a company as men (46.72%), 37.96% think that women do need to work more than men, and 15.33% are not sure. See Figure 19.

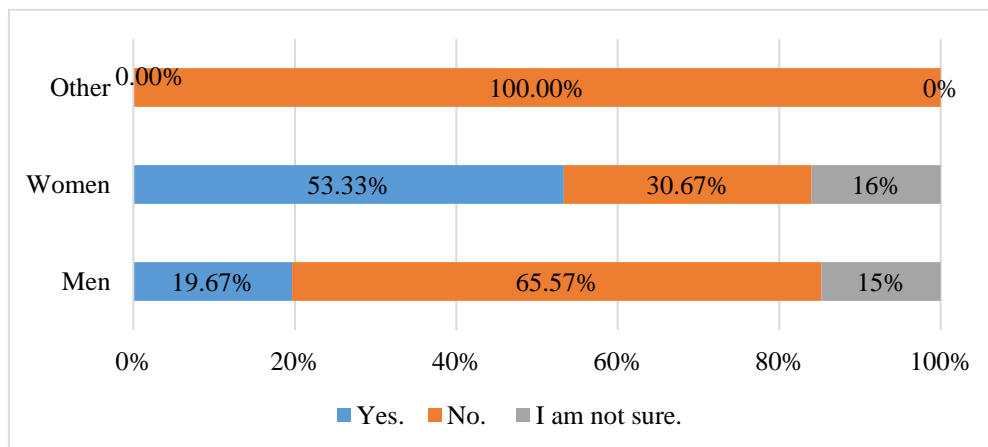
*Figure 19: Equal effort for equal pay and positions in the company*



*Source: own work.*

The following question was answered by 137 people: 61 were men, and 75 were women. 19.67% of male and 53.33% of female respondents think that women must work harder and receive more training to be paid equally and obtain equal positions as men in the company. 65.57% of male and 30.67% of female respondents think that women do not have to work harder and receive more training to be paid equally and obtain equal positions as men in the company. 14.75% of male and 16% of female respondents are not sure about the question. See Figure 20.

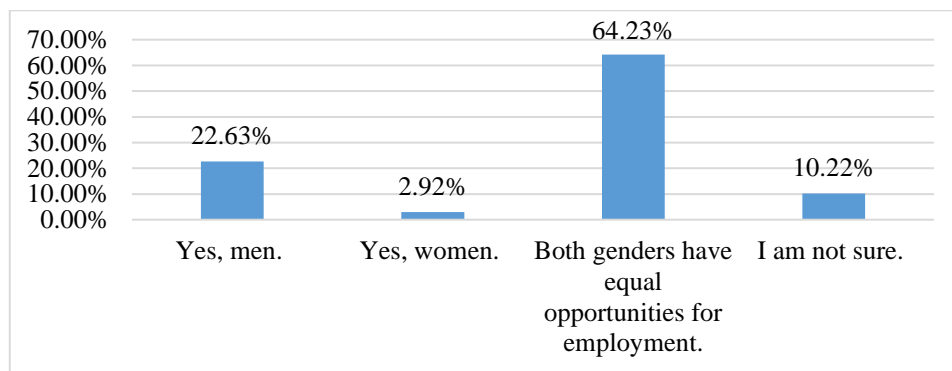
*Figure 20: Gender comparison: equal effort for equal pay and positions in the company*



*Source: own work.*

The next question focused on the recruitment processes in the company respondents work in. Most respondents think both genders have equal chances of getting a job in their company (64.23%). 22.63% believe men have more chances, and 2.92% think women have more chances of getting a job in their company. 10.22% were undecided. See Figure 21.

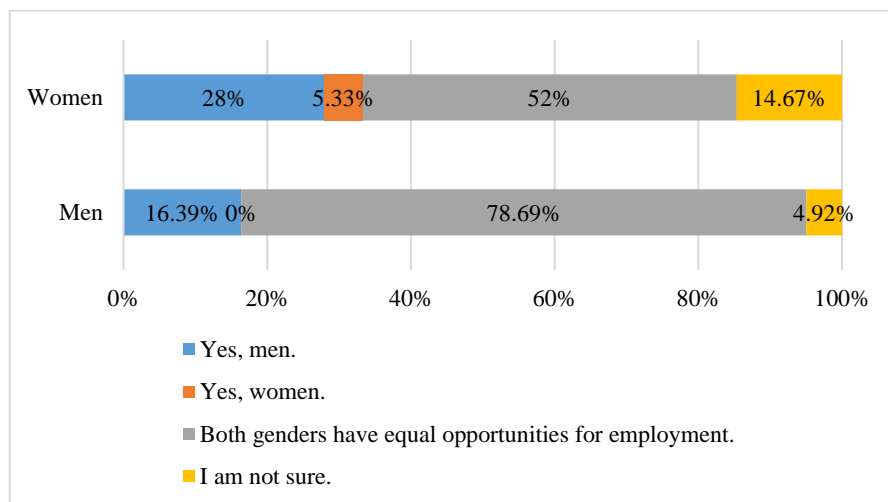
*Figure 21: Advantages in the recruitment process in the company*



*Source: own work.*

137 people answered the question; 61 were men, and 75 were women. 16.39% of male and 28% of female respondents think that men have an advantage in recruitment. Only 4.92% of women think women have an advantage when applying for a job at their company. 78.69% of men and 52% of women who answered the survey think women and men have equal employment opportunities. 5.33% of male and 14.67% of female respondents are not sure. See Figure 22.

*Figure 22: Gender comparison: advantages in the recruitment processes*

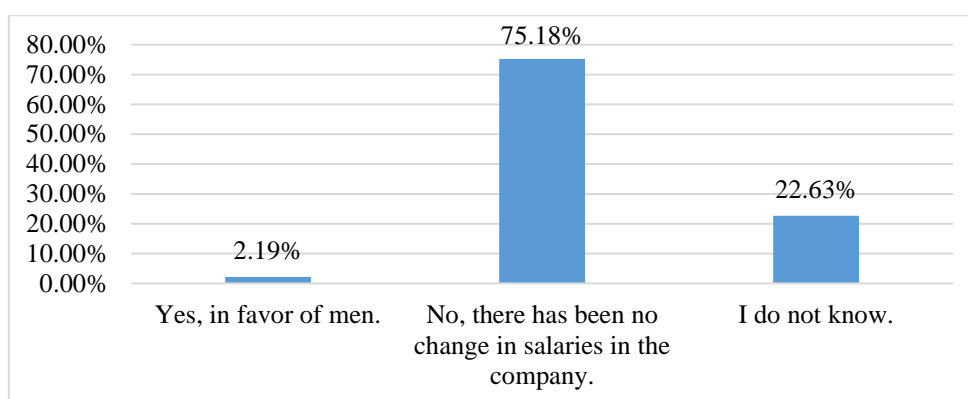


*Source: own work.*

The next question aimed at obtaining knowledge about the COVID-19 effects on the gender pay gap in the company. The majority of respondents do not think that the gender pay gap in their company has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (75.18%), 2.19% think that it has been affected in favour of men, and 22.63% are not sure if the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their company's salaries. No one thinks the pandemic affected the gender pay gap in favour of women. See Figure 23.



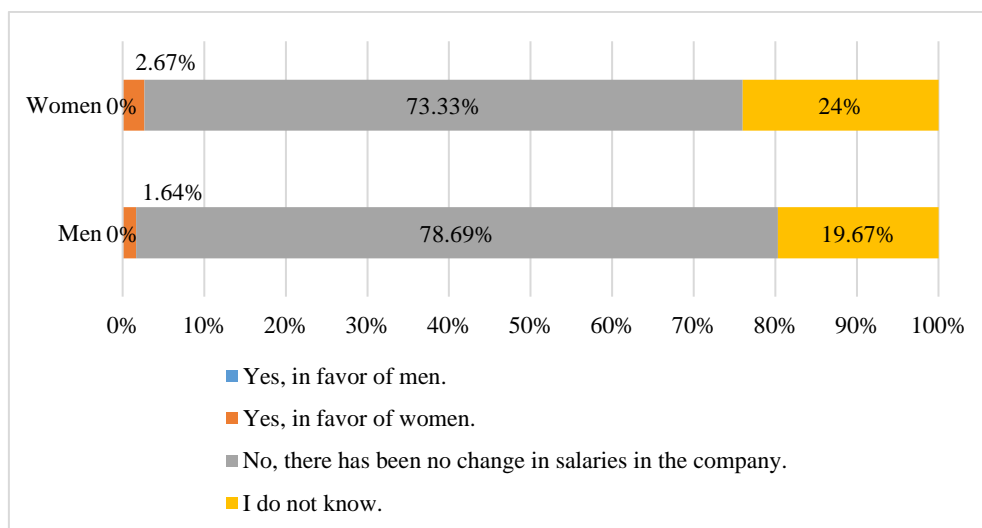
Figure 23: COVID-19 and the gender pay gap in the company



Source: own work.

The question regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the gender pay gap in the company people work at was answered by 137 people; 61 were men, 75 were women. None of the respondents believes that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the gender pay gap in favour of women. 1.64% of male and 2.67% of female respondents think the pandemic impacted the gender pay gap in favour of men. 78.69% of male and 73.33% of female respondents think that after the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been no change in salaries in their company. 19.67% of male and 24% of female respondents do not know. See Figure 24.

Figure 24: Gender comparison: COVID-19 and the gender pay gap in the company



Source: own work.

The last two questions focused on the existence of policies and guidelines promoting gender equality in the workplace. They aimed to see how aware respondents are of the company's policies, how they are implemented, and how effective they are. Just over half of the respondents answered that they do not know whether their company has policies and

guidelines promoting gender equality in the workplace (51.09%). 32.85% said that their company does not have such policies, and 16.06% said that companies they work at have policies and guidelines on gender equality.

137 people answered the question; 61 were men, and 75 were women. 18.03% of male and 14.67% of female respondents are aware of such policies and guidelines in their company. 34.43% of men and 32% of women who answered the question are not aware of them. 47.54% of male and 53.33% of female respondents do not know whether they exist or not.

If people answered that policies and guidelines which promote gender equality are implemented in the company, they were further asked how effective they are and to give an example of good practice. Effectiveness was not commented by anyone, one respondent pointed out the implementation of initiatives that focus on increasing women's representation in management positions, gender equality, flexible work policies, offering kindergarten to employees' children, breaking down stereotypes through training and education, and pay transparency. Sustainable development policies were also highlighted, and one respondent said their company holds annual interviews on gender equality progress.

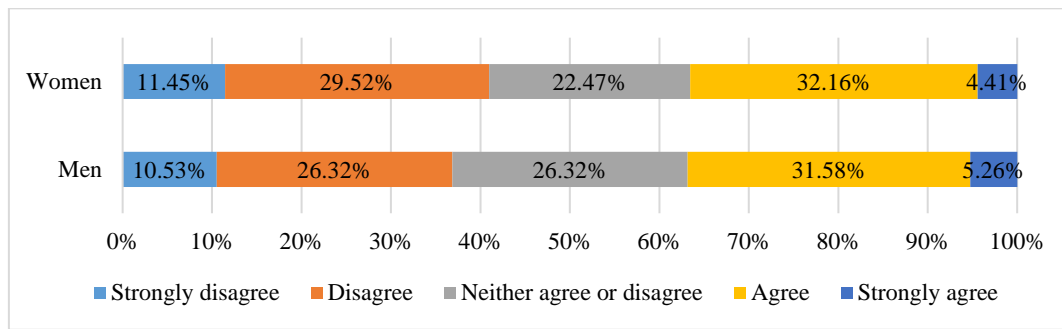
#### 5.2.8 Likert Scale on General Views

The last question of the survey focused on the general views of the survey's respondents. Respondents were given four statements and had to mark to which degree they agreed with them on a scale from one to five. One meaning strongly disagree, and five meaning strongly agree. One person did not evaluate the last two statements.

Respondents, on average, neither agree nor disagree that they are paid enough for the work they do in their current job ( $PV=2.90$ ). The standard deviation was 1.111. On average, respondents disagree that men are in the same position as women because of their greater abilities and are entitled to a higher salary ( $PV=1.98$ ). The standard deviation is 1.082. Respondents think that men are responsible for the financial provision of the family while women are responsible for childcare and household chores ( $PV=1.85$ ). The standard deviation is 0.98. On average, respondents disagree that women are paid less because they put the family before work ( $PV=2.26$ ). The standard deviation is 1.037.

The first statement: "I am paid enough for what I do." was evaluated by 342 people: 114 were men, and 227 were women. 10.53% of men and 11.45% of women strongly disagree with the statement. 26.32% of male and 29.52% of female respondents disagree. 26.32% of male and 22.47% of female respondents neither agree or disagree. 31.58% of men and 32.16% of women agree with the statement. 5.26% of male and 4.41% of female respondents strongly agree. See Figure 25.

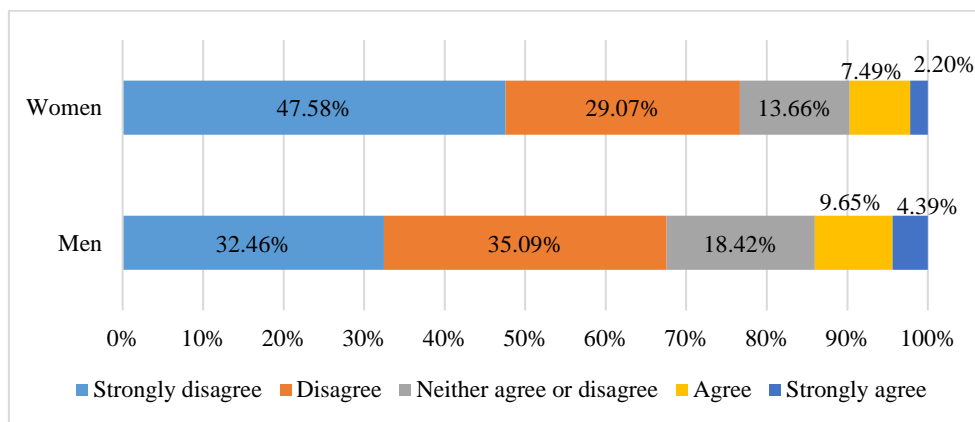
Figure 25: Gender comparison: “I am paid enough for what I do.”



Source: own work.

The second statement: “Men in equal positions as women are entitled to a higher wage because of their greater abilities.” was evaluated by 342 people: 114 were men, 227 were women. 32.46% of male and 47.58% of female respondents strongly disagree with the statement. 35.09% of men and 29.07% of women disagree with the statement. 18.42% of male and 13.66% of female respondents neither agree nor disagree. 9.65% of male and 7.49% of female respondents agree. 4.39% of male and 2.20% of female respondents strongly agree with the statement. See Figure 26.

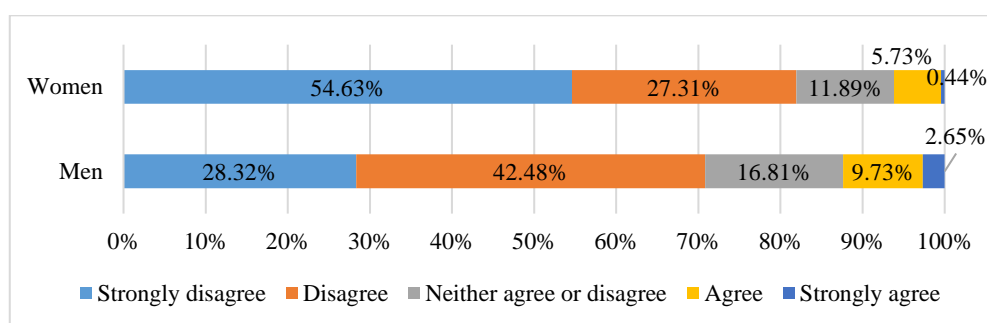
Figure 26: Gender comparison: equal position of genders, but higher pay for men



Source: own work.

The third statement: “Men are responsible for financially providing for the family, while women are responsible for childcare and carrying out the household chores.” was evaluated by 341 people. 113 were men, 227 were women. 28.32% of male and 54.63% of female respondents strongly disagree with the statement. 42.48% of men and 27.31% of women disagree. 16.81% of men and 11.89% of women neither agree or disagree. 9.73% of men and 5.73% of women agree, and 2.65% of men and 0.44% of women strongly agree. See Figure 27.

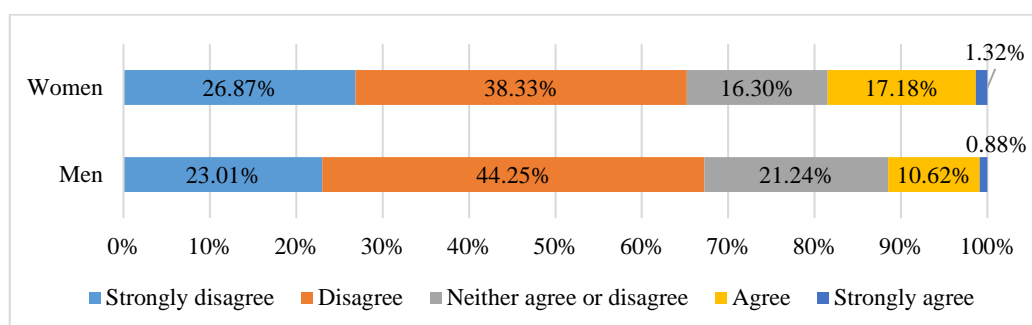
Figure 27: Gender comparison: men and women's responsibilities



Source: own work.

The fourth statement: “Women have lower wages because they prioritize family over work.” was evaluated by 341 people: 113 were men, 227 were women. 23.01% of male and 26.87% of female respondents strongly disagree with the statement. 44.25% of men and 38.33% of women disagree. 21.24% of male and 16.30% of female respondents neither agree nor disagree. 10.62% of male and 17.18% of female respondents agree with the statement. 0.88% of male and 1.32% female respondents strongly agree with the statement. See Figure 28.

Figure 28: Gender comparison: family prioritization leads to women's lower earnings



Source: own work.

### 5.2.9 Additional Considerations of Survey Respondents with Comments

Additional considerations provided by the respondents show an even bigger variety of perspectives and experiences related to the gender pay gap. Most of them call for equal pay for equal work for all, which shows high awareness of the problem. One of the respondents pointed out that equality is not a broad enough term and that we should talk about gender equity. Using a broader term calls for systemic action to not only close the gender pay gap, but to also achieve gender parity in all areas of life and to establish inclusive environments for all. Higher work flexibility and family-friendly policies were also suggested for a more manageable work-life balance. Companies should offer support to their employees' hobbies and other roles outside the working environment. One of the respondents highlighted that factors beyond gender, such as connections and personal acquaintances, can significantly

impact one's wage, indicating the issue's complexity and the need to consider multiple variables when analyzing the gender pay gap.

Another respondent pointed out that women are less present in some more physically demanding sectors like construction due to the nature of work, which calls for creating a more inclusive environment in traditionally male-dominated industries. Meaning that women should be welcomed in any industry they want to work at and should not be discriminated against on the basis of gender. Respondents also pointed out stereotypes and social norms focusing on traditional gender roles as one of the reasons for the gender pay gap. This indicates how stereotypes still influence our life and our working paths, they are still present in hiring practices, salary negotiations, and career advancement opportunities. Stereotypes influencing your decisions can lead to undervaluing women which contributes to the overall gender disparity. This can also be linked to the respondent saying that women are underrepresented in some physically more demanding occupations. One of the solutions here could be implementing gender neutral policies and introduce blind hiring, where gender of the applicant is hidden, and therefore cannot be the reason for not being employed. The criteria for all above mentioned should be objective, only then would women and men have equal opportunities.

One of the respondents sees the gender pay gap as a reverse problem. He or she highlighted that in specific sectors, we can see a trend of more women and fewer men in senior positions, which, in respondent's opinion, calls for considering and addressing gender disparities that negatively affect both genders, not only women. The respondent's answer could indicate that the person feels threatened by women taking over some previously male-dominated professions or positions, which could decrease their position in society and could result in their lower representation in specific fields.

To conclude, additional considerations of the survey participants show the complexity of the gender pay gap issue. They portray its various aspects. It can be said that society, work policies, and individual's attributes, connections and other characteristics influence individual's perception and awareness of the gender pay gap. Each individual has his or her view on the gender pay gap, which makes it even more challenging to find a way to close it.

The additional considerations also brought some criticism. There was some positive feedback on the survey, as well as some negative feedback. People expressed concerns about the survey design. Some pointed out that the questions were discriminatory and framed in a way that suggests women have a disadvantaged position in society, further implying the gender pay gap. The literature and research conducted until now shows that women have a disadvantage in society and are paid less compared to men for equal work. According to national and global statistics, the gender pay gap exists for a fact, it consistently favours men, and has negative consequences for women. Thinking that there is no issue or implying that the survey is discriminatory can be associated with the lack of awareness and knowledge on the gender pay gap phenomenon. It can be seen as negligence of the problem, which can

further halt the gender pay gap closing. Therefore, raising awareness, addressing the disparities, and educating people about them is even more critical.

### 5.3 Hypotheses Testing

The following chapter will provide the tests of all five preliminary set hypotheses. I tested the hypotheses with Chi-Square test, which is a statistical test that compares observed and expected results. It identifies if a difference between actual and predicted data appears due to chance or a relationship among them. It illustrates whether there is a connection between chosen categorical variables or not (Biswal, 2023). Graphical representation of hypotheses testing is included in Appendix 4.

**H1:** Respondents who think men and women should be paid equally for equal work are more aware of the gender pay gap existence in Slovenia.

Before performing the test, the answers to each question included in the analysis were recoded. For the question “Do you think there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia?”, we grouped respondents into two categories: those who think there is a gender pay gap (yes, in favour of women, and yes, in favour of men) and those who think there is no gender pay gap (no, both men and women are paid equally for equal work). Those who chose the answer “not sure” were excluded from the analysis. Those who answered with “not sure” when asked, “Do you think men and women should be paid equally for equal work?” were excluded from the analysis.

According to the results, most people who think that men and women should be paid equally for equal work also think that there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia (78.9%). Most people who think that women and men should not be paid equally for equal work (62.5%) think so as well. Given the p-value of 0.297, which is greater than 0.05, it can be said that there are no statistically significant differences in the opinion of whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia with regard to the opinion of persons who think that women and men should be paid equally for equal work. Based on the analysis we reject hypothesis 1. See table 1.

*Table 1: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 1*

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	1.239 <sup>a</sup>	1	.266
Likelihood Ratio	1.086	1	.297
N	269		

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.72. p-value should be lower than 0.05 to confirm the hypothesis.

*Source: own work.*

**H2:** Individuals working in the private sector are more aware of the unequal treatment of men and women than those employed in other sectors.

Before performing a test, the answers to each question included in the analysis were recoded. For the question “Do you think there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia?”, I grouped respondents into two categories: those who think there is a gender pay gap (yes, in favour of women, and yes, in favour of men) and those who think there is no gender pay gap (no, both men and women are paid the same for the same work). Those who chose “not sure” are excluded from the analysis. The same goes for the question, “Please tick the statement that applies to the company you work for?” we excluded those who answered “I am not sure” from the analysis.

According to the results, most people who say that there are more men than women in a company they work at think there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia (71.7%). Also, most people who say there are the same number of men and women in the company they work at think the same. Similarly, 84.6% of people who say that there are more women than men in a company in which they are employed think that there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia. Given that the p-value is 0.446 which is higher than 0.05, we can say that there are no statistically significant differences in the opinion on whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia, depending on whether the companies where the respondents are employed in are dominated by men or women or whether the quotas are aligned. All of them believe that there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia. Based on the analysis, we reject hypothesis 2. See table 2.

*Table 2: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 2*

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	1.615 <sup>a</sup>	2	.446
Likelihood Ratio	1.695	2	.428
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.584	1	.208
N	105		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.13. p-value should be lower than 0.05 to confirm the hypothesis.

*Source: own work.*

**H3:** Individuals working in the private sector are more aware of the gender pay gap than those in other sectors.

For the question “Do you think there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia?”, we excluded respondents who chose the answer “I am not sure”.

According to the results the majority of people employed in the public (79.2%) and private sectors (73.1%), the majority of self-employed (83.3%), and the majority of the unemployed (72.5%) think that there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia. Given the p-value is 0.408, which is greater than 0.05, it can be said that there are no statistically significant differences in the opinion on whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia, depending on which sector the respondents are employed in. Based on the analysis, we reject hypothesis 3. See table 3.

*Table 3: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 3*

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	4.604 <sup>a</sup>	6	.596
Likelihood Ratio	6.141	6	.408
Linear-by-Linear Association	.003	1	.960
N	267		

a. 4 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.36. p-value should be lower than 0.05 to confirm the hypothesis.

*Source: own work.*

**H4:** Private sector employees who believe that there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in their company also believe that men have better opportunities for promotion and obtaining rewards in the company.

For the question “Do you think there is a gender pay gap in the company where you work?”, we excluded respondents who chose “not sure”. Similarly, for the question “Do you think that male and female employees in your company have equal opportunities for promotion and reward?” those who answered “not sure” were excluded from the analysis.

According to the results in Table 4, half of the people who think that there is a pay gap in favour of men in the company they work at, also think that the company management prioritizes male employees, who receive higher bonuses and are promoted more easily and faster than women. However, the majority of people who believe that there is a pay gap in favour of women in the company they are employed at (100%), and the majority of employees who believe that men and women are paid equally in their company (95.8%) believe that their company respects national legislation and does not discriminate based on gender. Considering the p-value is 0.009 which is less than 0, it can be said that there are statistically significant differences in the opinion of whether male and female employees have the same opportunities for promotion and rewards or not in the company, variables are dependent. Based on the analysis, we confirm hypothesis 4.



Table 4: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 4

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	10.027 <sup>a</sup>	4	.040
Likelihood Ratio	13.412	4	.009
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.010	1	.045
N	92		

a. 5 cells (55.6%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.29. p-value should be lower than 0.05 to confirm the hypothesis.

Source: own work.

**H5:** Employees who believe there is a gender pay gap in the workplace in favour of men believe that women should work harder and take additional training to achieve equal pay and status in the company.

Hypothesis 5 was tested using a Chi-Square test. For the question “Do you think there is a gender pay gap in the company where you work?”, the respondents who chose “I am not sure” were excluded from the analysis. Similarly, for the question, “Do you think that women need to work more and undertake more training than men to receive equal pay and occupy the same position in the company?” we excluded from the analysis those who answered “I am not sure”.

According to the results in the contingency table below, the majority of people who think that there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in the company where they are employed also think that women need to work more and take additional training in order to receive equal pay and occupy the same position in the company compared to men (61.6%). The majority of people who think that there is a gender pay gap in favour of women in their company (100%) and the majority of employees who think that men and women are paid equally in their company (82.6%) think that women do not need to work more and take additional training to receive equal pay and occupy the same position in the company compared to men. Extremely low p-value of a 0.00008 in a Chi-Square test indicates strong evidence that the observed data is unlikely to occur by chance. There is strong statistical evidence that shows that studied variables are dependent. Because the p-value is close to 0 the conclusion should be taken with caution. Based on the analysis, we confirm hypothesis 5.

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests, hypothesis 5

	Value	df	p-value
Pearson Chi-Square	16.733 <sup>a</sup>	2	.0002
Likelihood Ratio	18.775	2	.00008
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.275	1	.012
N	86		

a. 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.26. p-value should be lower than 0.05 to confirm the hypothesis.

Source: own work.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Summary of Main Findings

RQ1: How are people viewing the gender pay gap phenomena in general and on the national level?

The research reveals that most respondents believe men and women should be paid equally for equal work (94.15%). Moreover, a significant number of respondents acknowledge the gender pay gap in Slovenia in favour of men (61.7%). The data correlates to the previously conducted research showing that only a tiny proportion of people are unaware of the gender pay gap. Almost half of the people who participated in the survey (45.32%) think that implementing government legislation requiring equal pay for equal work in companies is the most effective way to close the gender pay gap. 25.73% of people think the best way to do that is to increase payment transparency, and just over 12.28% of people think the best way to close the gap is to implement different policies and guidelines at the company level. Just over 10% of the respondents believe putting more women in leading positions is the best way to eliminate the gender pay gap. Respondents also suggested the combination of all of the above mentioned to be the most effective, encouraging social change and equal representation of both genders in managerial positions. Some respondents also think there is no solution to the problem. The results show the need for multifaced approaches to address the gender pay gap and ensure gender equity in the workplace.

Respondents had diverse opinions on applying for a company that does not pay men and women equally. Over one-third of the respondents think they would apply for a job and address the gender pay gap after employment. A smaller percentage (9.65%) of the respondents would take the job because they think the gender pay gap does not matter when applying. 26.61% of people believe applying for a job in a company with gender payment

disparity is against their principles of equal opportunities. 29.53% of survey participants are still determining if they would apply for such a job. The diversity of answers again shows the issue's complexity and how each individual views the phenomenon differently. According to the survey findings, we can conclude that respondents generally find the gender pay gap as one of the crucial factors when looking for a job. Still, when looking into results, we also have to consider other aspects that influence their decision and, in some cases, prevail. One of them is that employment is one of the predispositions to being economically independent. Often, individuals may find themselves in a situation where they have little or no choice but to accept a job offer, as it directly impacts their livelihood. Therefore, they cannot, even if this is against their gender equality principles, reject the job offer. Considering that taking the job and then advocating for gender equality may be the only option for most people who strive for gender equality. This reasoning could also indicate the high percentage of undecided people who do not know what they would do if they would be in such situation. We can conclude that in the case of employment, a lot depends on the current living situation of an individual, and their decision does not directly show their relation to the gender pay gap. This also indicates when comparing this question's answers to other questions' answers.

Respondents' views on the impact of motherhood on women's lifetime earnings varied. Most of the respondents believe that motherhood affects the overall lifetime earnings of women because women, due to gender norms, are more likely to work part-time or be unemployed, and 17.01% of people asked think that women overall earn less than men due to maternal responsibilities, and because they do not want to work that much. On the other hand, 6.16% of respondents think that women are employed at the same rate as men and receive equal pay, and 23.46% believe that women and men have the same income, regardless of whether a woman has children. We can conclude that respondents think women's earnings are shaped by factors such as societal norms and individual choices. The survey's findings only partially correlate to previously conducted data and statistics that show that women's overall lifetime earnings are lower if women are mothers. This discrepancy could be attributed to the respondent's working environment, which is more accommodating to mothers or can show the need for more awareness regarding the career-related challenges and sacrifices women must make. This again calls for awareness initiatives on gender equality in the workplace.

Analysis showed no statistically significant differences in the opinion on whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia concerning the opinion of persons who think women and men should be equally paid for equal work. We can conclude that these two are not significantly correlated, and the existence of the gender pay gap is not connected to the personal perception that men and women should be equally paid for equal work. The analysis also showed no statistically significant differences in the opinion on whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia, depending on whether the companies where respondents are employed are dominated by men or women or whether quotas are aligned. We can conclude that the

company's employment structure does not directly influence a person's perception of the gender pay gap in Slovenia.

RQ2: Do workers of different gender in the private sector have different opportunities and are treated differently based on gender?

The second research question concerns the differences and potential discrimination among genders in the private sector. Companies that the respondents work in mainly employ more men than women. Most respondents think that more men are employed in the company they work in than women (45.93%). 24.44% believe the number of women and men employees is the same, and a little more than 25% believe that more women are employed in the company. This indicates the existence of different employment structures in the respondents' companies and can call for a more gender-balanced employment structure where proportions vary. Other employment structures can be linked to the profession respondents are employed in; literature shows some occupations are male- and some are female-dominated.

Almost half of the respondents believe that employees in their company are equally paid for equal work, and nearly a quarter think there is a gender pay gap in a company in favour of men. At the same time, more than half of those asked believe that their company does not discriminate based on gender (64.96%). 20.44% of the respondents think gender is a factor in promotions and rewards. 6.57% of the respondents think that promotion in a company is more difficult for women because they have lower skills than men and 13.87% believe that the company's management prioritizes male employees, who can quickly and more easily get promoted or gain rewards. The survey's findings correlate to the statistical data showing a small gender pay gap in the Slovenian private sector.

Almost half of the people asked think that women do not need to work more or educate themselves more for them to obtain the same position and pay in the company as men. 37.96% of the respondents think women must work more and educate themselves more to obtain the same position and pay as men. The results show that companies, in the eyes of respondents, mostly treat women and men in the workplace equally, but differences in the eyes of some still occur. Especially in education and training, women are expected to put in more effort to obtain the same positions as men. In order to close the gender pay gap, efforts for fair treatment and equal opportunities for all should be encouraged. Survey findings show that stereotypes continue to shape perspectives on the underlying causes of the gender pay gap. This aligns with existing literature, which identifies stereotypes as one of the main reasons for the gender pay gap.

When talking about gender bias in employment, most respondents think that both genders have equal opportunities in the employment processes in their company (64.23%), and 22.63% think that men have better options for employment than women. On the contrary, the literature suggests that women still have fewer opportunities for employment. The reason for such an outcome can be linked to the fact that most respondents do not work in typically

male- or female-dominated industries where employment opportunities are more likely to differ.

Analysis showed no statistically significant differences in respondents' opinions on whether there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia, depending on which sector respondents are employed in. Meaning that the sector the respondents work in does not significantly influence their perception of the gender pay gap existence in Slovenia. Even though, for example, the gender pay gap in Slovenia is higher in the public sector, that does not conclude that public sector employees are more aware of it than private sector employees.

According to the analysis, there are statistically significant differences in respondents' opinions on whether male and female employees have the same company promotion and reward opportunities. This concludes that people who think there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in their company also think that men have better options for promotions and bonuses. People who think there is a gender pay gap in favour of women or that both genders are paid equally for equal work agree that men and women have equal opportunities for promotion. Additionally, the research concluded that employees who perceive a gender pay gap in their company feel that women need to put in more effort and additional training to achieve equal pay and position in the company as men. These correlations indicate that the gender pay gap in a company usually results in people perceiving unequal treatment of men and women in all areas of work. Closing the gender pay gap is the first indicator for people to feel they are equally treated regardless of their gender in all areas of work. Survey findings should encourage companies to make a change. Firstly, they should implement policies that would indicate and promote equal treatment of both genders, starting with equal pay for equal work.

Further, fair treatment should be included in all other work aspects. After the policies are implemented, they should be put into practice. Women and men should have equal opportunities for their professional development, and the company should implement clear initiatives to secure it. Introducing payment transparency is, according to literature, one of the most efficient ways to ensure equality. It forces companies to close the gender pay gap, while their payment data is public and, at the same time, enables employees to get insights on how much their colleagues are paid for the type of work they perform. If employees perceive that people are paid equally for equal work, they are more likely to believe that they are treated fairly in all work aspects, regardless of gender. Equal treatment of both genders further improves the well-being and productivity of employees, which increases the company's overall productivity.

RQ3: What are companies operating in the private sector doing to reduce the gender pay gap? Are their attempts effective?

More than half of the respondents are unaware of any policies and guidelines used in their company that encourage gender equality in the workplace (51.09%). Only 16.06% are aware

of such policies. None of the respondents evaluated the effectiveness of the above-mentioned policies and guidelines. One respondent mentioned initiatives for higher women representation in managerial positions, including gender equity goals in the company's strategy, the introduction of flexible work policies, kindergarten for employees' children, and education and training programs that increase awareness. Also, higher pay transparency and annual meetings on progress made with the help of implemented regulations were mentioned as effective methods for the closing of the gender pay gap. The lack of knowledge about the guidelines and policies on the gender pay gap can be attributed to their non-existence or the fact that companies do not inform their workers about them or that workers are not interested in the topic itself. Companies should implement policies and initiatives that reduce the gender pay gap and ensure equality in all work areas. Employees should be informed and educated about them. Gender equality should not only be a matter in payments but should also be included in every aspect of the company's work. Literature proves such measures are successful and improve companies' overall revenues and, at the same time, their employees' well-being. The effectiveness of gender equality policies and initiatives should be measured yearly and improved if results are not showing. According to the survey results, the first step should be raising awareness on the importance among employees if the policies already exist and, if not, their establishment and implementation.

RQ4: How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the gender pay gap phenomena nationally and in private companies?

The fourth research question looked into the consequences the COVID-19 pandemic left on the working environment. The majority of people think that the COVID-19 pandemic has, in terms of employment and job losses, affected both genders equally (58.77%). 16.67% of respondents believe women were more affected, and 23.10% of people asked are unsure who was affected the most. Respondents had very similar beliefs regarding lower wages. Most think both genders were affected equally (56.73%), 12.87% think women suffered more, and almost 30% are unsure. The statistics obtained on the situation in Slovenia show that both genders were in general affected equally, which confirms the majority's answer. When looking into specific occupations, the gender pay gap was different. The literature shows unemployment during the pandemic faced a significant rise. The survey findings present a valuable insight into the field, while there was no data on which gender was affected by unemployment the most.

Private sector employees were asked how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the gender pay gap in their company. Most of them believe there have not been any changes in payments in the company (75.18%). No one thinks that the gender pay gap improved in the direction of women, and almost 2.19% think it improved in favour of men. The findings link to the statistical data, which shows that the gender pay gap even decreased during the pandemic and increased again after the pandemic in 2021. Direct correlations with COVID-19 due to the phenomenon's complexity cannot be drawn.



RQ5: How do women and men view and reflect on the gender pay gap phenomenon?

The fifth research question compared women's and men's perceptions of the gender pay gap phenomenon.

Most men and women think that both genders should be paid equally for equal work, but the percentage is higher among women respondents than men (96.92% and 88.6%). More men than women agree that women and men should not be paid equally for equal work (6.14% of men and 1.76% of women). The answers were quite different when talking about the existence of the gender pay gap in Slovenia. 34.21% of male respondents think that women and men in Slovenia are equally paid for equal work, while only 9.69% of women think this way. Most women (71.73%) believe there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia, accounting only for 42.11% of male respondents. 2.63% of men think that there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia in favour of women, and only 0.44% of female respondents agree with that. According to the answers, female respondents, as the victims of the gender pay gap, are more aware of the problem than men.

When talking about how to most effectively eliminate the gender pay gap, men and women in the majority agree that it would be through the implementation of governmental laws, followed by higher payment transparency. More women than men think implementing gender equality policies on the company level would be the most effective (14.54% women and 7.89% men), and significantly more women than men think putting more women in leadership positions will be the most effective way to close the gender pay gap (13.66% women and 5.26% men).

The analysis showed that women and men participating in the survey have different views on employment in a company where they know the gender pay gap exists. Significantly more men than women think the gender pay gap in the company they want to be employed in is unimportant and will take the job regardless (25.44% men and 1.76% women). More women than men (28.95% men and 37% women) answered that they would take the job and later advocate for change in the company. Noticeably more women will not take the job because this would be against their equality principles (32.16% women and 15.79% men). The results conclude that the gender pay gap is a more significant decisive factor for women than men when applying for a job and that women feel a bigger urge to fight for equal treatment of men and women in the working environment when it is not ensured.

More men than women think that motherhood does not influence the overall lifetime earnings of women (13.16% compared to 2.65% of women), and more women than men agree that women's incomes are not affected by motherhood because women are successful in their maternal and professional roles and consequently have the same lifetime income compared to women who are not mothers, or men (20.18% men and 25.22% women). Significantly more women than men agree that women's income is lower due to motherhood because gender norms lead to more women than men working part-time or being

unemployed (42.48% of women and 28.95% of men). A similar percentage of men and women think that women, due to maternal responsibilities, do not want to work as much as men (15.79% men and 17.70% women). More women than men perceiving motherhood as a career disadvantage can lie in the fact that their opinion could be based on their personal experience or the experience of their female friends. Further, due to their disadvantages in society, women tend to be more aware and educated on the topic.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on employment and job losses, most men think that both genders were equally affected (74.56%), and just over half of women agree (51.1%). On the other hand, much more women than men think it affected women more than men (21.59% women and 7.02% men). The proportions were quite similar when looking into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of payments. 72.81% of men and 48.90% of women asked think men and women were equally affected. 17.18% of women and 4.39% of men think women were the most affected.

The changes in answers also appear between male and female respondents working in the private sector. 56.67% of men and 36.49% of women think there are more male employees than women. Most female and male respondents believe men and women employed in the company are paid equally for equal work, but the percentage is higher between men (60.66% of men and 41.33% of women). A higher percentage of women than men think there is a gender pay gap in favour of men in the company (33.33% women and 14.75% men).

Proportions are similar in the perception of opportunities for promotion and rewards both genders have. More men than women think the company they work at respects national legislation and does not discriminate based on gender (78.69% men and 53.33% women). A significantly higher proportion of women think the company's management prioritizes male employees, who receive higher bonuses and are promoted more easily and quickly (3.28% men and 22.67% women). Around 7% of men and women think promotion in their company is more difficult for women because of their lower skills. Further, significantly more women than men think women should work harder and receive more training to be paid equally and obtain equal positions as men in the company (53.33% women compared to 19.67% men) when the majority of men think this is not necessary (65.57% men compared to 30.67% women).

When talking about employment, most men and women agree that people have gender equal opportunities in the process, but that stands for more men than women (78.69% men and 52% women). More women than men think men are in favourable positions in the employment process of the company they work for. The results conclude that men view the employment process as more equal than women, who think men have an advantage.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the gender pay gap in the company they work for, there was no significant difference between the answers of male and female employees. Most think the gender pay gap has not changed.



The answers between men and women regarding the policies and guidelines implemented in their company were similar between men and women. Male and female respondents also have similar views on whether they are paid enough for what they do. On the other hand, more differences appear regarding the statement: "Men in equal positions as women are entitled to a higher wage because of their greater abilities ". More women than men strongly disagree with the statement (47.58% of women and 32.46% of men), 35.09% of men and 29.07% of women disagree. More men than women agree and strongly agree with the statement. An even more significant difference in answers was regarding the statement: "Men are responsible for financially providing for the family, while women are responsible for childcare and carrying out the household chores". More than half of women strongly disagree with the statement, a higher percentage than men (54.63% of women and 28.32% of men); 42.48% of men and 27.31% do not agree. More men than women agree or disagree, agree, and strongly agree. The last statement: "Women have lower wages because they prioritize family over work." was similarly evaluated. Most men and women do not agree with the statement – 23.01% of men and 26.87% of women strongly disagree, and 44.25% of men and 38.33% of women disagree. More women than men agree or strongly agree with the statement.

## **6.2 Discussion and Practical Implications**

The gender pay gap has been an enduring issue in society for a long time. It continues to persist today and is likely to remain present in the foreseeable future. Understanding how people view it and its causes is crucial for addressing the issue and closing the gender pay gap. The practical implications written below aim to encourage companies, policymakers and other actors to take further action in promoting gender equality in the workplace and further to close the gender pay gap.

Firstly, according to the answers, respondents are generally aware of the gender pay gap and think it should be closed. Companies, individuals, and other actors should further promote awareness and take action that will close the gender pay gap. The companies' agenda should be educating people on the matter, organizing regular meetings on progress, and providing online training, workshops, and coaching. Gender bias is, according to the respondents, not only present in the payment system, but it is also seen in the recruitment process and later in companies' promotion and rewards systems. Equal opportunities for advancement should be guaranteed in the workplace to encourage a more inclusive and empathetic environment. The change should, therefore, start with eliminating gender bias in the recruitment process and further develop throughout all of the company's practices. Promoting and including equality principles in their everyday business should become one of the company's main goals that will also improve their performance.

Secondly, respondents' opinions on the best way to close the gender pay gap differ, but the starting point should be problem recognition on all levels followed by action. Most agree that the best thing to do is to implement government legislation requiring equal pay for equal

work. We can see that people acknowledge the problem. However, the solution they propose is the one that is already in force, which indicates they are not familiar with the policies and guidelines on the reduction of the gender pay gap in Slovenia or that they transcribe that the gender pay gap stands where it stands despite the legislation. The reason behind it can be bad implementation or no implementation at all. This could improve if governments implied fines for companies not ensuring gender equality. Governments should prioritize and promote gender equality in all aspects of life, which will further improve the gender pay gap statistics and raise awareness among people unfamiliar with the phenomenon. Governments should indicate change. They should be an example for others, but with the gender pay gap being higher in the public than the private sector in Slovenia, that is probably not the case. If the situation in the public sector improves, it may further indicate changes in the private sector. A way for improving the situation in the public sector could be acquiring a more equal representation of both genders on all levels with the help of gender quotas.

Pay transparency was also mentioned as one of the most effective ways to eliminate the gender pay gap, which is, as such, also recognized by the EU. It adopted a directive on pay transparency that will also be implemented in Slovenian legislation in 2023. Payment transparency indicates change, particularly in the private sector, when payments in the public one are already transparent. According to the Slovenian statistical data on the gender pay gap in the public sector pay transparency is not efficient in the gender pay gap reduction. Pay transparent companies provide all necessary data regarding employee payments, which further decreases payment disparities. Higher transparency forces companies to pay women and men equally for equal work and increases employees' satisfaction if both genders are treated equally. Additionally, most respondents are unaware of the policies and guidelines the company they work for has that address the gender pay gap and gender equality in the workplace. This can be linked to them not existing or people not being informed about them. We should encourage companies to implement such policies and guidelines in their practices and promote them to raise employee awareness of the issue. Another way to eliminate the gender pay gap is to increase women's representation in higher positions. This can be achieved by introducing gender quotas. Quotas could be implemented by government directives or on the company level. Either way higher representation of women in the executive positions in the company, according to literature, increases the company's performance. Women are more eager to make a change because their actions are based on their own experiences of unequal treatment. The results show many changes should be made to close the gender pay gap and ensure gender equality in the workplace once and for all. Especially important is to consider gender equality in the process of promotions and rewards for the employees that should also be transparent.

Thirdly, we can conclude that respondents are well aware of motherhood-related disparities. In their opinion, motherhood decreases mothers' lifetime income and sets back their careers. The awareness regarding the problem is higher among women than men. The reason for that probably lies in the fact that women are the ones negatively affected by it. Companies should

implement mother-friendly policies and initiatives that support the work-life balance of mothers, which will further improve their economic position. This is a strategic move for companies. It shows that they are inclusive and equitable which increases their brand image. Nowadays, companies' social awareness and responsibility are increasingly important when consumers and customers are deciding for purchasing products and services. If the brand is known for unequal treatment of its employees, including discrimination against mothers, it can quickly lose revenue. Companies' image can also be improved by obtaining certificates or prizes for being employee-friendly. Recognition of a company's efforts by a third party definitely adds value and builds brand's image.

Fourthly, most respondents think the COVID-19 pandemic has affected both genders equally in terms of employment and wages and did not majorly influence the gender pay gap, the previously obtained statistical data supports the discoveries but at the same time draws attention to other disparities among men and women the pandemic revealed – even if it did not negatively affect the gender pay gap directly, it has significantly increased inequality. Unexpected crisis usually deepens the disparities and worsens the yet existing problems. Governments, companies, and other stakeholders should find solutions and establish measures to protect the gender pay gap from the possible negative crisis' impacts.

Finally, comparing male and female respondents' views, we can conclude that women and men view the gender pay gap phenomenon differently. Men's answers show that compared to women, they are less aware of the gender pay gap existence and that at the same time the issue is less significant to them. They are more inclined to perceive the employment process and opportunities as equal for both genders. When applying for a job, more men than women would not consider the gender pay gap. The difference is also seen in how they view the motherhood effect on women's earnings, gender roles and responsibilities, and treatment of women in terms of employment, promotion and rewards. In the eyes of men, women and men are "more" equal than in the eyes of women. The reason behind it could be that men are usually not the ones being discriminated against, they are usually treated better, and given more and better opportunities. We can say that stereotypes persist and continue to influence the appraisal of both genders. Efforts should be made to challenge and transform societal norms and beliefs that lead to gender inequalities in general and, more specifically, in the workplace. According to the survey findings and literature, putting more women to higher positions is a strategic move. Women are the ones affected by the gender bias and can based on their own experiences improve the working environment and make the changes in fields where they are most required. Women, compared to men, also have a greater motivation for change due to the same reason. Furthermore, sharing experiences among each other can help employees create a better working environment and understand each other's needs. This should be encouraged by employers, governments and other stakeholders in the field. Closing the gender pay gap is possible only if they unite and collectively advocate for change.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research**

The research has certain limitations that should be considered during data analysis and making conclusions.

Firstly, I would like to point out the broadness of the research subject. Focusing on the employees in general and, later on the private sector employees is broad. The analysis could be improved by focusing on a narrower group of people with specific characteristics. With a much higher proportion of women answering the survey, the sample can also be exposed to a potential bias, especially when comparing the views of both genders. Bias can also be detected due to the respondents' educational level and other demographic characteristics, such as age, industry people work in, and their position in the company. We should consider that different sample structure would bring different survey results. People's educational level, occupation, and other factors influence their perceptions and bring different results. Additionally, the results provided do not show a realistic picture of the gender pay gap existence in Slovenia but are only a representation of people's views on the phenomenon and can present an addition to the statistical data which can further improve the gender pay gap elimination process in Slovenia.

The perceptions of the gender pay gap obtained by the survey do not show the actual data on the gender pay gap. The survey included different aspects of the phenomenon and is mostly based on people's views which potentially leads to various gender pay gap explanations that are not comparable among each other. Before making conclusions we should consider the methods and background of the research. Perceptions vary from person to person and can exceed or underachieve the controlled gender pay gap usually measured by the statistical offices. This means that if another sample would be obtained different result could occur. The obtained data does not portray the direct reflection of the gender pay gap in Slovenia, however it sheds a light on other dimensions of the phenomenon offering valuable insights into the factors influencing payment disparities and gender inequality. Even though people's perceptions differ we cannot recognize a problem and solve it without considering them.

The second limitation could be the size of the sample. The findings of this research would be of greater credibility and meaning if a larger sample of participants were included in the survey. I see an additional limitation in the sample structure, while the majority of respondents identify as women. If both genders were represented equally, different results would probably occur. Another limitation connected to the sample size is the timeframe. If the survey was available for a more extended period, it would probably also get more answers and, with that, gain on its reliability and validity. During the research itself and, more precisely, during the survey analysis, I also discovered some new potential for further research. For example, gender comparison could be more reliable if tested via statistical tests. In such case, the questionnaire would need to be adapted to new research hypotheses and new methods should be implied.

Also, the selection bias can present a limitation; while the survey was only disseminated online, people without web access and the ones who do not hold social ties with me or the people that fulfilled the survey could not participate. Another issue could be that respondents provided socially acceptable answers instead of genuine opinions. However, the chance for this is lower when fulfilling an online survey than an in-person one, when the pressure of the interviewer is also present.

Undoubtedly, the gender pay gap is a pressing issue today. It is included in various extensive research projects and has been addressed multiple times through different periods. It offers a broad spectrum of potential research study topics. Firstly, it would be interesting to elaborate more on the views of genders about the gender pay gap. Descriptive analysis provided exciting data, but this is only a start and would be interesting to be looked into in depth. Similarly, it would be interesting to compare views of people who obtained different educational levels, are part of different age groups, work in different industries, and are in different positions. Obtaining knowledge about how each group views the gender pay gap phenomenon will provide better insight for companies and governments on dealing with each individual regarding the gender pay gap. It will provide a clearer perspective of an individual's needs and values. Another exciting field for research would be looking into policies and guidelines that companies established, how effective they are, and how they benefit the company. By comparing companies' results, we could obtain the most effective ways for the gender pay gap elimination and its potential connection to the companies' performance. Upon this, recommendations for companies and governments would be provided.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

The gender pay gap, regardless of various attempts to close it, remains an unresolved phenomenon. Slovenia is one of the countries with the lowest gender pay gap in Europe, but there is still room for improvement until the gender pay gap is not entirely closed.

The thesis provides readers with a definition of the gender pay gap, followed by an overview of the gender pay gap's history, which shows that the gender pay gap has been a global problem for ages. It recognizes educational and occupational segregation, working hours and part-time work, under-representation of women in leadership, and gender bias as leading causes. It also involves a chapter on the importance of closing the gap and people's perceptions on the gender pay gap. Further, it focuses on the gender pay gap in Slovenia. It provides an overview of legislation, statistics, and differences among the private and public sectors. The theoretical part also includes COVID-19 pandemic effects on the gender pay gap.

The research part of the thesis focused on people's perceptions and experiences related to the gender pay gap among individuals working in various sectors, emphasizing the private sector. The findings show that the gender pay gap is still an issue and highlight the need to

address it comprehensively. Correlations between the past research findings and the conclusions of my analysis have been found. I believe that my analysis can contribute to the perceptions of the gender pay gap among employees, companies, and organizations in Slovenia. Upon my research, I developed practical implications for possible future research.

Most of the respondents included in the survey recognize the existence of the gender pay gap and inequalities between men and women in the workplace, and they advocate equal pay for equal work for both men and women. The second part of the research focused more precisely on the private sector employees' perceptions and attitudes towards the gender pay gap. Most respondents believe that the employees in the company they work for are equally paid for equal work and have equal opportunities for promotion and rewards, and in the recruitment process. This links to the fact that the gender pay gap in Slovenian private sector is relatively low.

People who believe there is gender pay gap in favour of men in their company also believe that women have fewer opportunities for promotion and rewards than men and have to try harder and obtain additional training or education to achieve equal pay and positions in the company as men. Further, the research showed that respondents are unaware of potential policies and guidelines in private companies that promote gender equality. We can prescribe this to the fact that they do not exist or to the fact that people are unaware of them. Either way, action should be taken to increase awareness about gender equality and the gender pay gap.

According to the respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic has, in terms of employment and wages, affected both genders equally. Most private sector employees think there have not been any changes in payments in the company they work for. Also, no one thinks the gender pay gap in the company improved in favour of women.

Research shows that men and women have different opinions on the gender pay gap phenomenon. Women show higher awareness of the phenomenon and attach higher significance to it than men. Views on motherhood, gender roles, and opportunities for men and women in the workplace vary between genders. More men than women believe both genders have equal opportunities for career advancement, promotion, and rewards. Also, fewer men than women believe that women should educate themselves more and attend more training in order for them to prosper and get promoted. Overall, men tend to believe that both genders are treated more equally than women perceive.

In conclusion, a collective action of governments, employers, employees and other stakeholders in the field is required to close the gender pay gap. Only with the combination of implementation of legislative measures, company-level policies, and cultural shifts can our society become more inclusive for both genders and the gender pay gap can be closed once and for all.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1: Summary in Slovene

Plačna vrzel med spoloma je opredeljena kot razlika v povprečni bruto plači na uro med moškimi in ženskami. Osnova izračunov so plače zaposlenih preden so jim odšteti davek in prispevke za socialno varnost. Plačna vrzel med spoloma je bila in še je prisotna v vseh družbah sveta (European Parliament, 2020a). Razlogov za njo je več – izobrazba, poklicna segregacija, neprisotnost žensk na vodilnih položajih, delovni čas posameznika in diskriminacija na podlagi spola. Plačna vrzel v Sloveniji letno niha in je značilno pod povprečjem Evropske unije. Po zadnjih podatkih je plačna vrzel v letu 2021 znašala 3,8 %, v javnem sektorju je bila nekoliko višja (11,8 %) kot v privatnem (7,2 %). Neenaka obravnava moških in žensk je v Sloveniji zakonsko prepovedana, a je kljub temu še vedno prisotna.

Odprava plačne vrzeli med spoloma je ključnega pomena pri zagotavljanju enakosti med spoloma in izboljšanju položaja žensk v družbi. Na dolgi rok odprava pripomore tudi k boljšemu poslovanju in odpravi revščine (O'Donnell et al., 2020) in izboljša počutje ter produktivnost zaposlenih na delovnem mestu (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women, b. d.). Posamezniki plačno vrzel in razloge zanjo dojemajo različno, na percepcijo med drugim vplivajo spol, starost, poklic, dohodek, izobrazba, politična prepričanost in družba v kateri živijo (Hill & Silva, 2005). Pandemija COVID-19 je poslabšala položaj žensk v družbi in med drugim vplivala tudi na plačno vrzel med spoloma.

Glavni namen moje raziskave je bil preučiti dožemanje in odnos zaposlenih v privatnem in drugih sektorjih do plačne vrzeli med spoloma in njihove obravnave na delovnem mestu. Zaključki raziskave lahko služijo v pomoč podjetjem, vladnim organom in drugim akterjem na področju iskanja načinov za odpravo plačne vrzeli med spoloma.

S pomočjo raziskave sem ugotovila, da se večina anketirancev zaveda plačne vrzeli med spoloma in se zavzema za prejemanje enakega plačila za enako delo in enako obravnavo spolov na delovnem mestu. Zaposleni v privatnem sektorju verjamejo, da so ženske in moški v njihovem podjetju enako plačani za enako delo in imajo enake možnosti za napredovanje, prejemanje nagrad ter zaposlitev, ne glede na spol. V večini niso seznanjeni s pravilniki ali smernicami, ki bi spodbujale enakost med spoloma na delovnem mestu, kar lahko pripišemo njihovem dejanskemu neobstoju ali pa zgolj k neseznanitvi zaposlenih z njimi.

Raziskava je pokazala, da se pogledi in odnos do plačne vrzeli med spoloma in neenakosti povezanih s tematiko razlikujejo med moškimi in ženskami. Ženske se problematike bolj zavedajo in ji pripisujejo večji pomen. Večji odstotek anketiranih moških meni, da imajo moški in ženske enake možnosti za zaposlitev, napredovanje in prejemanje nagrad, in da se ženske ne rabijo dodatno izobraževati za doseganje istih položajev in plače v podjetju.

Med analizo sem potrdila nekatere ugotovitve preteklih obravnavanih raziskav in jim dodala nove zaključke. Zaključki lahko služijo podjetjem, vladnim organom in akterjem na področju

sestave politik in smernic za odpravo plačne vrzeli med spoloma. Samo s sodelovanjem je lahko plačna vrzel med moškimi in ženskami dokočno odpravljena.



## **Appendix 2: Questionnaire in English**

Greetings,

My name is Ana Germ, I am a student pursuing a Master's degree in International Business at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana. The survey below will be included in my master's thesis focusing on the gender pay gap in the Slovenian private sector.

Please be assured that your responses are entirely anonymous and will be used for research purposes only.

Thank you for your participation!

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### **QUESTIONS**

#### **Q1: Gender:**

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Other

#### **Q2: Please write your age: \_\_\_\_\_**

#### **Q3: Please mark the level of your education:**

- a) Basic or lower.
- b) Upper secondary education.
- c) Tertiary education.

#### **Q4: In which sector do you work?**

- a) Public
- b) Private
- c) I am self-employed
- d) I am unemployed

#### **Q5: What is your field of work?**

- a) Manufacturing
- b) Services sector
- c) Healthcare
- d) Agriculture and Energetics
- e) Transport and Logistics
- f) Information Technology

- g) Entertainment and Social Media
- h) Finance and Banking
- i) Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Q6: What is your current position in the company?**

- a) General Manager/CEO
- b) Head of a department
- c) Employee
- d) Support Staff

**Q7: Do you believe men and women should be paid equally for equal work?**

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) I am not sure

**Q8: Do you think the gender pay gap (the difference in average earnings between women and men) exists in Slovenia?**

- a) Yes, in favour of women.
- b) Yes, in favour of men.
- c) No, women and men are equally paid for equal work.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q9: What is in your opinion the most effective way to tackle the gender pay gap at the national level?**

- a) Implementing government legislation requiring equal pay for equal work.
- b) Implementing gender equality policies at the company level.
- c) Higher pay transparency.
- d) More women in leadership positions.

**Q10: Would you apply for a job in a company in which you know the gender pay gap exists?**

- a) Yes, that does not matter to me.
- b) Yes, if hired, I would then advocate closing the gap.
- c) No, this is against my principles of equal opportunities.
- d) I do not know.

**Q11: Do you think motherhood reduces women's overall lifetime earnings?**

- a) No, women are employed at the same rate as men and therefore receive the same pay.
- b) No, women are successful in their maternal and professional roles and consequently have the same lifetime income, as women who are not mothers or men.
- c) Yes, gender norms lead to more women than men working part-time or being unemployed.
- d) Yes, women due to maternal responsibilities do not want to work as much as men.
- e) I do not know.

**Q12: Who do you think has been more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of employment and job losses?**

- a) Men.
- b) Women.
- c) Both genders equally.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q13: Who do you think has been more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of wage cuts?**

- a) Men.
- b) Women.
- c) Both genders equally.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q14: Mark the statement that applies to the company you work at.**

- a) The company employs more men than women.
- b) The company employs more women than men.
- c) The company employs an equal number of men and women.
- d) I do not know.

**Q15: Do you think there is a gender pay gap in your company?**

- a) Yes, in favour of men.
- b) Yes, in favour of women.
- c) No, men and women are paid equally for equal work.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q16: Do you think that men and women employees in your company have the same opportunities for promotion and rewards?**

- a) Yes, the company respects national legislation and does not discriminate based on gender.

- b) No, promotion in the company is more difficult for women because of their lower skills.
- c) No, the company's management prioritizes male employees, who receive higher bonuses and are promoted more easily and quickly.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q17: Do you think that women should work harder and receive more training to be paid equally and obtain equal positions as men in the company?**

- a) Yes.
- b) No.
- c) I am not sure.

**Q18: Do you think either gender has an advantage in the recruitment process in your company?**

- a) Yes, men.
- b) Yes, women.
- c) Both genders have equal employment opportunities.
- d) I am not sure.

**Q19: Do you think the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the gender pay gap in your company?**

- a) Yes, in favour of men.
- b) Yes, in favour of women.
- c) No, there has been no change in salaries in the company.
- d) I do not know.

**Q20: Are there any policies and guidelines in your company that promote gender equality in the workplace?**

- a) Yes.
- b) No.
- c) I do not know.

**Q21: How are the policies and guidelines that promote gender equality implemented in the company and how effective are they? Can you give an example of good practice?**

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**Q22: To what extent do you agree with the statements below? (Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree or disagree, agree, strongly agree)**

- a) I am paid enough for what I do. (If unemployed, please answer for your previous employment.)
- b) Men in equal positions as women are entitled to a higher wage because of their greater abilities.
- c) Men are responsible for financially providing for the family, while women are responsible for childcare and carrying out the household chores.
- d) Women have lower wages because they prioritize family over work.

**Q23: A place for any additional considerations.**

### **Appendix 3: Questioner in Slovene**

Pozdravljeni,

sem Ana Germ, študentka magistrskega študija mednarodnega poslovanja na Ekonomski fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani. Prosim, da rešite spodnjo anketo, katere zaključki bodo vključeni v mojo magistrsko nalogo na temo plačne vrzeli med spoloma v slovenskem zasebnem sektorju.

Vaši odgovori so popolnoma anonimni in bodo uporabljeni izključno v raziskovalne namene.

Iskreno se vam zahvaljujem za sodelovanje!

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#### **VPRAŠANJA**

##### **Q1: Spol**

- a) Moški
- b) Ženski
- c) Drugo

##### **Q2: Starost \_\_\_\_\_**

##### **Q3: Označite nivo vaše izobrazbe.**

- a) Osnovnošolska ali manj
- b) Srednješolska
- c) Višješolska ali visokošolska

##### **Q4: V katerem sektorju ste zaposleni?**

- a) Javnem.
- b) Zasebnem.
- c) Sem samostojni/a podjetnik/ca.
- d) Sem brezposeln/a.

##### **Q5: Kaj je področje vaše zaposlitve?**

- a) Proizvodnja
- b) Storitvena dejavnost
- c) Zdravstvo
- d) Kmetijstvo in energetika
- e) Promet in logistika

- f) Informacijska tehnologija
- g) Zabavna industrija in odnosi z javnostmi
- h) Finance in bančništvo
- i) Drugo:

**Q6: Kakšen je vaš trenutni položaj v podjetju?**

- a) Generalni/a direktor/ica
- b) Vodja oddelka
- c) Zaposleni/a
- d) Podporni kader

**Q7: Ali menite, da bi morali biti moški in ženske enako plačani za enako delo?**

- a) Da.
- b) Ne.
- c) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q8: Ali menite, da v Sloveniji obstaja plačna vrzel med spoloma (razlika v povprečni plači med ženskami in moškimi)?**

- a) Da, v korist žensk.
- b) Da, v korist moških.
- c) Ne, moški in ženske so za enako delo enako plačani.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q9: Kakšen je po vašem mnenju najučinkovitejši način za odpravljanje plačne vrzeli med spoloma na nacionalni ravni?**

- a) Implementacija vladne zakonodaje, ki zahteva enako plačilo za enako delo.
- b) Implementacija politik za enakopravnost spolov na ravni podjetja.
- c) Višja plačna transparentnost.
- d) Več žensk na vodilnih položajih.
- e) Drugo:

**Q10: Bi se prijavi na delovno mesto v podjetju, v katerem veste, da obstaja plačna vrzel med spoloma?**

- a) Da, to se mi ne zdi pomembno.
- b) Da, v primeru zaposlitve bi se nato zavzemal/a za odpravo vrzeli.
- c) Ne, to je v nasprotju z mojimi načeli enakih možnosti.
- d) Ne vem.

**Q11: Ali menite, da materinstvo zmanjšuje celotni življenjski zaslužek žensk?**

- a) Ne, ženske so zaposlene v enaki meri kot moški in zato prejmejo enako plačilo.
- b) Ne, ženske uspešno opravljajo materinske in službene obveznosti ter imajo posledično enak vseživljenjski dohodek, v primerjavi z ženskami, ki niso mame ali moškimi.
- c) Da, zaradi spolnih norm je več žensk kot moških zaposlenih za polovični delovni čas ali brezposelnih.
- d) Da, ženske zaradi materinskih obveznosti ne želijo delati toliko kot moški.
- e) Ne vem.

**Q12: Koga je po vašem mnenju pandemija Covida-19 bolj prizadela z vidika zaposlovanja in izgube delovnih mest?**

- a) Moške.
- b) Ženske.
- c) Oba spola enako.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q13: Koga je po vašem mnenju pandemija Covida-19 bolj prizadela z vidika nižanja plač?**

- a) Moške.
- b) Ženske.
- c) Oba spola enako.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q14: Označite trditev, ki velja za podjetje v katerem ste zaposleni.**

- a) V podjetju je zaposlenih več moških kot žensk.
- b) V podjetju je zaposlenih enako število moških in žensk.
- c) V podjetju je zaposlenih več žensk kot moških.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q15: Ali menite, da v podjetju, v katerem ste zaposleni, obstaja plačna vrzel med spoloma?**

- a) Da, v korist žensk.
- b) Da, v korist moških.
- c) Ne, moški in ženske so za enako delo enako plačani.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q16: Ali menite, da imajo zaposleni in zaposlene v vašem podjetju enake možnosti za napredovanje in nagrajevanje?**

- a) Da, saj podjetje spoštuje nacionalno zakonodajo in ne diskriminira na podlagi spola.
- b) Ne, ženske v podjetju težje napredujejo zaradi svojih nižjih sposobnosti.



- c) Ne, ker vodstvo podjetja prioritizira moške zaposlene, ki prejemajo višje nagrade in lažje ter hitreje napredujejo v podjetju.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q17: Ali menite, da morajo ženske za prejemanje enakega plačila in zasedanje enakega položaja v podjetju, v primerjavi z moškimi več delati in se dodatno izobraževati?**

- a) Da.
- b) Ne.
- c) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q18: Ali menite, da ima kateri od spolov v vašem podjetju prednosti v postopku zaposlitve?**

- a) Da, moški.
- b) Da, ženske.
- c) Ona spola imata enake možnosti za zaposlitev.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q19: Ali menite, da je pandemija Covida-19 vplivala na plačno vrzel med spoloma v vašem podjetju?**

- a) Da, v korist žensk.
- b) Da, v korist moških.
- c) Ne, moški in ženske so za enako delo enako plačani.
- d) Nisem prepričan/a.

**Q20: Ali v vašem podjetju obstajajo usmeritve in pravilniki, ki spodbujajo enakost spolov na delovnem mestu?**

- a) Da.
- b) Ne.
- c) Ne vem.

**Q21: Kako se usmeritve in pravilniki za spodbujanje enakosti med spoloma izvajajo in v kolikšni meri so po vašem mnenju učinkoviti? Lahko predstavite kakšen primer dobre prakse?**

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**Q22: V kolikšni meri se strinjate s spodnjimi trditvami?** (Sploh se ne strinjam, se ne strinjam, niti niti, se strinjam, povsem se strinjam).

- a) Za delo, ki ga opravljam v sedANJI zaposlitvi sem dovolj plačan/a. (V primeru brezposelnosti odgovorite za vašo preteklo zaposlitev.)

- b) Moški na enakem položaju kot ženske so zaradi svojih večjih sposobnosti upravičeni do višje plače.
- c) Moški so odgovorni za finančno preskrbo družine, medtem ko so ženske odgovorne za skrb otrok in opravljanje gospodinjskih opravil.
- d) Ženske imajo nižjo plačo, ker pred delo postavljajo družino.

**Q23: Mesto za morebitne dodatne razmisleke.**

## Appendix 4: Contingency Tables Used For Hypotheses Testings

### 4.1 Contingency table for hypothesis 1

			Do you think men and women should be paid equally for equal work?		Sum
			Yes	No	
Do you think there is a gender pay gap in Slovenia?	Yes	f	206	5	211
		%	78.9%	62.5%	78.5%
	No	f	53	3	58
		%	21.1%	37.5%	21.6%
Sum		f	261	8	269
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Source: own work.*

### 4.2 Contingency table for hypothesis 2

			Mark the statement that applies to the company you work at.			Sum
			The company employs more men than women.	The company employs an equal number of men and women.	The company employs more women than men.	
Do you think gender pay gap exists in Slovenia?	Yes	f	38	20	22	80
		%	71.7%	76.9%	84.6%	76.2%
	No	f	15	6	4	25
		%	28.3%	23.1%	15.4%	23.8%
Sum		f	53	26	26	105
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Source: own work.*

### 4.3 Contingency table for hypothesis 3

			In which sector do you work?				Sum
			Public.	Private.	I am self-employed.	I am unemployed.	
Do you think gender pay gap exists in Slovenia?	Yes, in favour of women.	f	0	3	0	1	4
		%	0.0%	2.8%	0.0%	2.5%	1.5%
	Yes, in favour of men.	f	80	79	20	29	208
		%	79.2%	73.1%	83.3%	72.5%	76.2%
	No, men and women are equally paid for equal work.	f	21	26	4	10	61
		%	20.8%	24.1%	16.7%	25.0%	22.3%
Sum		f	101	108	24	40	273
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Source: own work.*

### 4.4 Contingency table for hypothesis 4

			Do you think there is a gender pay gap in the company you work at?			Sum
			Yes, in favour of women.	Yes, in favour of men.	No, men and women are paid equally for equal work.	
Do you think that men and women employees in your company have the same opportunities for promotion and rewards?	Yes, the company respects national legislation and does not discriminate on the basis of gender.	f	3	42	23	68
		%	100.0%	64.6%	95.8%	73.9%
	No, promotion in the company is more difficult for women because of their lower skills.	f	0	6	0	6
		%	0.0%	9.2%	0.0%	6.5%
	No, the company's management prioritizes male employees, who receive higher bonuses and are promoted more easily and quickly.	f	0	17	1	18
		%	0.0%	<b>26.2%</b>	4.2%	19.6%
Sum		f	3	65	24	92
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Source: own work.*

## D.5 Contingency table for hypothesis 5

			Do you think there is a gender pay gap in the company you work at?			Sum
			Yes, in favour of women.	Yes, in favour of men.	No, men and women are paid equally for equal work.	
Do you think that women should work harder and receive more training to be paid equally and obtain equal positions as men in the company?	Yes.	f	0	45	4	49
		%	0.0%	<b>61.6%</b>	17.4%	49.5%
	No.	f	3	28	19	50
		%	100.0%	38.4%	82.6%	50.5%
Sum		f	3	73	23	99
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

*Source: own work.*