

HOW WOMEN MANAGE CAREER CHANGE IN TODAY'S LABOUR MARKETS

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Abstract: Occupational segregation is one of the main causes of all gender differences today, especially of the gender earnings gap, along with job characteristics and industry. It is empirically proven that educational segregation, work experience and other personal characteristics of workers make a smaller contribution to explaining the existing inequalities between men and women in the labour market and are even less significant. This paper examines conceptually how women cope with professional challenges, particularly in terms of the impact of technology on the labour market, changes in educational structures and occupations. Drawing on existing theoretical concepts and empirical findings, the conclusions will serve to highlight gaps in current approaches and provide some directions for future empirical research on trends in career change and women's participation in the labour market.

Keywords: career, job positions, occupations, technology impact, women.

1 INTRODUCTION

The professional development of women and the corresponding changes over the course of their productive age depend primarily on how active they are in the labour market. Their status in the labour market is determined by many factors, as the literature suggests, including educational attainment [6, 7], employment history, termination and continuation of employment [12], marital status, geographical factors [11], social norms and cultural differences [3, 7] and other personal characteristics, but also characteristics of firms and employers [1, 10]. Thus, many factors are taken into account, psychological, sociological and even health conditions, but when economic motives are singled out, some of them are considered important, such as expected earnings, promotion and other factors that can affect the economic situation of the individual and their household. At a younger age, they are guided by economic factors and the expected annual salary they can earn from doing a certain job. Thus, they may change their occupation, e.g. start as a shop assistant and continue as a teacher, and at an older age they may even leave the paid labour market and become self-employed [8, 9]. As the occupational level is less complicated, the income gains expected from changing jobs or careers are lower and it is easier to make a change. Women who take on positions of responsibility in organisations and survive in these positions face even greater difficulties, and these situations show marked gender differences [2, 6].

The transition from education to employment in the European Union, for example, depends strongly on prior educational attainment, age groups and the willingness of women to contribute by actively participating in the paid labour market, as trends in the gender structure of secondary and tertiary graduates show that women are less likely to find employment than men. Eurostat data for 2023 [4] show that the employment rates of tertiary graduates (20-34 years old) are between 85% and 82% for men and women (83.5% at the Union level). The employment rates of secondary graduates are lower for both men (81.7%) and women (80%) and average 81% at the EU-27 level. These rates for men and women with secondary and tertiary education lead to a gender employment gap that indicates slow changes in the advancement of women in the labour market and may have further implications for their career progression.

Based on the available data, this paper aims to focus on several research questions that may be relevant in the context of examining how women are coping with challenges that are likely

to affect career change in today's labour markets. Thus, several questions will be examined: 1. how the structure of educational attainment of working women is changing; 2. to what extent do working women take advantage of continuing education programmes; 3. how the occupational structure of working women is changing over time. These questions are analysed using the aggregated survey data and serve as a basis for drawing conclusions about possible directions in women's occupational and career change. In aggregated form, the results will provide approximate values and general insights into the current situation.

2 DATA AND METHODS

As mentioned above, this paper addresses three questions that may be relevant to women's decisions about entering the labour market, remaining in the labour market, and transitioning between jobs and career advancement. The focus is on the European labour market, so that average values at the level of Unions will be examined as well as gradual changes. The first research question relates to the structure of educational attainment of working women and the changes observed. The second research question examines the extent to which working women make use of further education programmes. Finally, the last question examines how the occupational structure of working women changes over time.

At least two Eurostat datasets can be used to answer the above questions: the European Union Labour Force Survey (LFS) data series with annual indicators and the European Union Adult Education Survey (AES) data. The first dataset provides continuous annual data series, while the second dataset contains the data for the years in which the survey was conducted (starting in 2007, then 2011, 2016 and 2022). Thus, the data available at an aggregated level allows the application of descriptive statistical analysis methods.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Over the last ten years, the employment prospects of women in the European Union (EU-27) have improved, with the employment rate increasing by an average of four percentage points and reaching 49.5% for women aged 15 and over in 2024. At the same time, the employment rate for men rose by 2.6 percentage points to 59.9 % in 2024, which shows that the gender balance in terms of employment is still a long way off.

Figure 1 shows the development of female employment rates across the educational levels defined by ISCED codes.

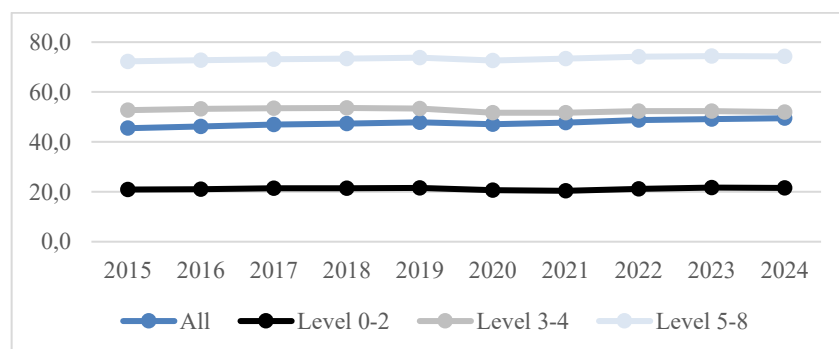


Figure 1: Employment rates of women by educational attainment and years, EU-27

The first research question assumes that the educational structure can be seen as an important factor in increasing the employment rates of women. Over the ten-year period, the employment rate of women with a tertiary education rose by two percentage points (74.3% in 2024) and

that of men by 1.2 percentage points to a rate of 75.6%. This is probably because the employment rates of university graduates (aged 20 to 34 years) are rising faster among women, as already explained. If we look at the distribution of female employment by level of education, two further subtleties emerge. The employment rate of women with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education is declining, in contrast to men, for whom the employment rate has remained almost the same. This is in line with the higher enrolment rates in tertiary education and the postponement of employment. For both women and men, the employment rates of those with the highest level of lower secondary education increase (for men by 1.7 percentage points to 38.1% in 2024, while the employment rate for women increases by 0.6 percentage points to 21.5%).

Women are more likely to participate in continuing education programmes, as shown by data from the current AES 2022 – the participation rate of women (51.3%) is higher than that of men (50.1%) in the population aged 18-64 in the EU-27. On the other hand, according to the LFS 2024 data, a larger proportion of employed women (36.8%) participate in continuing education than men (32%), showing that women are more aware of the impact of education on their career development despite all the obstacles they face [7, 13].

Table 1: Changes in the occupational structure of employed men and women, EU-27

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Men</i>			<i>Women</i>		
	<i>Structure, in %</i>			<i>Structure, in %</i>		
	<i>2015</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>Diff.</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2024</i>	<i>Diff.</i>
<i>Managers</i>	68.1	64.8	-3.2	31.9	35.2	3.2
<i>Professionals</i>	47.0	46.2	-0.8	53.0	53.8	0.8
<i>Technicians</i>	50.4	50.1	-0.3	49.6	49.9	0.3
<i>Clerks</i>	32.8	33.9	1.1	67.2	66.1	-1.1
<i>Service workers</i>	37.1	36.6	-0.5	62.9	63.4	0.5
<i>Skilled agricultural workers</i>	66.3	72.2	5.9	33.7	27.8	-5.9
<i>Craftsmen</i>	88.9	89.3	0.4	11.1	10.7	-0.4
<i>Operators</i>	81.9	82.7	0.7	18.1	17.3	-0.7
<i>Elementary occupations</i>	43.2	46.6	3.4	56.8	53.4	-3.4
<i>Total</i>	54.2	53.6	-0.6	45.8	46.4	0.6

Source: Author on the basis of Eurostat (2025) data.

The greatest changes in the employment structure by occupation can be observed among managers and professionals, which can be directly linked to the changes in women's careers (Table 1). Women are still underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and maths occupations [5], but overrepresented in education, social protection and health. In terms of professional careers, the occupational structure of female managers is developing positively, while the proportion of women who do not pursue a profession is decreasing.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Previous studies have been concerned with reviewing the known and developing new models of how women cope with career challenges over the course of their working lives, using theoretical concepts and empirical research findings. The literature has found that women's career development is primarily determined by individual aspirations and organisational concepts. The linear models of women's and men's career development can no longer be considered conceptual, both because of differences in individual characteristics and because of the influence of technology driven by global progress.

This paper confirmed that women pay more attention to education, but also that, despite changes in the occupational structure, some occupational groups, such as managerial positions

and engineering occupations, are less accessible to them. This paper lacks the analysis based on the individual or microlevel data and monitoring women's distribution through the positions providing the examples of career advancement and changes related to specific jobs or workplaces in organizations and comparison with their male counterpart in order to examine gender balance and specific challenges women experience when moving along the career development path. This paper raises questions that are worth exploring in further research.

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