Equality in numbers: Detecting the gender gap

Authors

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Type of activity

Statistical data analysis, graphical visualisation, institutional roleplay, and intervention proposal design.

Target educational level

It can be addressed to the last courses of High School students and to any university student.

Information entry

The resource introduces SDG 5 with an initial reflection on the persistent gender inequalities across different social spheres. Students engage with key concepts such as:

- Gender pay gap
- Glass ceiling
- Gender-based violence
- Shared responsibility
- Educational and occupational segregation
- Intersectionality

The gender pay gap refers to the average difference in earnings between women and men for work of equal or similar value. This gap can be expressed as a percentage and reflects not only direct wage disparities but also inequalities in access to well-paid positions, job insecurity, and the lower presence of women in economic sectors with better working conditions. Although the gap has slightly narrowed in many countries over recent decades, it remains a persistent

expression of structural discrimination. Its causes are multiple: from the societal undervaluation of women's work, particularly in feminised sectors such as care and education, to the barriers preventing women from reaching leadership positions and the career interruptions associated with their traditional role in childcare.

The glass ceiling is a metaphor describing the invisible barriers that hinder or prevent women from accessing high-responsibility or leadership positions, despite having the same or even more experience than their male counterparts. These barriers are not explicitly stated in formal regulations but manifest through institutional practices, social biases, and subtle exclusion mechanisms. The glass ceiling can be seen, for example, in the low representation of women on executive boards, in senior academic positions, or in corporate leadership roles. It is often accompanied by the phenomenon of the sticky floor, which keeps many women trapped in the lowest rungs of the professional ladder, with little mobility and low pay.

Gender-based violence is an extreme manifestation of structural inequality between men and women. It refers to any action or behaviour that causes physical, psychological, sexual, economic, or symbolic harm to a person because of their gender or gender identity. This includes various forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, workplace or street harassment, digital violence, human trafficking, and forced marriages. Gender-based violence is not an isolated issue but a form of control and domination aimed at maintaining patriarchal power structures. Combating it requires not only legal and law enforcement measures but also a profound cultural, educational, and social transformation that promotes equality, respect, and individual autonomy.

The concept of shared responsibility refers to the fair distribution of domestic and caregiving tasks among all individuals, regardless of gender. Traditionally, these responsibilities have disproportionately fallen on women, limiting their available time for employment, education, and social participation. Shared responsibility goes beyond traditional work-life balance approaches (which place the burden of reconciliation on women alone) to advocate for a fairer social organisation of care, recognising its value and promoting its distribution

among the state, businesses, communities, and men. The lack of shared responsibility is a key factor driving other inequalities, such as the gender pay gap or the underrepresentation of women in the workforce.

Educational and occupational segregation refers to the unequal distribution of men and women across different educational pathways and professional sectors, reinforcing gender stereotypes and inequalities. In education, women remain overrepresented in fields related to care and the humanities and underrepresented in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). This horizontal segregation extends into the labour market, where women are concentrated in lower-paid jobs with less social recognition. Additionally, vertical segregation persists, limiting women's progression to higher-ranking positions. This uneven distribution is not solely the result of free individual choices but is shaped by social, cultural, and educational influences that mould expectations and opportunities from an early age.

Finally, the intersectionality approach highlights that gender inequalities are not experienced in isolation but intersect with other axes of oppression, such as ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, disability, or geographic location. For example, a migrant woman with a disability or a trans woman living in poverty faces discrimination not only based on gender but also due to the intersection of multiple identities that exacerbate her situation. Initially introduced by Black feminist movements, intersectionality helps to make these overlapping experiences visible and enables the development of more comprehensive and just responses. It moves beyond one-size-fits-all approaches that fail to acknowledge the most vulnerable groups. This perspective is crucial in designing public policies, educational interventions, and social processes that are truly inclusive and transformative.

Short videos, articles, or guided readings can be used as a foundation for this topic.

Source

Data consultation at:

- National Statistics Institute (INE)
- Eurostat
- UN Women
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)
- Reports from Oxfam, Save the Children, etc.

Problem statement

Where are the main gender gaps in our societies today?
How do they translate into inequality of opportunities and violation of rights?

Solution

1. Selection and analysis of recent statistical data on gender inequality in key areas: employment, education, caregiving, violence, health.

2. Creation of graphs and visualisations (bars, lines, maps) in teams, using tools such as Excel, Canva, Flourish, or Tableau.

3. Roleplay or simulation of an institutional roundtable, where each group represents a stakeholder (ministry, NGO, feminist movement, social educators, citizens) and defends improvement proposals based on the analysed data.

4. Design of a concrete educational or community action proposal with a gender perspective, which could be implemented in a real context (neighbourhood, educational institution, university, social centre).

Optionally, a collaborative digital mural can be created with all the proposals to visualise the group's ideas.