The Generational Perspective of Gender Gap and Discrimination in Southern Europe

Castellano, Rosalia and Punzo, Gennaro and Rocca, Antonella

University of Naples Parthenope, University of Naples Parthenope, University of Naples Parthenope

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Rosalia Castellano, Gennaro Punzo and Antonella Rocca

Abstract The paper aims at investigating gender differentials in education and wage across four developed countries of southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), taking into account the generational transmission of preferences and some peculiarities of gender equality policies implemented in each national legislative framework. More precisely, a set of α-indexes – which reflect the whole wage and educational distributions of women – is computed to explore the different extent to which these gaps can be attributed to discrimination. Country-specific differentials are sketched and the often controversial role of national contexts in shaping gender discrimination is discussed.

1 Background and Introduction

Both in developed and developing countries socio-economic advantages are frequently transmitted across generations [7,13]. Education is surely one of the main dimensions in which intergenerational mobility may occur as it mediates the influence of other dimensions (*i.e.*, occupation and earnings) that are critical components of social stratification and predictors of inequality within and across generations. Education is also a crucial means of socialising children and young people and a realm in which it is important to design policies that aim at achieving greater gender equality [5].

Over the last few decades, a reversal of trend in gender educational gap has emerged in the most industrialized economies. Indeed, since the late 1960s, the cultural progress and female emancipation have created greater autonomy for women, more opportunities for their careers, and, consequently, an increasing attractiveness of education [5]. Although non-linearities in generational mobility exist, several factors may help to explain the gender patterns of educational mobility and their differences across countries. The family of origin, the type of ties or interaction dynamics, in terms of time and efforts that parents invest in

[1] Rosalia Castellano, Gennaro Punzo and Antonella Rocca, University of Naples "Parthenope", Department of Statistics and Mathematics for Economic Research, Naples, email: (lia.castellano, gennaro.punzo, antonella.rocca)@uniparthenope.it

their children [2], and the ways through which they differently allocate resources between sons and daughters may play a crucial role for understanding generational transmission processes and for shaping gender differentials in education. Nevertheless, these mechanisms may strongly vary over family components and, even more so, across countries where structural and institutional differences exist [1].

The aim of this paper is to investigate gender gaps in wages and education in an intergenerational perspective across four developed economies of southern Europe – Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain – trying to understand the role of family background in creating male-female differentials. Taking into account more than one measure of the degree of gender discrimination in wages and education, the paper explores the main determinants for "success in education" and the role played by discrimination in determining these differentials. In other words, in the light of country-specific frameworks, in terms of national school systems, gender equality policies and returns to education, some key factors – mainly in the spheres of family background, that differently affect up-ward mobility in education, gender gaps and discrimination – are discussed.

2 Gender equality policies in legislative frameworks

Gender gaps in employment and wages refer to differences between males and females in terms of participation to labour market and earnings. These differentials may result from different choices taken by women as well as from different formal and actual opportunities [9] reserved to them. Actual opportunities depend on structural availability of access to formal education and participation in labour market, but also on other factors such as the family background which, together with the socio-cultural context, may play a crucial role in affecting life prospects of women.

During the second half of the XXI century, the feminist movements – which oppose the perpetuation of gender discrimination in economic, political and social structure – and the rising attention paid by national Governments to equal rights and opportunities – inspired policies and welfare strategies aimed at increasing women's participation to labour market. In the last decades, female labour-force participation has remarkably been increasing in all European Countries, even though Lisbon targets for women's employment rates at 60% in 2010 are still far for most of them. Anyway, the expansion of tertiary and the flourishing of innovative non-standard works in the service sector have been increasing job opportunities for women and, as a result, have been stimulating them to access to higher education.

The growth of female participation in the labour force certainly contributes to increase the Gross Domestic Product and to improve national business results; meanwhile, in socio-familial spheres and couples' relationships, these changes are connected with the increasing of the purchasing power of women and, more generally, of their decisional control. However, as the division of family responsibilities is still unequal between women and men, problems concerning the reduction in time for mothers to spend with their children, the scarcity of childcare places and difficulties in changing husband/wife roles in dual-income families have produced greater levels of daily stress than women of previous generations [12].

These dynamics inevitably produce different outcomes in labour participation and earnings between males and females which may reflect in various forms of gender discrimination and horizontal/vertical segregation. If the horizontal segregation concerns the different choices made by males and females about the field of study (for example, women result under-represented in engineering and science) and the types of job [15], the vertical segre-

gation refers to social phenomena as the *glass ceiling* – the unbreachable barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements [6] – and to their under-representation in economic and political decision-making positions. Moreover, the degree to which institutions of different types encourage the creation of human capital also largely depends on specific features of each country (*i.e.*, ways in which formal education and training are organised and stratified) and on peculiarities of national labour markets, family policies, social protection systems and institutional framework's ability to guarantee equality between males and females.

Although Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain substantially share similar cultural and economic structures, the impact of the European legislation that protects gender equality and anti-discrimination principles varies across Member States, depending on different forms of gender relations, the strength of organised feminisms and other dimensions such as legislative and fiscal regimes [5; 14].

In Italy, a general policy of equal treatment and opportunities is officially in force, but not very actively pursued. Indeed, the gender mainstreaming strategy – which includes "the re-organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes to ensure that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and stages of all policies by those normally involved in policy making" [3] – is not adequately taken into account when designing policies and measures in education. Initiatives on gender equality are adopted by local authorities at a regional, provincial or municipal level.

In Greece and Portugal, legislation covers some domain-specific aspects of gender equality, especially in education, and more specific programs for equal rights are implemented. Anyway, legislation appears to be partial from a gender perspective so far; indeed, equal access and treatment within education are ensured, but specific provisions on the role of education in counteracting exiting inequalities are not included. While in the Portuguese system, the principles of gender mainstreaming in education policies are quite efficiently pursued, Greece does not still pay particular attention to this field.

Finally, Spain, like other Central and Nordic European countries, actively promotes the gender equality through even more specific anti-discrimination provisions. Indeed, in the Spanish educational system, achieving effective equality for men and women, which is framed as an outcome of education, is one goal of the Act of Education. Gender perspective is adequately emphasised by the national legislation, gender mainstreaming stands for a basic governing principle of equality strategies and Gender Equality Units in each ministry monitor the concrete application of gender policies.

Briefly, various policy instruments to guarantee equal male-female opportunities exist almost everywhere, but countries widely differ in ways and intensities through which these measures are effectively pursued. In other words, the interaction of alternative approaches to gender equality with the different national socio-economic structures and mechanisms of generational transmission of preferences can produce complex outcomes that reflect in gaps in labour participation, education and wage.

3 Educational Mobility and Gender: Data Source

Our analysis draws upon 2005 EU-SILC data (European Union-Survey on Income and Living Conditions), currently the main European reference source for comparable and multidimensional socio-economic statistics both at household and individual level. The 2005 wave is the only one which collects, as secondary target variables, retrospective parental information (*i.e.*, education, employment, activity sector) for each respondent aged 25-64

when he/she was a young teen-ager, which allows to account for potential generational changes over time. The analysis focuses on currently working employees – that is anyone who works for a public or private employer with a wage or salary – the only ones for which a hourly-wage can be reasonable estimated.

As documented by Eurostat [epp.eurostat.ec.europe.eu], the patterns of formal education strongly varies across countries of southern Europe, although the incidence of highly educated individuals is consistently higher for females than males everywhere. Indeed, at European level (EU-27), in 2005, the proportion of graduate females is equal to 30%, more than two percentage points respect to their male counterpart (27.9%). This differential is the highest for Spain (7.7 percentage points), which also keeps the highest proportion of graduates (43% for females *vs* 35.3% for males), even more than the European average. Conversely, the incidence of graduates is lower than the EU-27 average for Italy (19.9% for females *vs* 14.9% for males), Portugal (21.7% for females and 17% for males) and Greece (27.5% for females *vs* 23.4% for males) with smaller gender gaps constantly in favour of women. Currently, in Greece and Italy, the upper-secondary school stands for the most frequent highest completed degree of formal education for both the genders; in Portugal, it is the primary school.

Exploring EU-SILC data, in 2005, the proportion of employees aged 25-64 with an educational attainment higher than their parents – defined as intergenerational up-ward mobility ratio in education – is close to 70% everywhere, except for Portugal where it is sensibly lower, with small gender differentials (table 1). Children strongly outperform their parents with a marked increasing trend for the earlier birth cohorts (1940-1959) – consistently higher for males with a gender gap even higher than 10%, especially for Portugal – and *somewhat* smaller in later cohorts (1960-1980), where the educational progress becomes greater for females. Indeed, younger women strongly outperform not only their parents but also their male colleagues all over the countries, highlighting a reversal of trend in gender educational gap. Formerly, men were beyond women; latterly, women get over men everywhere. The increasing trend across cohorts of up-ward mobility in education, which just concerns Spain, confirms the highest presence of graduate individuals in this Country.

Table 1 Intergenerational up-ward mobility in education by birth cohort and gender

	Greece		Italy		Portugal		Spain	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1940-1949	75.20	70.22	72.72	70.52	71.50	60.93	70.50	67.73
1950-1959	81.76	77.87	82.32	80.96	73.53	72.73	72.24	68.08
1960-1969	77.20	75.97	78.31	78.24	58.44	66.70	74.96	75.18
1970-1980	72.56	77.25	69.77	73.36	65.00	69.32	71.69	79.12

A further explorative analysis (not reported for brevity) stresses that in Spain slightly less than one-quarter of graduate employees (24% for males and 23% for females) may be classified as graduates by second generation, as they come from a family where at least one parent had a degree, while in the other southern countries this proportion is practically lower than 20% without strong differentials between genders. Therefore, the coexistence ratio between graduates by first and second generation – defined as intergenerational gap in tertiary education – is close to 20% everywhere, except for Spain, where this ratio is markedly higher (32% for males and 30% for females) and Greece, where it is quite high for females (27% *vs* 22% for males). This should suggest a stronger awareness in Spanish and Greek societies to consider the education as a mean for challenging the dualistic assump-

tions on social roles of men and women and for fostering a greater gender equality; in these countries, the most recent generations of women may surely benefit from the efforts of their foremothers to identify their new perspectives and struggles.

4 Earnings equations and latent variable models for ordinal outcomes: α-order discrimination measures

In order to get a distribution pattern of the degree of discrimination across countries and to assess its nature and extent, both in terms of earnings and education, two sets of aggregate indexes (dr_α), based on an α-order mean of individual measures of discrimination, are computed at different levels of "aversion to discrimination" [4; 8]:

$$dr_\alpha(v_{Fi}) = \left(\frac{1}{n}\right)\sum_{i=1}^{k^*}(v_{Fi})^\alpha \tag{1}$$

where α is a coefficient of "aversion to discrimination", k^* the number of discriminated female employees and v_{Fi} the relative difference between the estimated wage (or education) that each woman could acquire if her individual characteristics were rewarded at average male returns $\left(\hat{r}_{Fi} = \hat{\beta}_M X_{Fi}\right)$ and her estimated wage (or education) if her same characteristics were rewarded at average female returns $\left(\hat{y}_{Fi} = \hat{\beta}_F X_{Fi}\right)$:

$$v_{Fi} = \frac{\hat{r}_{F_i} - \hat{y}_{F_i}}{\hat{r}_{F_i}} \tag{2}$$

A higher α-value denotes a greater weight on the most discriminated female employees. In this paper, α-values equal to 0, 1 and 2 are considered. More precisely, while dr_0 merely shows the *diffusion* of discrimination, that is the incidence of discriminated female employees, dr_1 and dr_2 measure, respectively, the *intensity* and the *severity* of discrimination suffered on average by women.

The first set of α-indexes, concerning the wage discrimination, is computed starting from the estimation of some extensions of Mincerian log-earnings equations [11], separately for each country and for male and female employees, on a wide range of determinants considered to be linked to productivity. Therefore, in this paper, the earnings of individuals depend not only on human capital variables (educational attainment and work experience), but also on a range of socio-demographic (marital status, dependent children, residence area) and professional characteristics (occupational status, activity sector, type of contract and position, working hours, firm-size).

The second set of α-indexes, regarding the discrimination in education, is based on the estimation of ordered logistic regression models by country and gender on a range of personal and family background characteristics supposed to influence the educational level attained (y_i, *manifest* variable). Indeed, an underlying decisional process – based on the comparison among the utilities of different educational levels, which leads out to the choice to be highly educated – is expected; thus, a continuous unobservable propensity (y_i^*, *latent* variable) would cross thresholds (τ) which differentiate adjacent levels of the observed ordered y_i's. In other words, the latent variable – the relative advantage to be highly educated – is supposed to be linearly related to the observed x's through the structural model [10]:

$$y_i^* = x_i\beta + \varepsilon_i \tag{3}$$

Beyond some socio-demographic covariates (birth cohort, marital status, residence area), the role of intergenerational dimension is considered by evaluating how the parental educational level, employment status and professional profile, as well as the composition of family of origin and the potential existence of financial problems, differently affect the probability to acquire a higher education. More precisely, the manifest ordinal variable (y_i), that is the educational level attained by each individual, is related to y_i^* according to the following measurement model:

$$y_i = m \quad if \quad \tau_{m-1} \leq y_i^* < \tau_m \qquad for \quad m = 1 \quad to \quad J \tag{4}$$

where m identifies five levels (J=5) of manifest variable – until primary (ISCED 0-1), lower secondary (ISCED 2), upper-secondary (ISCED 3), post-secondary non tertiary (ISCED 4) and tertiary (ISCED 5-6) – and τ the estimated thresholds on latent variable used to differentiate the levels of educational attainment.

Finally, a relative index (γ), based on the previous α-order discrimination measures, allows to compare the relative evenness of discrimination between Italy (I), taken as country of reference, and each other country (C = Greece, Portugal and Spain):

$$\gamma = \frac{dr_2^I}{dr_2^C} - \left(\frac{dr_1^I}{dr_1^C} \right)^2 \tag{5}$$

Positive γ–values indicate a more uneven distribution of discrimination for Italian female employees.

5 Main empirical evidence

Findings of our analysis open to some interesting interpretations. Firstly, as regards to earnings equations, the personal educational level is surely one of the most significant factors explaining individual wages everywhere, both for females and males. Comparing the estimated coefficients of different educational levels, it is worth stressing their increasing distribution as one moves from the lower secondary to the tertiary education. As they say, being graduate with years of work experience and living in more urbanized areas strongly increase individual earnings, without significant gender differentials. Indeed, being highly educated with knowledge of labour market is regularly required before rising to the upper managerial rungs which, in turn, significantly increases personal incomes, especially if with permanent contracts in large enterprises (table 2). In Spain, the family responsibilities (i.e., to be married with dependent children) positively impacts on females' wages, probably due to the more effective equality policies promoted in this Country; this evidence is essentially confirmed for males elsewhere.

Table 2 Parameters' estimates of earnings equations by country and gender

	Greece		Italy		Portugal		Spain	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Intercept	1.035***	0.624***	1.604***	1.477***	0.579***	0.502***	1.265***	1.363***
Marital (*ref*: unmarried)	0.109***	0.031	0.066***	0.042*	0.072***	-0.003	0.005	0.027***

Children (*ref*: without)	0.049**	0.026	0.032***	0.022*	-0.033	-0.007	0.027*	0.032***
Urban (*ref*: not densely)	0.028*	0.037*	0.050***	0.040***	0.043**	0.049***	0.045***	0.025*
Education (*ref*: primary)								
Lower secondary	0.104***	0.078*	0.092***	0.036**	0.156***	0.219***	0.005	0.026
Upper secondary	0.135***	0.195***	0.186***	0.158***	0.365***	0.420***	0.093***	0.141***
Post-sec. not tertiary	0.111**	0.192***	0.181***	0.135***	0.156	0.356**	0.103**	0.053
Tertiary	0.250***	0.390***	0.370***	0.283***	0.722***	0.760***	0.244***	0.282***
Work experience	0.084***	0.025***	.0182***	0.014***	0.034***	0.030***	0.022***	0.013***
Squared experience	2E-04***	.3E-04***	.2E-04***	2E-04***	5E-05	4E-04***	3E-04***	1E-04*
Contract (*ref*: temporary)	0.145***	0.194***	0.191***	0.177***	0.120***	0.147***	0.141***	0.088***
Working hours (*ref*: < 30)								
30 – 40 hours	-0.080*	-.133***	-.121***	-.086***	-0.017	-.119***	0.036	0.004
> 40 hours	-.225***	-.223***	-.231***	-.167***	-0.189**	-.281***	-.147***	-.160***
Managerial (*ref*: not)	0.166***	0.150***	0.149**	0.080***	0.157***	0.114***	0.176***	0.166***
Profession (*ref*: elementary)								
Legislator	–	–	0.235***	0.184	–	–	0.356***	0.609***
Official/Manager	0.280***	0.639***	0.359***	0.362***	0.271***	0.331***	0.482***	0.625***
Professional	0.261***	0.438***	0.247***	0.391***	0.391***	0.459***	0.379***	0.501***
Technician	0.059*	0.261***	0.111***	0.245***	0.192***	0.314***	0.159***	0.261***
Clerk/service worker	-0.001	0.208***	0.049***	0.143***	0.078**	0.069**	0.094***	0.090***
Skilled craft/operator	0.016	0.133***	0.010	0.026	0.039	-.110***	0.026	-0.084**
Armed force	0.096	0.1306	0.232***	0.126	0.196**	-0.073	-0.022	0.142
Activity sect (*ref*: primary)								
Secondary	0.292***	0.314***	0.162***	0.120***	0.140	0.138*	0.220***	0.014
Construction	0.304***	0.211	0.139***	0.204***	0.145**	0.212*	0.256***	-0.015
Tertiary	0.321***	0.237**	0.128***	0.054**	0.079	0.072	0.100***	-0.118**
Advanced tertiary	0.342***	0.378***	0.236***	0.171***	0.170**	0.116	0.218***	-0.028
Public administration	0.393***	0.422***	0.118***	0.133***	0.131*	0.192**	0.219***	0.053
Education	0.485***	0.488***	0.152***	0.220***	0.060	0.222**	0.207***	0.001
Health/Social work	0.297***	0.360***	0.179***	0.096***	0.009	0.075	0.186***	-0.077
Other services	0.166**	0.189*	0.095***	-0.032	0.120	0.991	0.083*	-0.107*
Firm size (*ref*: small)								
Medium	0.111***	0.065***	0.045***	0.098***	0.140***	0.084***	0.108***	0.114***
Large	0.147***	0.169***	0.122***	0.146***	0.223***	0.143***	0.158***	0.173***
Adjusted R^2	0.4766	0.5785	0.4355	0.4691	0.5578	0.7048	0.4795	0.5556

*** Significant at 1%; ** Significant at 5%; * Significant at 10%

Secondly, results from ordered logistic regressions point to a relationship between parents and children all over the countries. The parental education, as one proxy for measuring the human capital in a generational perspective, positively affects the probability of acquiring a higher personal education; in particular, the higher the father's educational level, the more likely it is to affect the educational success of sons and daughters; instead, just in It-

aly, having a mother graduate positively impacts on the educational path of children. Conversely, living in a large family with more than one sibling and having a working mother significantly reduce the probability to attain a high education almost everywhere; probably, in both cases, the mother could pay lower attention to her children's education.

Table 3 Parameters' estimates of ordered logit models by country and gender

	Greece		Italy		Portugal		Spain	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Cohorts (*ref*: 1940-1950)								
1950-1960	0.378	-0.319	-0.030	0.185	0.271	0.733**	0.273	0.218
1960-1970	0.500*	0.217	-0.219	0.315	0.084	1.037***	0.449**	0.897***
1970-1980	0.388	0.311	-0.351*	0.362	0.698**	1.503***	0.505**	1.290***
Marital (*ref*: unmarried)	0.149	-0.055	0.017	-0.105	-0.246	-0.356**	0.055	-0.079
Urban (*ref*: not densely)	0.484***	0.395***	0.146**	-0.030	0.588***	0.322**	0.605***	0.273**
Mother's background								
Education (*ref*: primary)								
Lower secondary	0.464**	0.484**	0.261**	0.251**	0.390	0.407	0.145	-0.173
Upper/post-secondary	0.738***	0.424	0.685***	0.776***	-0.022	1.090**	0.004	0.704***
Tertiary	0.567	0.644	1.384***	1.186***	0.960	0.682	0.210	1.252**
Age (*at employee birth*)	0.005	-0.025	-0.001	-0.007	0.005	0.026	-0.006	0.017
Occupation (*ref*: other)								
Self-employed	-0.429	-0.132	-0.083	-0.176	-0.714***	-0.403*	-0.173	-0.401**
Employee	-0.172	-0.111	-0.335***	-0.324***	-0.728***	-0.549***	-0.494***	-0.606***
Profession (elementary)								
Legislator/Manager	1.335**	1.009	0.559***	0.497***	0.982**	1.058**	1.001**	0.752*
Professional/Technician	0.513	-0.360	0.269	0.464**	1.047**	0.218	0.784**	1.108**
Clerks/Service worker	0.339	-0.126	0.468***	-0.054	0.366	0.491**	0.476***	0.430***
Skilled craft/operator	0.203	-0.097	0.363***	0.128	-0.271	-0.672***	0.143	0.138
Father's background								
Education (*ref*: primary)								
Lower secondary	0.584***	0.437*	0.839***	0.366***	0.355	1.023***	0.456**	0.303
Upper/post-secondary	0.917***	0.795***	1.445***	0.800***	1.144***	1.633***	0.139***	1.002***
Tertiary	1.238***	0.956***	2.568***	1.478***	1.497***	1.493***	1.689***	1.292***
Age (*at employee birth*)	0.001	0.044***	0.032***	0.026**	-0.007	-0.040**	0.019	0.001
Occupation (*ref*: other)								
Self-employed	0.23	-0.432	0.017	0.289*	-0.009	1.196*	0.513	0.452
Employee	0.317	-0.387	-0.069	-0.093	-0.061	0.576	0.434	0.115
Profession (elementary)								
Legislator/Manager	0.393	0.700**	0.292**	0.483***	1.024***	-0.237	0.577***	0.536**
Professional/Technician	0.516**	0.890***	0.467***	0.412**	1.048***	0.963***	0.888***	0.303
Clerk/Service worker	0.267	0.347	0.147	0.367***	1.041***	0.516**	0.662***	0.563***

Skilled craft/operator	-0.174	0.27	-0.132	-0.220**	-0.051	-0.356**	0.055	-0.158
Siblings (*ref*: until one)	-0.559***	-0.522***	-0.530***	-0.515***	-1.262***	-1.059***	-0.530***	-0.427***
Financial (*ref*: difficult)	–	–	0.253**	0.232**	–	–	0.032	0.477***
- ln pseudo-likelihood	4608518	2976360	1823402	1255172	6932470	5555623	1158714	1192482
Wald χ^2	398.85	341.77	312.37	204.96	869.84	546.12	366.76	391.83

*** Significant at 1%; ** Significant at 5%; * Significant at 10%

Briefly, education is designed as a crucial determinant for the professional path of each individual. In such a way, differences in education directly affect differences in wages and, therefore, a prospective discrimination suffered in education can add to wage discrimination. As showed by α-indexes (table 4), it is worth noting that gender discrimination is consistently higher, more intense and more severe for wage than education everywhere.

Table 4 α-indexes at different levels of aversion to discrimination by country

	Greece		Italy		Portugal		Spain	
	Wage	Education	Wage	Education	Wage	Education	Wage	Education
dr_0 – *diffusion*	90.02	84.67	95.02	74.11	93.17	8.48	98.62	42.38
dr_1 – *intensity*	17.80	7.52	16.98	7.47	21.99	0.97	19.25	4.02
dr_2 – *severity*	5.91	6.35	3.99	1.42	6.95	0.32	4.65	0.82
γ – *evenness*	-0.23	-0.76	–	–	-0.02	-55.1	0.08	-1.71

In Spain, the greater attention paid to gender equality principles reflects on the lowest levels of discrimination in education (after Portugal), but the incidence of wage discrimination is still higher. Conversely, Italy, where legislation on equality is less binding, shows a high degree of discrimination in education, although the penalty in wages for women is the lowest, both in terms of intensity and severity. Nevertheless, the γ index of wage discrimination between Italy and Spain highlights a more uneven distribution for Italian females; all the while, Portugal and Greece, which share similar gender policies, keep very different degrees of educational discrimination.

6 Concluding remarks

The high complexity of gender gap dynamics in education and wage comes from the multiplicity of their determinants. Beyond gender-specific characteristics, other factors linked to socio-economic, cultural and institutional frameworks strongly affect male-female differentials. Similarly, the different ways through which parents influence the educational choices of their young sons and daughters and, consequently, their future professional careers may also cause gender differences in the patterns of intergenerational mobility. In other words, gender gaps start from individuals' perceptions and cognitive sex differences and produce substantial effects on labour market and economy on the whole.

Empirical results of our analysis stress how the role of family background may be even stronger than the contribution of some gender equality policies. Firstly, parents may differently give sons or daughters the best possible start to their lives (*i.e.*, orienting their schooling or employment opportunities) and thus differently help them to develop and achieve

through their childhood into adulthood. Secondly, the influence of gender discrimination on females' behaviour, which leads them to be less paid in jobs even if more educated than their male colleagues, may be also partly ascribed to the often inadequacy of national policies to reconcile the choices taken by women in their private sphere with their professional life. Currently, women overcome men in education; nevertheless, they still stand back them in terms of presence in labour market and earnings. Although the degree of discrimination in education is lower than wage discrimination everywhere, women could probably choice fields of study which open to careers in less paid jobs which allow them well to reconcile work with private life and, first of all, with their motherhood desire.

Anyway, although traditional policies aimed at removing horizontal segregation in education are pursued almost everywhere, they essentially concern educational guidance and awareness-raising projects; yet, programmes to wage a war against vertical segregation are rather few and just focus on promoting female assumptions at the highest professional job qualifications. Therefore, efforts in contrasting gender wage gap and discrimination should be directed by Institutions to create the ground to make possible for women to live their private choices without renouncing to career prospects. In other words, policies should promote the diffusion of easing work-life balancing with the provision of childcare facilities; meanwhile, anti-discrimination strategies should encourage women to enter into labour market or to return to work after a career break.

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