

Chapter 1

The Evolution of the Role of Women in Labor Markets in Developed Economies

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in labor markets has been characterized by great changes in the last century, with gender inequalities decreasing in most developed countries. The stereotypes related to women in labor markets have been hard to break within social norms and cultures. Many efforts have been made in recent decades by governments and national and international institutions to decrease and promote women's empowerment and gender equality in labor markets. This chapter has as its main purposes to provide an overview of the evolution of the role of women in labor markets in developed countries and to investigate this evolution based on a set of variables: gender participation rates, education, employment, the gender gap in management, wages and the gender wage gap, and public policies and laws. However, despite the positive evolution of the participation rate of women in labor markets that has been observed in recent decades, gender inequalities still persist.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last century, women's participation in labor markets has undergone great changes and gender inequalities have decreased in most developed countries. This evolution is considered as a consequence of the changes in the social norms and cultural structure, which changed the conventional place for women in labor markets. It was mostly motivated by new ways of thinking within society and due to efforts made by governments and national and international institutions through the institutional legal framework, by political regimes related to human rights and with the pressure of labor unions. From these changes,

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related to new ways of being in society, greater relevance has been given to women's education, their rights and participation in labor markets.

The increase of women's participation in labor and the convergence of gender equality have had positive social contributions at different levels: social inclusion and poverty reduction, development of living standards and economic growth (ILO, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2017; Klugman, 2015; Pereira, 2018, Tzannatos, 1999). This raises the importance of studying this evolution over time to gain a better understanding of how these effects are changing over time. Thus, the relevance of studying this subject is justified by the contribution to increasing scientific knowledge of it and improving the welfare of the population, as well as making a better and fairer society.

The role performed by women in labor markets has been evolving over time, with significant changes observed in the last century and in particular in the last six decades. These changes were observed at different levels: women's participation in labor markets and in education increased; female employment in economic sectors of activity changed from their conventional structure, with women reinforcing their participation in management and occupying places in the top management of companies; and a set of public policies support the empowerment of women and their position in labor markets. Although the relevance of women in labor markets has a greater preponderance in developed economies, gender inequalities, in particular in wages and opportunities for promotion and employment still persist (Castellano & Rocca, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2017; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2016; Pereira, 2018). According to Kennedy et al. (2017:14), for all of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, *“on average, women earn less than men”*, so it is *“not sufficient to increase female work participation rates to achieve gender equality”*.

The main objective of the present chapter is to provide an overview of the evolution of women's and female work in labor markets in developed countries, and to investigate this evolution based on a set of variables: gender participation rates, education, employment, gender gap in management, wages and gender wage gap and public policies and laws.

This chapter is structured as follows: after this introduction, a second section provides the background and reviews the literature through a review of seminal works combined with state-of-the-art articles about the research topic and focused on the main concepts. A third section describes and analyzes the evolution of women in the labor markets in developed economies, based on a set of selected variables, and presents the discussion of the observed evolution of the data in accordance with the literature reviewed and the main trends. A fifth section presents future directions and recommendations, and finally the last section presents the conclusion.

Background on Women in Labor Markets

From a historical point of view, the evolution observed in the last century changed the existing cultural structure and consequently the conventional place of women in society and in labor markets. Over time, certain specific labor has been associated with men and women (Alesina, Giuliano & Nunn, 2013), but this labor specialization has varied across time and cultures (Blau & Kahn, 2007; Cochard, Couprie & Hopfensitz, 2018). After the Second World War, the common way to see gender stratification and stereotypes in society started to change (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011).

The changes which occurred in the 20th century, over a progressive time path, were mostly operated by the international mobility of persons and ideas, and witnessed a gradual change of the way of being in society. This reflected on the employment segregation with changes at the typical gender-based division

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