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DESIGUALDADE SALARIAL DE GÊNERO NA AMÉRICA LATINA: IMPLICAÇÕES PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO REGIONAL NO BRASIL E MÉXICO

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes gender wage inequality in Latin America through a comparative approach between Brazil and Mexico, aiming to understand its implications for regional development. Methodologically, it adopts a qualitative approach based on documentary analysis, literature review, and the use of secondary data from official sources and specialized studies. In the Brazilian case, labor market data and Law No. 14,611/2023 are examined, while Mexico is analyzed through indicators from the National Survey of Occupation and Employment and recent studies on gender inequality. The findings indicate that, despite normative advances in both countries, wage disparities persist and are associated with occupational segregation, high levels of informality, low female labor participation (especially in Mexico), and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. The comparison shows that these inequalities cannot be explained by individual factors alone but are rooted in structural economic and social conditions characteristic of Latin American economies. It concludes that gender wage inequality represents a constraint on regional development and requires integrated public policies that connect labor markets, care systems, and territorial dynamics.

Keywords: Wage Inequality. Gender. Regional Development. Brazil. Mexico.

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa a desigualdade salarial de gênero na América Latina a partir de uma abordagem comparada entre Brasil e México, com o objetivo de compreender suas implicações para o desenvolvimento regional. Metodologicamente, adota-se uma abordagem qualitativa, baseada em análise documental, revisão bibliográfica e utilização de dados secundários provenientes de organismos oficiais e literatura especializada. No caso brasileiro, examinam-se dados sobre mercado de trabalho e a Lei nº 14.611/2023, enquanto o caso mexicano é analisado a partir de indicadores da *Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo* e estudos recentes sobre desigualdade de gênero. Os resultados indicam que, apesar de avanços normativos em ambos os países, as disparidades salariais persistem, associadas à segmentação ocupacional, à elevada informalidade, à baixa participação feminina (especialmente no México) e à sobrecarga do trabalho de cuidado não remunerado. A comparação evidencia que tais desigualdades não se explicam por fatores individuais, mas por estruturas econômicas e sociais comuns às economias latino-americanas. Conclui-se que a desigualdade salarial de gênero constitui um entrave ao desenvolvimento regional, demandando políticas públicas integradas que articulem mercado de trabalho, cuidado e território.

Palavras-chave: Desigualdade Salarial. Gênero. Desenvolvimento Regional. Brasil. México.

INTRODUCTION

Gender wage inequality remains one of the defining structural features of Latin American economies, reflecting persistent social hierarchies that shape labor markets and constrain opportunities for regional development. Although women have significantly increased their participation in formal employment and, in many countries across the region, have attained higher educational levels than men over recent decades, these advances have not translated into equal pay. This disconnect between educational attainment and earnings suggests that gender inequality should not be understood merely as a temporary imbalance, but rather as a part of a historically rooted pattern of economic and social organization.

Within the Latin American context—characterized by dependent development, structural heterogeneity, and profound territorial inequalities—women's participation in the labor market remains unequal, segmented, and precarious. The concentration of women in lower-paid sectors, the disproportionate burden of unpaid reproductive work, and the persistence of institutional and cultural barriers create a context in which wage inequality is closely linked to broader dynamics of social exclusion (Brancacci; Miglioli; Senra, 2023). Consequently, the analysis of wage disparities between men and women extends beyond labor market relations, becoming a central issue for understanding the limitations of regional development in Latin America.

This article argues that gender wage inequality constitutes not only a form of social injustice but also an obstacle to development, as it restricts women's economic autonomy and limits the productive potential of territories (ECLAC, 2019). To examine this argument, the study undertakes a comparative analysis of Brazil and Mexico, two countries that, while sharing structural characteristics typical of peripheral economies within the global economic system and similar patterns of socioeconomic formation (Furtado, 2000), have followed distinct institutional trajectories in addressing gender inequalities in the labor market. The theoretical framework utilized combines the Latin American structuralist tradition with feminist economics. While structuralism highlights the historical and persistent nature of inequalities in peripheral economies, feminist economics demonstrate how these inequalities are shaped by gender relations that organize both the division of labor and the distribution of resources. Brought together, these perspectives make it possible to understand wage inequality not

as an isolated market failure but as the expression of a broader structure characterized by dependency, productive heterogeneity, and the sexual division of labor.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, the present article aims to comparatively analyze gender wage inequality in Brazil and in Mexico and discuss its implications for regional development. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following research questions: (i) How does gender wage inequality manifest in Brazil and in Mexico? (ii) Which structural factors contribute to the persistence of these inequalities in both countries? (iii) To what extent do the recent regulatory frameworks adopted by Brazil and by Mexico have the potential to address these disparities and promote regional development?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design grounded in literature review, document analysis, and secondary data. This approach enables the examination of gender wage inequality as a structural phenomenon requiring the articulation of economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

Brazil and Mexico were selected as the units of analysis due to their shared structural characteristics—common to Latin American economies—including productive heterogeneity, the persistence of the sexual division of labor, and high levels of social inequality. Concurrently, they have followed distinct institutional trajectories in addressing gender inequalities in the labor market. These cases were selected for their economic relevance within the region, their recent adoption of regulatory frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, and the opportunity to identify both convergences and specificities in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

The analysis relies on normative documents, specialized literature, and secondary data produced by national and international institutions. Sources include, among others, Law No. 14,611/2023 and the Salary Transparency Reports, for Brazil; and, for Mexico, the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, the legislative reforms enacted in 2024, and official documents concerning gender equality policies. The study also draws upon data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the Brazilian Ministry of Labor and Employment, the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), the Economic Commission for Latin

America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the International Labour Organization, UN Women, and the United Nations Development Programme, alongside scholarly works addressing gender wage inequality, feminist economics, and regional development.

The theoretical framework employed integrates the Latin American structuralist tradition—represented by authors such as Raúl Prebisch and contributions from ECLAC—with feminist economics, particularly Social Reproduction Theory. Said framework assumes that gender wage inequality stems from the interaction between productive structures, the social organization of care, and historical patterns of development. Accordingly, normative documents, official statistical data, and specialized literature regarding Brazil and Mexico were analyzed to compare institutional frameworks, labor market conditions, and the implications of gender wage inequality for regional development in both countries.

Considering the study's objectives and theoretical framework, the comparative analysis was operationalized through analytical dimensions that allow for an integrated examination of the institutional, economic, and social aspects of gender wage inequality. Table 1 summarizes these analytical dimensions and the main sources employed.

Table 1 | Analytical dimensions and sources used in the comparison between Brazil and Mexico

Analytical dimension	Aspects considered	Main sources
Regulatory framework	Legislation on pay equity and the protection of women's labor rights	Law No. 14,611/2023; Mexican legislative reforms of 2024
Labor market	Wage disparities, female labor force participation, informality, and occupational segregation	IBGE, MTE, INEGI
Social organization of care	Unpaid domestic and care work	ECLAC; ILO; UN Women; INEGI; IBGE
Regional development	Relationship between wage inequality, labor market dynamics, and regional development	ECLAC; specialized literature

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The remainder of this article is organized into four sections, in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. Section 1 presents a brief discussion of the theoretical framework, highlighting proposed dialogues between the Latin American structuralist tradition and feminist economics. Sections 2 and 3 examine the Brazilian and Mexican cases, respectively. Finally, Section 4 provides a comparative analysis of the two selected cases.

DIALOGUES BETWEEN LATIN AMERICAN STRUCTURALISM AND FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Analyzing gender wage inequality in Latin America requires an approach that goes beyond conventional interpretations centered on market failures or individual differences in qualifications. In economies characterized by historical trajectories of dependency and inequality, such as those of Latin America, it is necessary to draw upon theoretical frameworks capable of articulating the structural dimensions of development with the social relations that organize the production and reproduction of life.

Latin American structuralism is grounded in the understanding that underdevelopment does not represent a transitional stage on the path to development, but rather a historically produced condition within the center–periphery system (Prebisch, 1949; Furtado, 2000). The subordinate integration of peripheral economies into the international market has resulted in heterogeneous productive structures characterized by the coexistence of dynamic sectors alongside segments marked by low productivity, informality, and precarious labor conditions. By concentrating wealth, income, and opportunities, this pattern of development constrains the expansion of welfare and reproduces persistent internal inequalities.

In Latin America, these dynamics also possess a territorial dimension, as economic development unfolds unevenly across regions, reinforcing historical asymmetries. The concept of structural heterogeneity, a central element of structuralist thought, helps explain how these inequalities are not evenly distributed across space but are instead associated with distinct productive and institutional configurations. Consequently, any analysis of regional development in Latin America will require a consideration of not only aggregate economic indicators but also the specific ways in which inequalities manifest themselves across territories.

However, while the original structuralist tradition has been fundamental to understanding economic inequalities both between and within nations, it did not explicitly incorporate gender relations into its analytical framework. Inequality was primarily examined in socioeconomic terms, with an emphasis on the distribution of wealth and income.

This limitation highlights the need for theoretical contributions capable of recognizing the centrality of gender. It is on this point that feminist economics offer significant insights. Authors such as Benería (2003) and Elson (1999) argue that capitalist economies are deeply shaped by a sexual division of labor that separates and hierarchizes productive and reproductive activities. Whereas waged labor is socially recognized and economically valued, domestic and care work—performed predominantly by women—remains largely invisible despite being essential for the reproduction of the labor force and, ultimately, for the functioning of the economic system.

From this perspective, gender wage inequality cannot be interpreted solely as the result of direct discrimination or differences in human capital. Rather, it reflects a social organization of labor that places women in structurally disadvantaged positions. The concentration of women in lower-paid occupations, their greater exposure to informal employment, and their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work constrain their opportunities for labor market participation and career advancement, thereby contributing to the persistence of wage disparities.

Bringing together Latin American structuralism and feminist economics[1] therefore makes it possible to understand gender inequality as an intrinsic component of the dynamics of peripheral development. Rather than treating gender as an additional analytical variable, this perspective recognizes that gender hierarchies are embedded in productive structures, institutions, and economic policies. Gender wage inequality thus emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of economic dependency, structural heterogeneity, and the sexual division of labor.

1 It should be noted that the feminist economics literature mobilized in this article to establish a dialogue with Latin American structuralism is consistent with Orozco's (2006) definition of feminist economics, namely one that "calls for changes in the understanding of the economic system and its functioning, either through the reformulation of androcentric discourse (in the case of Reconciliation Feminist Economics) or through its rupture (characteristic of Rupture Feminist Economics)" (Bohn; Catel, 2023, p. 696).

Furthermore, by incorporating the territorial dimension, this perspective demonstrates that gender inequalities do not manifest uniformly across space but instead assume distinct configurations according to regional specificities. In contexts characterized by higher levels of informality, lower productive diversification, and weaker state capacity, barriers to pay equity tend to be even more pronounced (Teixeira, 2008). Understanding gender wage inequality in Latin America therefore requires simultaneous attention to national and regional scales, as well as to the interactions between economic structures and social relations.

Based on this theoretical framework, gender wage inequality can be understood as an integral component of development dynamics in Latin America. The following section expands this discussion at the regional level before turning to the analysis of the Brazilian and Mexican cases.

GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

Gender wage inequality in Latin America should be understood as an integral component of the region's development dynamics. Rather than representing an isolated distortion of the labor market, it is embedded within a context characterized by structural heterogeneity, high levels of informality, and profound territorial disparities. These factors not only shape women's participation in productive activities but also define the possibilities for overcoming inequalities across different regional contexts.

Over recent decades, Latin American countries have made significant progress in regards to educational attainment and women's participation in the labor market. Nevertheless, these advances have not translated into pay equity. Women remain concentrated in lower-productivity and lower-paid sectors, such as personal services, education, and care-related activities, while continuing to be underrepresented in more dynamic and capital-intensive sectors (ECLAC; UN Women, 2025). This pattern indicates that wage inequality cannot be explained solely by differences in individual qualifications but rather reflects the persistence of a sexual division of labor that continues to shape labor markets across the region.

Moreover, the high incidence of informality constitutes one of the principal mechanisms through which gender inequalities are reproduced in Latin America. A substantial proportion of women are employed in informal occupations characterized by low earnings, limited social protection, and job insecurity (ECLAC; UN Women; UNDP; ILO, 2025). This phenomenon limits the effectiveness of public policies aimed at promoting pay equity, as such initiatives tend to focus primarily on the formal labor market. As a result, the gap between regulatory advances and the lived realities of many women workers continues to widen.

The territorial dimension is equally central to understanding these inequalities. Economic development in Latin America has unfolded unequally across regions, reflecting historical processes of productive concentration and uneven investment. In less dynamic regions, characterized by lower levels of economic diversification and weaker institutional capacity, women's opportunities for labor market participation tend to be more limited and less well remunerated. Consequently, gender wage inequality varies not only across countries but also within them, assuming distinct configurations across territories and reinforcing the need for multiscalar analyses.

Within this context, public policies aimed at promoting pay equity face significant limitations. Measures such as pay transparency, labor inspection, and sanctions against discriminatory practices represent important institutional advances, yet their effects remain limited when they are not accompanied by broader public policies. The persistence of gender wage inequality is closely associated with the social organization of care, occupational segregation, and productive structures that concentrate women in undervalued economic activities. Consequently, initiatives that focus exclusively on equal pay without addressing these structural dimensions tend to function as marginal corrections incapable of transforming the underlying foundations of inequality.

Conversely, reducing gender wage disparities has direct implications for regional development. By increasing women's income and economic autonomy, pay equity contributes to the dynamism of local economies, stimulates consumption, and improves social indicators. Furthermore, greater female participation in higher-skilled productive activities can foster economic diversification and innovation. In this sense, gender wage inequality should be understood not only as an issue of social justice but also as a barrier to development itself.

Against this background, the analysis of the two specific national cases illustrates how such dynamics take shape under different institutional and productive arrangements. The discussion begins with Brazil, a country whose recent trajectory provides important insights into the limits of public policies aimed at addressing gender wage inequality.

GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL: STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS AND THE LIMITS OF RECENT POLICIES

The Brazilian case combines recent institutional advances with the persistence of deep structural disparities. Over the past decades, Brazil has experienced important improvements in educational attainment and women's participation in the labor market. Nevertheless, these advances have not been sufficient to eliminate wage differentials between men and women, highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon.

Gender wage inequality remains widespread across different economic sectors and occupational levels. In 2022, for example, women earned lower wages than men in 82% of the country's major occupational groups, while only a minority of sectors exhibited either pay parity or a female wage advantage (IBGE, 2024). This pattern persists despite the fact that women, on average, have higher educational attainment than men, reinforcing the inadequacy of explanations based solely on differences in qualifications. The persistence of the gender wage gap therefore points to the operation of structural mechanisms, including occupational segregation, unequal access to leadership positions, and discriminatory practices within the labor market.

Another key factor is the high incidence of informality, which significantly affects women's labor market participation. In 2022, women's participation in informal employment exceeded that of men, illustrating how this form of employment contributes to the reproduction of inequality (IBGE, 2024). Women's concentration in informal occupations implies reduced access to labor rights, greater income instability, and weaker social protection, thereby increasing the challenges associated with reducing gender wage inequality.

In addition, the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work restricts women's availability for longer working hours and career advancement, constituting a structural barrier to pay equity. In 2022, women devoted nearly twice as much time per week to domestic and care activities as men, reflecting the persistence of a social organization of care that constrains their economic participation (IBGE, 2024). These inequalities also vary among women themselves, and are particularly pronounced among lower-income women, thereby reinforcing the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective.

Gender disparities in Brazil also display a significant territorial dimension, demonstrating that wage inequality is not distributed uniformly across the country. States such as the Federal District, Sergipe, and Piauí present relatively high levels of pay equivalence between women and men, exceeding 90% in certain indicators. By contrast, Espírito Santo, Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Santa Catarina exhibit substantially wider wage gaps than the national average, with differences exceeding ten percentage points (Brasil, 2024). This regional variation indicates that national policies aimed at reducing gender wage inequality must be combined with strategies that take local specificities into account; otherwise, existing territorial disparities may be reinforced.

Against this backdrop, the enactment of Law No. 14,611/2023 represents an important milestone in Brazil's recent efforts to address gender wage inequality. The legislation introduced pay transparency mechanisms, required large companies to publish periodic salary transparency reports, and established sanctions for discriminatory practices. By making wage disparities more visible, the law aims at reducing the information asymmetry that has historically hindered the identification and contestation of unequal pay.

The initial results associated with the implementation of this policy nevertheless indicate that its effects on reducing the gender wage gap remain limited (Minharro, 2024). Although pay transparency constitutes an important institutional advance, wage disparities between women and men have remained relatively stable, including in more recent assessments. These findings suggest that regulatory mechanisms, when implemented in isolation, face significant limitations in transforming deeply entrenched labor market structures.

Among the main limitations of the policy are its restricted scope—since it applies primarily to large companies—and its inability to directly address structural dimensions such as the sexual division of labor and the social organization of care. Moreover, the persistence of intersectional inequalities, particularly those related to race, demonstrates that gender wage disparities do not affect all women equally but are especially severe among historically marginalized groups.

In this context, the Brazilian case illustrates the tensions between normative advances and structural constraints in addressing gender wage inequality. Although policies promoting pay transparency and labor inspection are essential for advancing pay equity, their effectiveness depends on their articulation with broader measures capable of addressing the economic and social foundations that sustain these disparities.

The Brazilian experience therefore reinforces the need to understand gender wage inequality not merely as a problem of labor market regulation, but as part of a broader pattern of development that reproduces gender inequalities across multiple scales. Against this background, the Mexican case provides an opportunity to deepen the comparison by illustrating how similar patterns of inequality emerge under different institutional arrangements and labor market configurations.

GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY IN MEXICO: NORMATIVE ADVANCES AND THE PERSISTENCE OF STRUCTURAL ASYMMETRIES

The Mexican case exhibits dynamics that, while sharing broad characteristics with other Latin American economies, also reveal distinctive features in the configuration of gender wage inequality. As in Brazil, a relatively comprehensive legal framework for gender equality coexists with persistent disparities in the labor market.

From an institutional perspective, gender equality is formally guaranteed within the Mexican legal system. As noted by Pérez and Lara (2025), this principle is enshrined in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States and in complementary legislation, while also being reinforced by international commitments such as the International Labour Organization Conventions No. 100 and No. 111 and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Legislative reforms enacted in 2024 further strengthened this regulatory framework by establishing explicit obligations

for employers and public authorities to address gender wage inequality and occupational segregation.

Despite these formal advances, the achievement of substantive gender equality remains limited. Evia (2023) argues that the persistence of the gender wage gap in Mexico illustrates the distance between legal equality and substantive equality, indicating that women must still work significantly longer than men to attain equivalent earnings. Quantitative evidence from the National Survey of Occupation and Employment indicates that, in 2025, Mexican women earned between 14% and 18% less than men (INEGI, 2025), confirming the continued existence of substantial gender wage disparities.

Beyond wage differentials, gender inequality in Mexico is also reflected in women's participation in the labor market. Pérez and Lara (2025) report that the female labor force participation rate remains well below the average observed among member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The gender gap of more than 30 percentage points places Mexico among the OECD countries with the largest disparities in labor force participation, revealing a persistent pattern of women's relative exclusion from the labor market.

Regarding occupational structure, gender inequalities are likewise reflected in the concentration of women in lower-paid and more precarious forms of employment. According to Pérez and Lara (2025), a substantial proportion of employed women are concentrated in the lowest income brackets, with 46.1% earning no more than the minimum wage—a considerably higher proportion than that observed among men. Furthermore, women are more frequently employed in part-time positions and in forms of employment associated with self-employment and small-scale economic units, factors that tend to limit both their earnings and their access to social protection.

Informality represents another important dimension of the analysis. Although the proportional differences between men and women are not particularly large, Pérez and Lara (2025) argue that women's participation in the informal sector reinforces conditions of greater economic vulnerability due to lower job stability and the absence of labor protections. This pattern reflects the persistence of labor market arrangements that continue to reproduce structural gender inequalities.

The unequal distribution of unpaid work also plays a central role in explaining these disparities. According to Pérez and Lara (2025), Mexican women devote an average of 331 minutes per day to unpaid

domestic and care work, compared with 131 minutes for men—a difference exceeding 200 minutes daily. This disparity is substantially larger than the OECD average, highlighting the disproportionate burden of reproductive labor borne by women. Such unequal distribution of unpaid work directly constrains women's opportunities for labor market participation and career advancement, thereby reinforcing gender wage inequality.

Against this backdrop, the Mexican case demonstrates that the existence of an advanced legal framework is not, in itself, sufficient to overcome gender inequalities. As Evia (2023) argues, the formal recognition of equality within the legal system does not eliminate the social and economic structures that sustain discrimination in the labor market. As observed elsewhere in Latin America, gender wage inequality in Mexico should therefore be understood as the outcome of the interaction between institutional, productive, and social factors that jointly reproduce gender disparities.

The Mexican experience thus reinforces the need to analyze gender wage inequality beyond its legal dimension by incorporating factors such as labor force participation, occupational structure, and the sexual division of labor. This perspective helps explain why gender inequalities persist despite significant institutional advances.

Building on the evidence presented for the Mexican case, the comparison with Brazil makes it possible to identify both convergences and country-specific features in the mechanisms through which gender wage inequality is reproduced. These similarities and differences are examined in the following section.

GENDER WAGE INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL AND MEXICO: CONVERGENCES, SPECIFICITIES, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The comparison between Brazil and Mexico reveals both structural convergences and institutional specificities that shape the persistence of gender wage inequality. To summarize the main aspects discussed in the previous sections, **Table 2** presents a comparative overview of the analytical dimensions adopted in this study.

Table 2 | Comparative Summary of Gender Wage Inequality in Brazil and Mexico

Dimension	Brazil	Mexico
Regulatory framework	Law No. 14,611/2023 introduces pay transparency mechanisms and strengthens labor inspection.	Legislative reforms enacted in 2024 expand obligations related to gender equality but continue to face implementation challenges.
Gender wage inequality	Wage disparities persist despite recent regulatory advances.	Wage disparities persist despite constitutional protections and international commitments.
Female labor force participation	Higher female labor force participation than in Mexico, although marked by occupational inequalities.	Low female labor force participation, well below the OECD average, remains one of the principal barriers to gender equality.
Occupational segregation	Women remain concentrated in lower-paid sectors and underrepresented in leadership positions.	Similar pattern, with women concentrated in undervalued occupations and limited representation in higher-paid positions.
Unpaid care work	Women's disproportionate care burden is evidenced by IBGE (2024).	Women's care burden is even greater, according to Pérez and Lara (2025).
Informality	Women's concentration in informal employment increases economic vulnerability.	High female participation in the informal economy limits the effectiveness of public policies.
Territorial dimension	Significant disparities between states reflect distinct regional development trajectories.	Regional inequalities exist but receive less emphasis in the literature analyzed.
Main challenge	Transforming legal advances into substantive equality.	Integrating pay equity policies with care and social protection policies to enhance their effectiveness.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

As summarized in Table 2, the comparative analysis of Brazil and Mexico demonstrates that, although both countries share structural characteristics typical of Latin American economies, gender wage inequality is shaped by distinct combinations of institutional, productive, and social factors. The comparison therefore highlights both regional patterns of convergence and national specificities that influence the mechanisms through which these inequalities are reproduced.

One important point of convergence concerns the coexistence of relatively advanced legal frameworks with the persistence of significant wage disparities. In both countries, gender equality is formally guaranteed through legislation and reinforced by international commitments. Nevertheless, as Evia (2023) argues for the Mexican case—and as evidenced by the Brazilian data analyzed in this study—the existence of legal provisions alone has not been sufficient to ensure substantive equality in the labor market. This disconnect between legal norms and actual outcomes suggests that gender wage inequality is rooted in deeper structural conditions that cannot be fully transformed through legal instruments alone.

Despite this convergence, the two countries differ considerably in the design and implementation of public policies. In Brazil, the enactment of Law No. 14,611/2023 introduced pay transparency mechanisms and sanctions aimed at reducing wage disparities, with a particular emphasis on monitoring large formal-sector employers. In Mexico, as highlighted by Pérez and Lara (2025), recent legislative reforms have expanded legal obligations related to gender equality but continue to face challenges associated with implementation and the need for stronger care and social protection policies. Whereas the Brazilian approach places greater emphasis on pay transparency, the Mexican experience reflects a broader regulatory effort with less reliance on direct enforcement mechanisms.

Another important area of convergence concerns the role of labor market structures in reproducing gender inequalities. In both Brazil and Mexico, women remain concentrated in lower-paid sectors and continue to face barriers to entering more highly valued occupations. Occupational segregation and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions emerge in both cases as key factors sustaining the gender wage gap. At the same time, the comparison reveals a distinctive feature of the Mexican case: women's labor force participation is substantially lower than in Brazil. Pérez and Lara (2025) demonstrate that female labor force participation in Mexico remains well below the OECD average, indicating that a considerable share of women remain outside the labor market altogether.

The sexual division of labor and the unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities constitute another fundamental point of convergence. In both countries, women devote substantially more time than men to unpaid domestic and care work, limiting their opportunities for labor market participation and career advancement. In Mexico, Pérez and Lara (2025) show that this disparity reaches particularly high levels by international standards, while in Brazil, IBGE data reveal a similarly persistent imbalance in

the distribution of care work. These findings reinforce the central role of the social organization of care in shaping gender inequalities.

Regarding informality, Brazil and Mexico also display broadly similar patterns, although with different levels of intensity. Women's significant presence in informal employment contributes to the persistence of wage disparities by restricting access to labor rights and social protection. Although gender differences in informality rates are not particularly large, women's participation in the informal economy tends to occur under more precarious conditions, thereby increasing their economic vulnerability.

By contrast, the Brazilian case more explicitly highlights the territorial dimension of gender wage inequality, with marked differences between states reflecting distinct regional development trajectories. Although Mexico also exhibits important regional disparities, the literature examined in this study places comparatively less emphasis on territorial heterogeneity, tending instead to address these issues within broader discussions of labor markets and social policy. This difference does not imply the absence of regional inequality in Mexico but rather reflects distinct analytical and institutional emphases.

The comparison between Brazil and Mexico therefore adds to a broader understanding of gender wage inequality as a structural feature of Latin American economies. In both countries, wage disparities cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics or isolated market failures. Instead, they emerge from the interaction between unequal productive structures, institutional constraints, and persistent patterns stemming from the sexual division of labor.

From the perspective of regional development, these findings carry important implications. The persistence of gender wage inequality not only reproduces broader social inequalities but also constrains the economic dynamism of territories by limiting women's full participation in productive activities. Reducing these disparities thus requires the articulation of labor market policies, care policies, and regional development strategies capable of simultaneously addressing the multiple dimensions of gender inequality.

Overall, this comparative analysis demonstrates that, despite their distinct institutional trajectories, Brazil and Mexico face similar structural constraints in addressing gender wage inequality. These common challenges underscore the need for integrated approaches that recognize the centrality of gender within development processes while incorporating territorial diversity as a fundamental element in the design and implementation of public policies.

CONCLUSION

The analysis developed in this article has attempted to demonstrate that gender wage inequality in Latin America, examined through the cases of Brazil and Mexico, cannot be understood as an isolated distortion of the labor market, but rather as an expression of deeply rooted economic and social structures. By articulating insights from Latin American structuralism and feminist economics, this study shows that these inequalities are embedded in a development pattern characterized by structural heterogeneity, occupational segmentation, and the persistent sexual division of labor.

The comparison between Brazil and Mexico reveals that, although both countries have made advances toward gender equality through the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks, these advances have not translated into substantive changes in labor market outcomes. The existence of specific legislation, such as Law No. 14,611/2023 in Brazil and the recent legislative reforms in Mexico, represents an important step toward institutional recognition of the problem. However, their effects remain limited by the structural factors that sustain inequality. This gap between legal provisions and actual labor market conditions reinforces the argument that policies based exclusively on regulatory instruments are insufficient to address structural phenomena.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that gender wage inequality is closely intertwined with other structural dimensions, including women's low labor market participation, their concentration in lower-paid occupations, high levels of labor informality, and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. Although these factors vary in intensity across the two countries, they consistently indicate that gender inequality is not an isolated phenomenon but an integral component of the organization of Latin American economies.

The territorial dimension also proved to be essential for understanding these disparities. In Brazil, variations across states illustrate how distinct development trajectories produce different configurations of gender inequality. In Mexico, although the territorial dimension has received less attention in the literature examined, it remains a relevant avenue for future research. This finding reinforces the importance of multiscalar approaches that integrate national and regional perspectives in the analysis of gender inequalities.

From a regional development perspective, the findings suggest that persistent gender wage inequality constitutes not only a matter of social justice but also a barrier to economic dynamism. By limiting women's economic autonomy and restricting their full participation in higher-quality productive activities, these inequalities constrain the growth potential and transformative capacity of territories. In this sense, promoting gender equality should be understood as a strategic component of regional development policies.

In light of these findings, this article argues that addressing gender wage inequality in Latin America requires integrated public policies that extend beyond labor market regulation. This entails combining transparency and enforcement mechanisms with care policies, measures to increase women's labor market participation, the valorization of historically feminized occupations, and strategies to reduce territorial inequalities. Without such an integrated approach, normative advances are likely to produce only marginal effects, leaving the underlying structures of inequality largely unchanged.

Finally, this article contributes to the debate by demonstrating that gender wage inequality should be analyzed as a constitutive element of development dynamics in Latin America. By highlighting the interaction between economic structures, institutions, and gender relations, it seeks to provide analytical support for future research agendas and the formulation of public policies that are more responsive to the complexity of the phenomenon. Future studies may broaden the scope of the comparative analysis to include other Latin American countries and further explore the territorial and intersectional dimensions of gender inequality, thereby expanding our understanding of the pathways toward greater gender equality. In this sense, gender wage inequality emerges not merely as a consequence of underdevelopment but as an active component in the reproduction of Latin America's development constraints.

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