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Topic: Innovation and Technological change, and Education in digital age for achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls

“When a politician is against equal pay for women, I think it begs the question, should they be a politician?”

Through the millennium, innovation has brought technological changes to society, and along with it a constant differentiation in our standards and methods of education; similar to all other social progressions, digitalization has impacted gender equality. The United Nations has proven that men and women are equal in the UDHR, 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' Despite this, women's rights have tended to be of lesser value economically, often being approached differently regarding the nation's federal laws and the societal behaviors of the specific country, like in the Federal Republic of Germany. German constitutional law is devoted to the equality of men and women and emphasizes a federal commitment to an effective equality policy by setting clearer regulations on gender equality in terms of pay, labor market, public administration, and leadership roles. Article 23 of the UDHR states, 'Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.' Defiantly, the country's Federal Statistics Office reported that women in Germany earned 18% less on average than men in 2023. It’s an improvement compared to the 23% gap found in 2016, but the gap steadily decreased only until 2020, to 18% and has remained unchanged since then.

The Transparency in Wage Structures Act commends Article 23(section 2) allows employees of both genders to be informed of each other's pay. However, this law only applies to companies with more than 200 employees, and only firms with more than 500 staff will be legally required to inform them of their pay structure. The limitations of the law make it possible for women working for smaller companies in less urban areas to be taken advantage of. Even though the female employment rate has risen in recent decades, many parts of the economy, such as mechanical engineering, construction, civil engineering, and transport, or any occupation that would require a STEM-based degree, are male-dominated. Contrastingly, the service industry has a higher percentage of female employees, such as those in health care, social services, and teaching. The General Act on Equal Treatment, implemented in Germany in 2006, bans employment discrimination based on gender, disability, or belief. However, the Federal Statistics Office confirmed that women are more frequently employed part-time or in marginal employment than men, associated with lower average gross hourly earnings. To combat this opportunity imbalance in the industry, Germany plans to implement a law to increase the share of women in leadership positions and another law to promote 'Women in STEM professions'; but the average critic would argue that Germany as a country doesn't seem as urgent to set these regulations as the EU would prefer. It is commendable that there are 'support centers' available to victims of gender discrimination, such as the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, which provides legal aid for victims. To issue ensure authenticity of inclusivity, the Federal Association of Municipal Women's Offices and Equality Bodies use networking to ensure the influence of women in political decision-making.

It’s evident that society does not lack policy or have any intentional ignorance towards gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. However, the population is bound to discriminatory gender roles and stereotypes of women. Just as ethical decision-making tests are used in employee-hiring processes, they should also be within the criteria of hiring executives and other positions of power to ensure that anyone under their management is not disadvantaged due to these biased and discriminatory principles. There is a stigma around mentioning issues related to gender discrimination in; sources state that speaking of gender-based violence and sexual harassment is trivialized among staff and scholars alike in places of work and education. This normalization leaves a sense of degradation of women in STEAM. Governments are obligated to tackle this ignorance by setting an example and being more open about gender discrimination cases and regulations to raise awareness. Regarding the aforementioned 'wage transparency act,' it should not be limited to companies with over 250 employees and should be inclusive of all establishments. At this stage of gender inequality, it is clear that a cure would be more than impossible, and prevention by awareness and education is key to modernity.

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