

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“Information Society and Sustainable Development”- ISSD 2025, XIIth Edition
May 30th & 31st, 2025, University of Targu-Jiu, Rumania

Gender inequality in the labor market: A comparative analysis of wage gaps and job quality in Argentina, Spain, Germany, and Poland (a)

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(a) International Network for Knowledge and Comparative Socioeconomic. Analysis of Informality and the Policies to be Implemented for their Formalization in the European Unión and Latin America. Project 101182756 — INSEAI 2023.



Funded by the
European Union



Structure of the Presentation

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Introduction

- Structural inequalities persist in labour markets, especially in terms of gender.
- These gaps are not only due to differences in training or experience, but also to gender hierarchies that structure access to, retention of, and quality of employment.
- **Fecundability**, understood as a sociostructural category, operates as a mechanism of anticipatory discrimination against women of reproductive age.
- This "social marker" implies a symbolic and material penalty in the labour market.
- Income gaps reflect this segmentation, with female overrepresentation in informal, precarious, or part-time jobs.

Objectives

- Compare the hourly labour income between women and men in four countries with different trajectories.
- Assess how fecundability and gender interact with institutional contexts to shape unequal labour trajectories.

Theoretical Background

This work adopts an intersectional perspective that integrates three theoretical frameworks:

1. Feminist Economics

Analyses how labour market structures systematically penalize women's reproductive potential (Elson, 1999; Folbre, 1994).

2. Welfare and Work-Family Reconciliation Regimes

Highlight the role of institutional frameworks in shaping women's access to and continuity in the labour market (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992).

3. Labor Market Segmentation Theories

Explain the unequal distribution of employment based on gender, social class, and life course position (Misra et al., 2011).

Case studies

Germany, as a representative of a conservative model with strong labor institutionalization

Spain, reflecting the Mediterranean regime with high labor temporality and weak public care provision

Poland, a post-socialist economy with low informality but limited reconciliation infrastructure and weak collective bargaining

Argentina, an emerging economy characterized by structural informality and fragmented social protection policies

Methodology

- Comparative and Quantitative Design with a Mixed Approach: Descriptive-exploratory and Inferential
- Harmonized microdata from EU-SILC (European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions) 2023 (for Germany, Spain, and Poland) and Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) 2023 (for Argentina) are used.
- Hourly labour income is used as a synthetic indicator of job quality, reflecting dimensions such as contractual stability, formality, access to rights, and opportunities for advancement.
- Employment is classified according to economic sector, skill levels and type of employment relationship.
- The analysis focuses on the employed population, enabling a more precise estimate of the differential effect of fecundability on income and job quality.

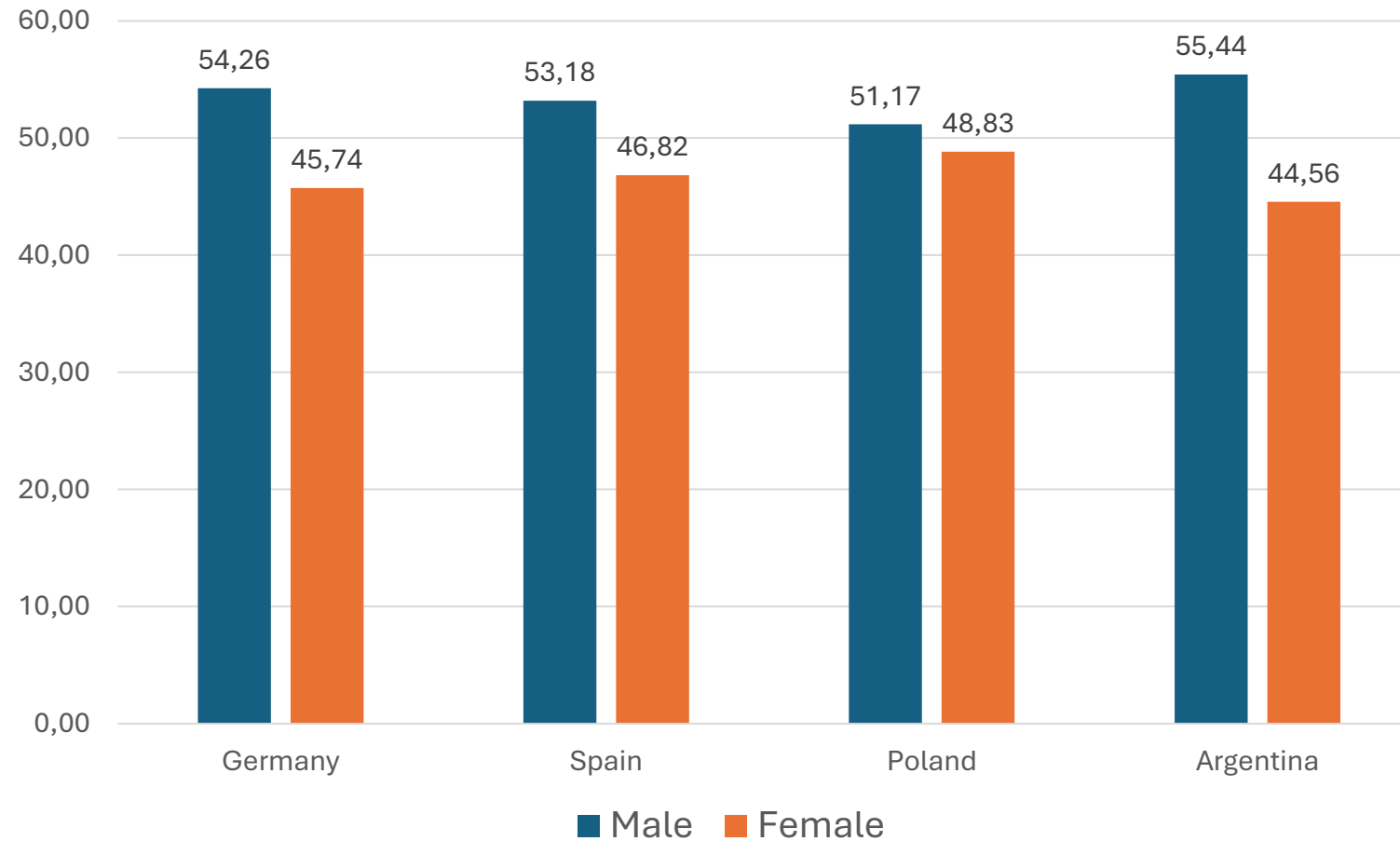
Hypothesis

The main hypothesis holds that the interaction between gender and fecundability exacerbates wage and labor gaps through mechanisms such as occupational segregation, limited availability of formal employment, and absence of reconciliation policies.

A secondary hypothesis suggests that gender and fecundability gaps intensify in contexts with high informality and weak reconciliation policies (e.g., Argentina), and even in aging countries (e.g., Poland) where traditional gender roles persist, while in models with robust social protection (e.g., Germany), these gaps are mitigated regardless of demographic structure.

Results: differences between countries

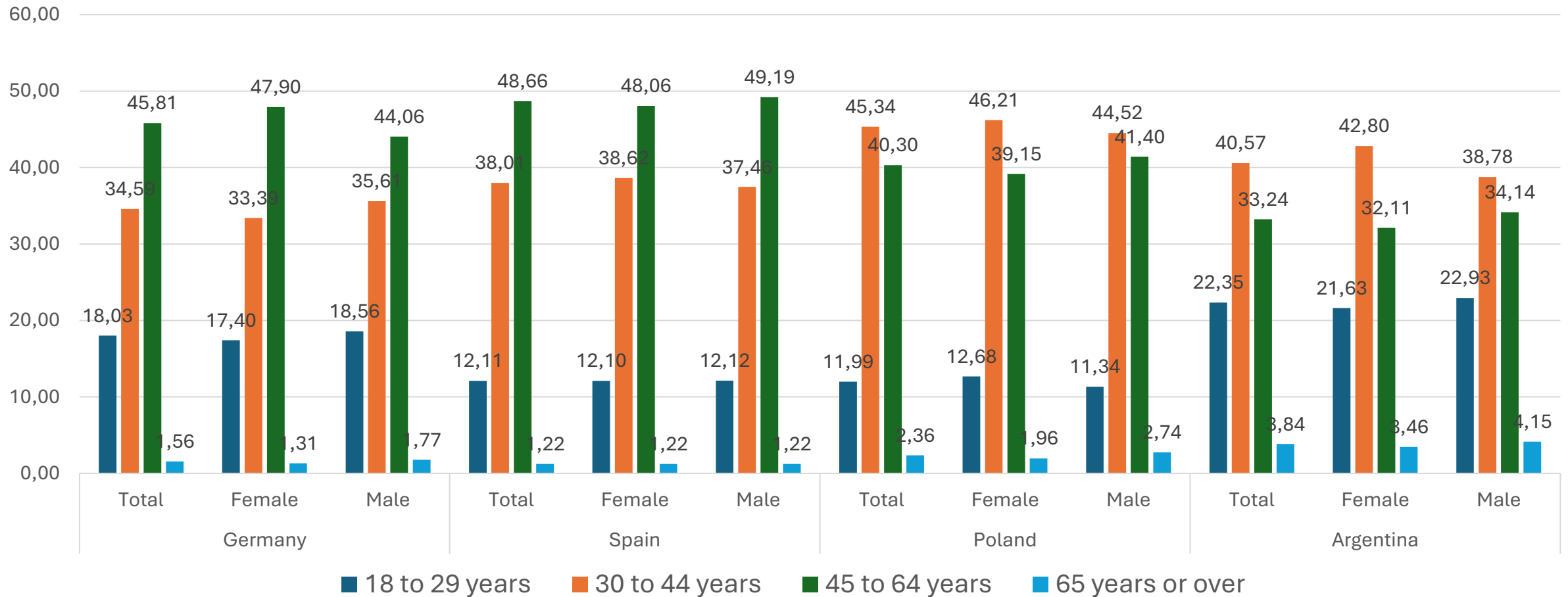
Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender, 2023



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results: differences between countries

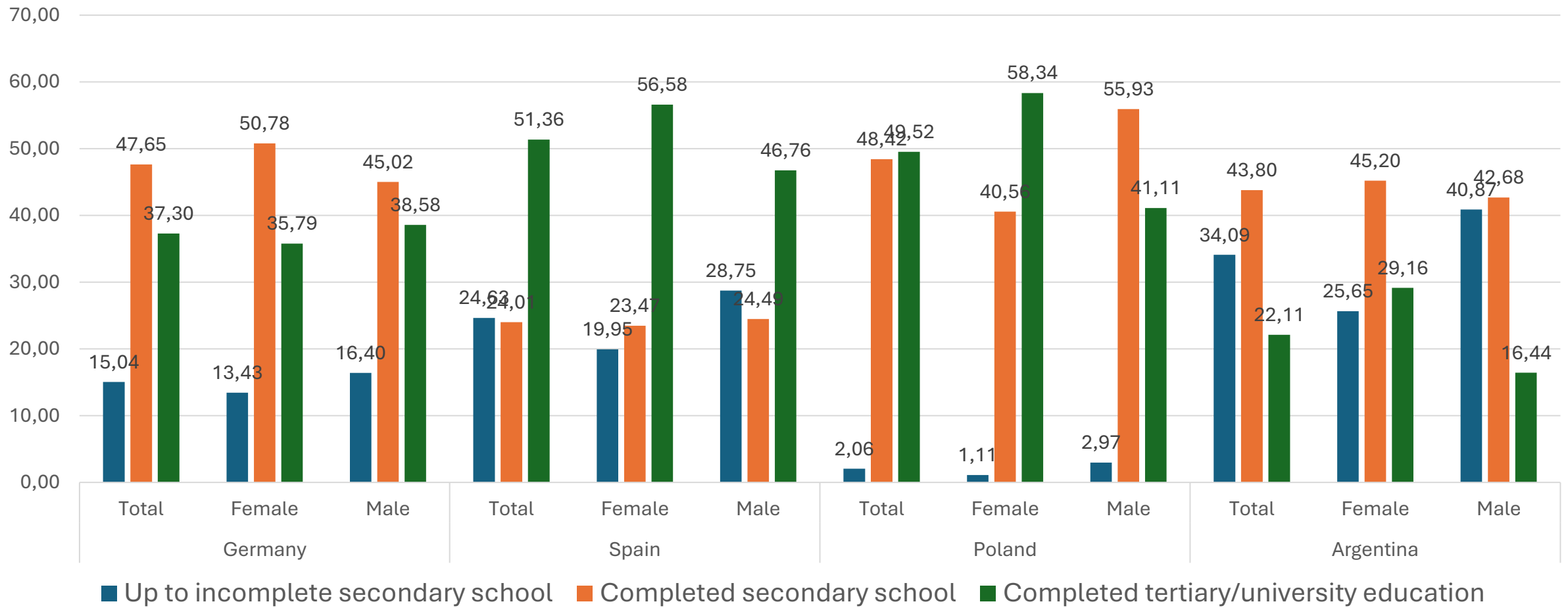
Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender , According to age groups, 2023.



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
 Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results: differences between countries

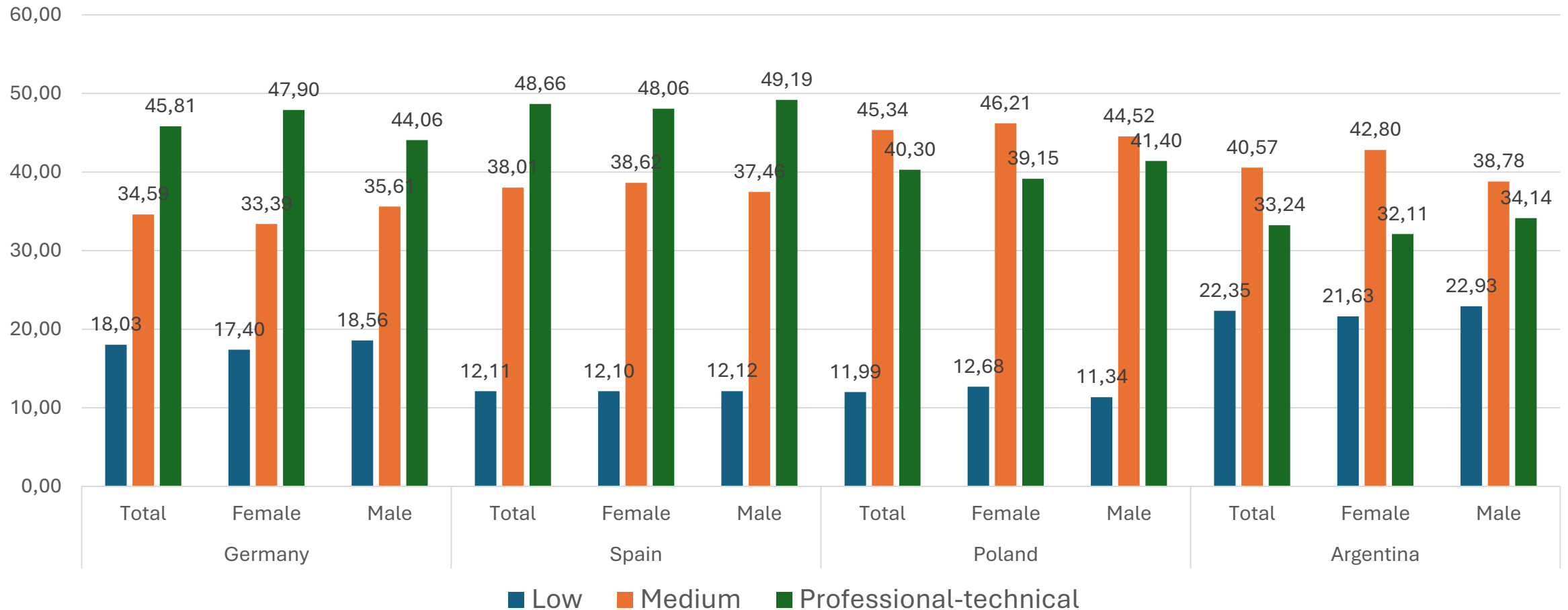
Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender , According educational level, 2023



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
 Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results: differences between countries

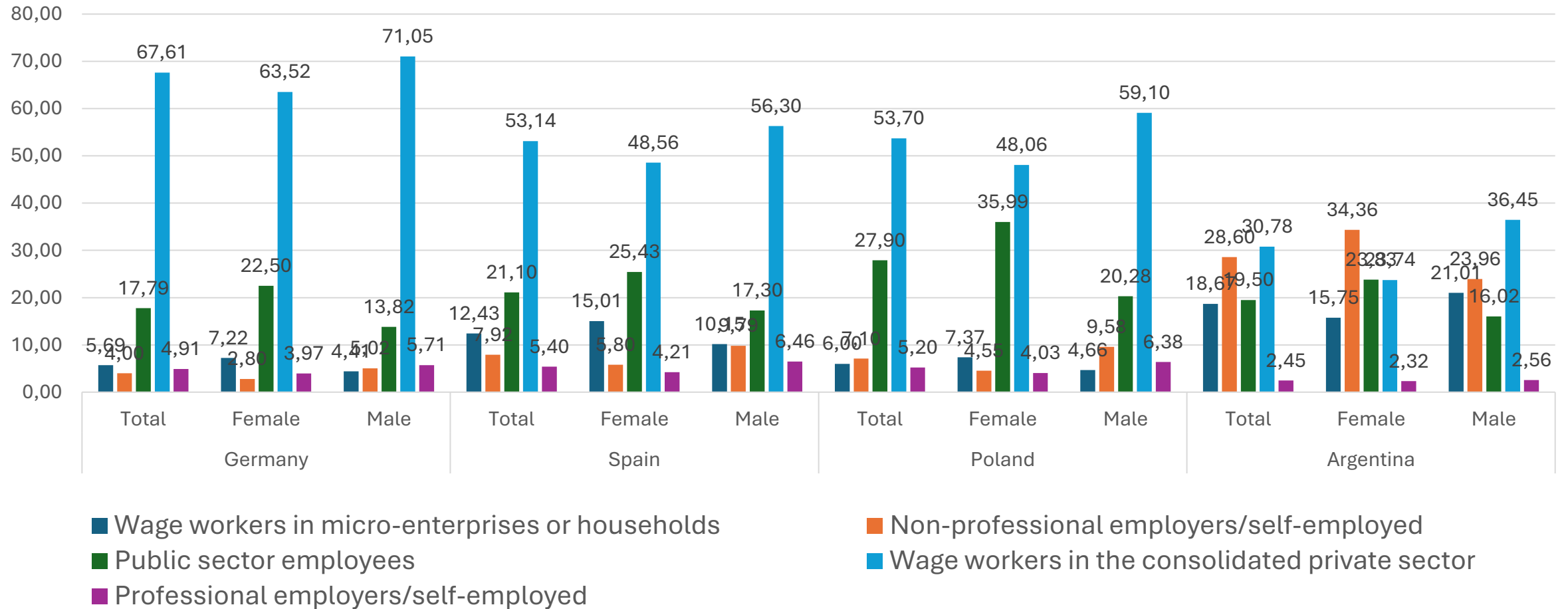
Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender , According to occupational qualification, 2023



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
 Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results: differences between countries

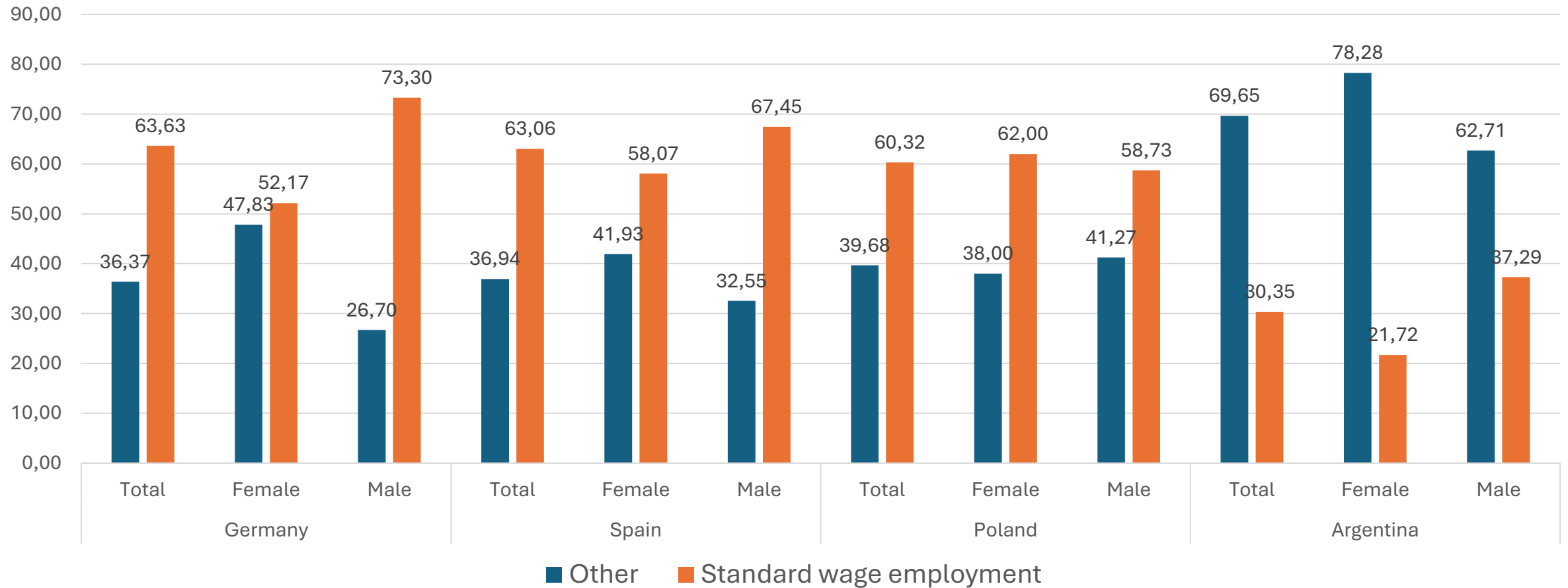
Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender , According to socio-occupational sector , 2023



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
 Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results: differences between countries

Distribution of the Employed Population (Aged 18 and Over) by gender , According to type of employment*, 2023



*Standard employment consists of full-time, wage jobs that are covered by social security and are subject to a permanent, written contract (Bosch, 2004; Standing, 2011; Shin et al., 2023)
Source: Own elaboration based on the Permanent Household Survey (EPH-INDEC) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) survey.

Results

Multiple linear regression on the logarithm of hourly labour income of the employed population – human capital variables. 2023

Female					Male				
Variables	Germany	Spain	Poland	Argentina	Variables	Germany	Spain	Poland	Argentina
Age Group					Age Group				
18 to 29 years ©					18 to 29 years ©				
30 to 44 years	0.38***	0.25***	0.06*	0.14***	30 to 44 years	0.37***	0.26***	0.18***	0.17***
45 to 64 years	0.44***	0.38***	0.12***	0.20***	45 to 64 years	0.45***	0.35***	0.11***	0.24***
65 years or over	0.41***	0.26	0.22***	0.14***	65 years or over	0.37***	0.54***	0.09	0.25***
Educational level					Educational level				
Up to incomplete secondary school©					Up to incomplete secondary school©				
Completed secondary school	0.25***	0.07*	0.09**	0.14***	Completed secondary school	0.22***	0.09**	0.05	0.17***
Completed tertiary/university education	0.48***	0.31***	0.37***	0.37***	Completed tertiary/university education	0.43***	0.24***	0.25***	0.37***
Occupational Qualification					Occupational Qualification				
Low©					Low©				
Medium	0.15***	0.05	0.12***	-0.02	Medium	0.09***	0.11***	0.03	0.09***
Professional-technical	0.24***	0.27***	0.29***	0.23***	Professional-technical	0.31***	0.34***	0.25***	0.39***

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Results

Multiple linear regression on the logarithm of hourly labour income of the employed population – job characteristics variables. 2023

Female					Male				
Variables	Germany	Spain	Poland	Argentina	Variables	Germany	Spain	Poland	Argentina
Socio-occupational sector					Socio-occupational sector				
Wage workers in micro-enterprises or households[©]					Wage workers in micro-enterprises or households[©]				
Non-professional employers/self-employed	-0.22**	-1.20***	-0.54***	-0.11***	Non-professional employers/self-employed	0.05	-0.75***	-0.31***	0.06***
Public sector employees	0.20***	0.28***	-0.005	0.46***	Public sector employees	0.17***	0.38***	0.17***	0.41***
Wage workers in the consolidated private sector	0.14***	0.10***	0.03	0.28***	Wage workers in the consolidated private sector	0.13***	0.21***	0.11***	0.29***
Professional employers/self-employed	0.02	-0.59***	-0.14	0.36***	Professional employers/self-employed	0.15**	0.00	-0.1	0.36***
Type of employment*					Type of employment*				
Other[©]					Other[©]				
Standard wage employment	0.09***	0.11***	-0.02	0.08***	Standard wage employment	0.28***	0.25***	0.01	0.25***
R ²	0.14	0.15	0.16	0.30	R ²	0.18	0.15	0.14	0.27
n	11444	11335	3818	12019	n	12918	12282	3736	14988

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Conclusions

- Wage penalties for women are not explained solely by education or experience, but by structures that discriminate in advance based on gender and fecundability.
- The intersection between gender and fertility operates as a structural barrier that channels women of reproductive age into more precarious, lower-paid, and less protected forms of employment.
- This penalty is especially severe in contexts marked by high informality and weak labor institutions, such as Argentina, and is mitigated in more regulated environments, such as Germany.
- In short, the interaction between gender, fertility and institutional context profoundly influences women's labour trajectories.

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International Network for Knowledge and
Comparative Socioeconomic. Analysis of
Informality and the Policies to be Implemented
for their Formalization in the European Unión
and Latin America. Project 101182756 —
INSEAI 2023.

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