

Informing about gender inequality: Beliefs about the gender pay gap and support for gender equality policies

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Labour markets in most European countries continue to be characterized by substantial earnings differences between men and women, yet policies aimed at reducing these inequalities often lack popular support. We suggest that people's beliefs about the size and the source of these inequalities might be crucial to explain why individuals support or oppose gender equality policies. Scholars emphasizing the importance of inequality aversion and gendered labour market segregation suggest that people likely underestimate the size of the gender pay gap and would increase support for gender equality policies if adequately informed. Another branch in the literature, however, suggests that this expectation may be misguided as people do not dislike inequality per se but only inequality they deem unjustified. Thus, informing individuals about the overall gender wage gap might be insufficient to shift their policy preferences, as many may attribute these pay differences to women's choices rather than to systematic disadvantages in the labour market. This study empirically tests these two theoretical arguments using a preregistered cross-national information provision experiment. The experiment, fielded in early 2025 in Germany and the US and planned for Sweden in Summer 2025, informs participants about gender inequality in pay within their country, varying both the size (low/high) and the type (unadjusted vs. within-job adjusted) of gender pay information presented. Using this data, we examine whether different types of gender pay gap information can increase support for gender equality policies and

investigate whether factors such as issue salience, misinformation, or justice beliefs drive these effects. Preliminary results indicate that information can change individual's perceived gender pay gaps and fairness beliefs, but the impact on policy preferences is limited. The strongest effect is observed when participants receive within-job-adjusted pay gap information, supporting the idea that respondents take the type of gender pay gap into account when deciding whether to support gender equality policies. Combined with additional analyses, these findings suggest that while information can shape fairness perceptions, broader interventions may be needed to drive substantive policy support.