Equal pay for work of equal value

Women's work, Men's work: Who decides what each is worth?

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CONCEPTS

Two ideas that are often confused

Equal pay for the same work

A woman and a man doing the same job must receive the same pay.

Largely secured in law, but discrimination against women still happens in certain sectors.

(BBC cases: Carrie Gracie - 2018; Samira Ahmed - 2020)

Equal pay for work of equal value

Different jobs judged equal in their demands must be paid equally.

- **Cleaner vs Gardener**
- **Carer vs Forklift operator**

This is the feminist frontier!

Equal pay for work of equal value | Source: European Commission



Maria

Carer in an old people's home



George

Forklift operator in a warehouse

MEASURING VALUE

Gender Neutral Job Evaluations

Skills

Knowledge, qualifications and abilities, including those learnt informally.

Effort

Physical, mental and emotional demands of the job.

Responsibility

For people, resources, information and outcomes

Working conditions

The physical and psychological environment of the work.

An evaluation is only as neutral as the people who design and weight the factors – Are the persons doing the evaluation gender-biased?

FEMINIST THEORY

When assessing for work of equal value – Invisible skills

Factor	George, forklift operator	Maria, carer
Skill	**One-day** certified **forklift training**	**MQF Level 3 in Care**: **284 hours** (Jobsplus) or **1,500 hours** (MCAST course – about 200 times longer than the forklift training)
Effort	Moving heavy loads (with a machine) – repetitive movement, time pressure,	Lifting and turning residents, long hours on her feet, **emotional labour** (Hochschild, 1983)
Responsibility	Expensive machinery and valuable stock, safety of others	Residents' safety, health, medication and dignity
Working conditions	Noise, fumes, shift work, hazards (falling loads), cold stores and loading bays exposed to the weather	Distress, aggression, bodily fluids, death of residents

AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

Pay inequality is not experienced evenly – Intersectional discrimination

Migrant women

Often concentrated in care, cleaning and hospitality, frequently with weaker bargaining power.

Disabled women

Disadvantages linked to gender and disability can combine in employment and pay.

Older women

Decades of undervalued work carried into lower pensions.

The Pay Transparency Directive explicitly recognises intersectional discrimination.

FEMINIST THEORY

Gendered organisations and the ideal worker norm

Pay systems look neutral, but they encode assumptions about time, whose body and whose skills count.

- → Job hierarchies were built around an unencumbered male worker.
- → Grading and pay rises typically reward continuous, full-time, uninterrupted careers.
- → Care responsibilities are read as lower commitment.

PAID AND UNPAID WORK

Care, time and the motherhood penalty

Time and care

- **Women carry most unpaid care work at home** – natural rather than learnt – often left out of job evaluations
- **Part-time work and career breaks cut earnings**
- Many studies find a **motherhood** penalty and a **fatherhood bonus**

Questions to consider

- How much value do employers tie to caring work?
- How do employers read parenthood?
- **How does this affect the value that employers give to work done by women/men, mothers/fathers?**

Care is undervalued at home, and that undervaluation follows it into paid work

WHO SETS THE PAY SCALES?

The state as pay-setter – but is it fair?

The state is not a neutral bystander

- **Public pay scales** often set the value of **care workers in hospitals, Learning Support Educators, Childcare Educators in childcare settings (0-3)**
- **Procurement and funding** shape pay in **outsourced care + cleaning**
- The **state can lead revaluation**, or **lock in undervaluation**

STRUGGLES AND LANDMARK CASES

Won through collective action, not granted

Year	Case or struggle	Why it matters
1968	**Ford Dagenham sewing machinists** Car factory, **UK**	**Women's skilled work** had been graded as less skilled compared to men's work.
1989	**Danfoss** Danish engineering manufacturer, **Denmark**	Where a pay system **lacks transparency**, the employer must prove it is not discriminatory.
1993	**Enderby v Frenchay Health Authority** **UK**	Female speech therapists compared with psychologists and pharmacists (mostly men).
2018	**Glasgow City Council** **UK**	Mass 48-hour strike by 8,000 council workers (mostly women) over unresolved equal pay claims.
2021	**Asda v Brierley** **UK**	**Retail workers** (checkout and shelf-stacking staff) may use **warehouse workers** as comparators.

THE NEW EU FRAMEWORK

The Pay Transparency Directive (EU) 2023/970

Pay information before employment	**No questions on pay history**	**Right to pay information, by sex**	**Gender pay gap reporting**
Joint pay assessment if an unjustified gap of 5% or more is not remedied	**Shift of the burden of proof to the employer**	**Full compensation for victims**	**Intersectional discrimination recognised**

Maria can now ask her employer what others earn**. But would knowing that, on its own, raise her pay? Let’s be honest about the limits.**

Equal pay for work of equal value | Source: Directive (EU) 2023/970, Arts. 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 16 and 18; L.N. 173 of 2026

A FEMINIST CRITIQUE

The limits of transparency

- → **Transparency reveals gaps; it does not revalue feminised work.**
- → **Worker categories are drawn up by employers and can re-encode bias.**
- → **Reporting obligations exclude smaller employers, which dominate Malta's economy.**
- → **Informal, agency, domestic and platform work falls through the gaps.**
- → **The market rate defence can still justify lower pay in feminised sectors.**

Revaluation needs collective bargaining, sector-wide pay reviews, and sustained investment in care



Maria

Carer in an old people's home



George

Forklift operator in a warehouse

CONCLUSION

Is the work women do valued fairly? – That is a political choice, not a natural fact.

State

Resource enforcement and review public pay scales

Employers

Adopt gender-neutral job evaluation

Unions

Bring equal value claims and bargain for revaluation

Civil society

Monitor, inform and pursue strategic cases

Academia

Produce studies, educate and raise awareness