



Obstacles to Finding the Ideal Workplace: A Gender-Based Analysis Across the V4 Countries

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Abstract

This study explores gender-specific barriers to finding an ideal workplace in the Visegrád countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), where similar historical and socioeconomic contexts shape labor market inequalities. Based on the relevant literature, women are disproportionately affected by challenges related to language proficiency, professional networks, and mobility. The research applied a quantitative methodology, including chi-square tests, multiple logistic regression, and cluster analysis, using SPSS Statistics software to analyze the survey data. Findings revealed significant gender disparities. Women report greater difficulties with language and mobility, particularly in Hungary and Slovakia, whereas men benefit more from strong professional connections. The cluster analysis identified three respondent groups: those hindered by language barriers, those with weak networks, and those facing limited mobility. International experience mitigates language challenges, and robust networks ease job search difficulties. In line with the ideals of a circular society, this study also explores how circularity, inclusiveness, and collaboration can help break down gender-based barriers in the labor market. The study's novelty lies in its comparative regional focus and the integration of statistical methods to segment job-seeker profiles. These insights highlight the need for targeted policies that enhance language skills and foster professional networking opportunities, especially for women. By addressing these barriers, policymakers can better support gender equality in labor market access across Central Europe.

Keywords:

Gender Differences;
Ideal Workplace;
Labor Market Barriers;
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1- Introduction

There are notable differences in finding the ideal workplace in the V4 countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) [1]. Although aggregated data may suggest no significant gender-based differences, a closer examination on a country-by-country basis reveals more nuanced patterns. The indicated gap occurs in many traditional issues such as compensations, development opportunities, etc. [2], but more recently, even in the case of digitalization and sustainability, such a difference has emerged [3].

Are the obstacles to finding the right employer and job role the same for both genders? The answer to the above question is very complex. It depends on economic development, cultural background, and many other factors [1, 4]. This question drove our research on a country-by-country basis. We aim to identify statistically significant gender differences in labor market obstacles across these countries and examine the potential social and sociological reasons for such disparities. These four countries share a similar historical and legal background, which influences their labor markets [5, 6]. Additionally, geographical and transportation characteristics could further explain gender-specific job-seeking challenges.

In these four countries, which share a similar historical background, laws, customs, geographical features, and transportation characteristics, the differences may also be explained by the different laws. In this literature review, we systematically identified potential labor market obstacles, such as demographic changes, labor shortages, and income disparities across the EU, that could influence gender-specific job-seeking experiences. During the labor market research, the author team discussed which factors should be incorporated into the questionnaire, and from the outset, we systematically reviewed the relevant literature. Most of these factors have become known either earlier or later in these countries. Among others, it is worth mentioning the following points:

- The escalation of the demographic situation [7],
- The loosening or disappearance of attachment to the workplace (life-long employment) [8, 9],
- The emergence of a drastic labor and talent shortage [10],
- Effects of income disparities within the EU [11, 12],
- Labor migration and the appearance of foreign workers [13],
- and, last but not least, the economic difficulties caused by COVID-19 and the Russian–Ukrainian war [1, 14, 15].

These obstacles can significantly hinder access to employment, especially for individuals seeking jobs out of necessity. However, many job seekers are not only searching for a livelihood but also for roles that improve their quality of life, a challenge that varies significantly by gender. First, in the theoretical part of the article, we present the literature review related to our topic. Next, we present our four hypotheses applied in the article and the general characteristics of our empirical research. In this light, we first present the foundations on which this part of the questionnaire, compiled over several years of international research, is based. Following this, we will present the results of our statistical analyses for the four countries under study. Finally, we summarize the key findings of our research and address the limitations of our study.

2- Literature Review

The ideal workplace depends on numerous factors that can play a significant role [16, 17]. Securing the right job requires time and energy, especially in a competitive labor market that, according to various sources, is becoming increasingly complex and challenging to navigate [1, 18].

Publications from previous years have suggested that job seekers need to devote sufficient attention and energy to the job search process because these factors directly influence the chances of successful employment [5, 19]. The time and effort invested in a job search can significantly contribute to successful job hunting. It is important that job seekers allocate time to job opportunities, preparing application materials, and getting ready for interviews. According to the research above, those who invest more energy in the search are more likely to find a suitable job. Blau [20] highlighted that the time and energy spent on the job search are closely related to the likelihood of successful employment. More intense efforts generally lead to faster employment. Boswell et al. [21] found that using effective job search strategies can increase the likelihood of success in finding a job. One of the most effective strategies during a job search is maintaining consistency and adopting a flexible approach that requires persistence and adaptability. Job search intensity, transparency of the search process, and commitment to securing a job are all factors that significantly increase the chances of successful employment [22]. Furthermore, proper self-presentation, boosting self-confidence, setting clear goals, and utilizing social support are all closely linked to job search success [23]. In addition, personal networks can be particularly effective during job searches because they not only shorten the duration of unemployment but also lead to faster and more successful employment outcomes [24]. The concept of a circular society is underlined by sustainability and equity, which go beyond environmental concerns and include social equality, such as in labor market dynamics.

Literature on gender inequalities in the job market has argued, for example, in the case of Blau & Kahn [19] and Kabil et al. [25], for more inclusive approaches in accordance with the principles of the circular society. This methodology enhances accessibility to networks and the development of skills, thereby diminishing obstacles to gender disparities in labor markets [12, 19, 26].

Connections and references are crucial in the job search. A well-established network can help job seekers obtain information about hidden job opportunities and increase their chances of employment. Hidden job opportunities refer to positions that are not publicly advertised but are only open to a select group of candidates [27, 28]. Osatuyi & Dennis [29] demonstrated that relatively loose connections are often more effective because job seekers can access a broader range of information. Good references enhance job seekers' credibility and reliability in employers' eyes. References typically come from the applicant's previous employers, colleagues, or professors and inform the employer about the candidate's professional competence, work ethic, and achievements. According to CRANET's global human resource management (HR) research, when different organizations are looking for employees at management and subordinate levels, referral requests are often used as a recruitment method in different parts of the world [30]. Professional experience is also a critical factor that employers consider when evaluating applicants. Relevant work experience demonstrates the candidate's professional skills and preparedness. According to earlier research by Kabil et al. [25], professional experience is directly related to workplace success and career development. The requirement of professional experience can particularly disadvantage early-career individuals [26]. According to McDonald et al. [31], gender significantly affects access to networks, references, and professional experience in the labor market. The study found that men and women access social capital differently in terms of quantity and quality. White men possess more social capital than women and minorities, which allows them to receive more job offers through their networks.

Women are particularly disadvantaged in higher positions because they receive fewer recommendations, even when they have similar social capital to men [32]. The research also highlights that gender-based segregation in workplace relationships further disadvantages women, as they receive less information about higher-status job opportunities.

Educational attainment is also a crucial indicator for employers. Appropriate qualifications are essential for securing a good job [33] because they reflect a candidate's capabilities and preparedness. Educational background often determines an individual's entry point into the labor market and career opportunities. Oreopoulos et al. [34] showed that individuals with higher educational qualifications generally enter the labor market with higher starting salaries and better career prospects. Employers are primarily interested in candidates' skills, knowledge, and willingness to adapt [35].

In previous decades, salary has been one of the most essential pieces of information for job seekers. The gap between expected and offered wages often hinders individuals' ability to find an ideal job. According to Yang & Wu's [36] study, job seekers tend to search for workplaces that align with their salary expectations and meet their livelihood needs. Higher salary offers generally make job opportunities more attractive, but other factors, such as workplace culture and growth opportunities, can also be important. Hassan et al. [13] research showed that language proficiency significantly increases employability and wages, particularly in areas where language skills are essential for job performance. Language proficiency is fundamental in global and multicultural work environments. Job seekers who speak multiple languages are more likely to find jobs at international companies and may receive better salaries [37, 38].

According to Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen [38], structural and cultural barriers, as well as discrimination, play a significant role in why women face more language obstacles during the job search process. Ressler et al. [39] suggested that women are more likely to turn to insecure forms of work and often find themselves at a disadvantage due to the balance between family roles and employment. Kaur et al. [40] found that language barriers deepen gender disparities in job searches, making it more difficult for women to find suitable employment.

Today, new and entirely different demands have emerged regarding job searching, including the desire for personal and holistic lifestyles, well-being, and the possibility of hybrid work arrangements. Hybrid work can impact men and women differently, particularly because of the social expectations surrounding caregiving responsibilities. Alakärppä et al. [41] highlighted that social norms related to gender roles and caregiving tasks significantly influence women's ability to balance work and family life. Employed women feel more confident in managing this balance. Kelly et al. [22] pointed out that women, especially mothers, respond much more positively to flexible work initiatives, whereas men tend to approach them more cautiously. This underscores that men and women react differently to the opportunities and challenges presented by the hybrid work model, which should be considered when designing workplace policies.

The use of new technologies can also raise the issue of gender balance when searching for a job. However, many studies have indicated that the impact of technology is more skill-based than gender-based [26, 42].

McAleer et al. [43] stated that communication skills are critical for workplace relationships and professional advancement. Good communication skills increase job seekers' chances of successful employment and long-term career development as they facilitate their integration into new communities. Better communication leads to higher levels of information sharing, which results in more efficient job performance. Research shows mixed results regarding gender differences in communication skills. According to Dash et al. [35], women's communication abilities are lower than

men's during the early and later stages of their careers. However, they perform better during the middle stages of their careers. In contrast, Amni [44] found that women possess better communication skills at a younger age. This discrepancy may indicate that the development of communication skills varies across different stages of life, which could lead to diverse advantages or disadvantages for women in terms of career development.

Team player behavior, or the ability to collaborate effectively with others, is becoming increasingly important in modern workplaces. Employers seek candidates who work well in teams because successful collaboration is a key requirement for achieving corporate goals in most work environments. Pietrantonio et al. [45] found that effective teamwork enhances organizational performance and individual satisfaction. Verhoeff et al. [46] showed that effective teams consist of individuals who communicate well, adapt quickly to changes, and can resolve conflicts without hindering group dynamics. Good team players contribute to workplace harmony and achieve common goals, making them more likely to secure employment. Team player skills include collaboration, communication, conflict resolution, flexibility, and adaptability. Job seekers should focus on developing these skills because doing so will make them more competitive in the labor market.

A key issue in job searching is commuting and worker mobility. Is the employee willing to travel to their workplace daily, and within what distance are they searching for a job? Are they willing to relocate if they find a better-paying job in another part of the country? Economic theories examine job selection, residential location, and commuting behavior simultaneously. A lack of willingness to commute limits job seekers' opportunities [1, 47].

Gender differences in commuting preferences and mobility are closely linked to relationships, parenthood status, and caregiving responsibilities [48]. Women are more involved in household tasks and childcare, which limits their mobility and influences their commuting habits. Echeverría et al. [16] found that the presence of children significantly increases gender differences in commuting times, supporting the hypothesis that caregiving responsibilities restrict women's mobility more than men's. Casado-Díaz et al. [49] added that cultural and social constraints further reduce women's mobility, although highly educated women show commuting patterns similar to men.

Commuting, or the daily travel between home and work, can significantly impact job searching and selection. The length of commuting time and the associated costs often influence whether a job seeker accepts a job offer. According to Van Ommeren et al. [50], the length of commuting time directly affects job seekers' employment decisions. Job seekers generally prefer jobs closer to their homes or where commuting time is acceptable.

Worker mobility, that is, employees' ability to change geographic locations, is also a critical factor in job search. Herold et al. [6] research shows that geographic mobility increases job seekers' chances of employment, allowing them to search in a broader labor market. Job seekers willing and able to relocate are more likely to find employment, especially if the local labor market offers limited opportunities. Workers with high mobility are more adaptable to economic changes and regional labor market differences. One possible method of investigation, based on search theory, suggests that dual-earner households make mobility more difficult. Van Ommeren et al. [50] found that the distance between the workplaces of both earners facilitates job changes but reduces willingness to relocate. A lack of mobility limits the number of suitable job opportunities [51].

Discrimination can pose a significant barrier to finding a job [52]. Job seekers may frequently encounter discrimination based on various factors, such as gender, age, religion, and ethnicity. This reduces employment opportunities, as individuals from certain groups may face unfair treatment during job interviews or the selection process. Gender discrimination often appears during job searches, with women and men receiving different treatment. Bertrand & Hallock [53] concluded that female applicants often receive lower salary offers and are less likely to be placed in higher positions than their male counterparts. Ethnic and racial discrimination also has a significant impact on job search. Pager [54] found that individuals from ethnic minorities are less likely to find employment and tend to receive lower pay. Age discrimination is particularly problematic for older job seekers. Neumark et al. [33] demonstrated that older job seekers often face age-related discrimination, which reduces their chances of employment and limits their labor market opportunities. Generally, older applicants are less likely to be invited for interviews and have fewer job opportunities than younger candidates.

The authors identified a research gap concerning the abovementioned obstacles during the literature review. They did not find any literature, studies, or research examining the role of these factors in the Visegrád Group (V4) countries. This study aims to fill this research gap.

3- Research Methods

Our study is based on the database of an international labor market research project [12]. Our research aimed to explore how well employees in the V4 countries perceive the ideal workplace. We were actively involved in the research, utilizing demographic data and information regarding the ideal workplace from the collected data. The sample sizes varied, with the smallest group coming from the Czech Republic (239 participants) and the largest coming from Hungary (1,152 participants). We also received 302 valid responses from Poland and 318 from Slovakia.

Our empirical study was essentially *ex post* [55]; that is, we examined topics such as labor shortages, job suitability or ideal job identification, and labor retention based on actual data from the observation period. The questionnaire primarily employed closed-ended questions to facilitate statistical analyses. The respondents were asked to select the most characteristic response from a set of pre-formulated options that broadly covered the examined topics. In most cases, participants were reached using the snowball sampling method.

Drawing on these literature sources, our questionnaire identified 13 job-related characteristics—such as search time, professional experience, language skills, teamwork, communication, contextual references, relationships, general references, mobility, and minority status—that influence the perception of an ideal workplace.

Respondents from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia evaluated these characteristics in terms of what they considered representative of a suitable or ideal workplace. Based on a statistical analysis of the respondents' responses, we identified the characteristics of an ideal workplace across the entire sample as well as differences specific to each country and gender.

Data collection began in 2022 and concluded in 2024, and was conducted in paper-based and electronic format. Although the sample cannot be considered entirely representative, the researchers aimed to reflect the demographic diversity of the labor market. After data cleaning and filtering, 2,147 valid responses remained, which were analyzed using SPSS software.

On the basis of a systematic review of the literature and the labor market experiences of the members of the research group, we formulated the following hypotheses.

- H1.** Women in the analyzed V4 countries are more likely than men to perceive inadequate language skills as a barrier to finding an ideal workplace.
- H2.** Men in V4 countries are more likely than women to have stronger professional networks, which, in turn, reduces the likelihood of experiencing language-related barriers in the labor market.
- H3.** Women in V4 countries, particularly Hungary and Slovakia, face more significant mobility challenges (e.g., commuting or relocation) than men, which limits their job opportunities.
- H4.** Opportunities for gaining international experience reduce the likelihood of encountering language-related barriers in job searches, with a greater impact observed among women.

According to our hypotheses, in the Visegrád region and other Central Eastern European countries, individuals face different gender-related barriers to securing their desired jobs. Socioeconomic and cultural factors—particularly language proficiency, mobility, and professional networks—play a key role in this process. Furthermore, the extent and significance of these factors may vary significantly across countries and genders.

We applied a chi-square test, followed by multiple logistic regression using SPSS Statistics, to determine which factors increased the likelihood of individuals facing these challenges. Subsequently, we employed the k-means clustering algorithm to identify distinct clusters of respondents based on characteristics related to language proficiency, professional networks, and mobility. We conducted a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to visualize the results, reducing the multidimensional data to two principal components. The resulting representation clearly illustrates the differences between the identified clusters. Table 1 and Figure 1 present the distribution of the sample by gender and country.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample

Country of employment		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Czech Republic	Frequency	86	153	239
	%	35.98%	64.02%	100.00%
Poland	Frequency	157	145	302
	%	51.99%	48.01%	100.00%
Hungary	Frequency	371	781	1152
	%	32.20%	67.80%	100.00%
Slovakia	Frequency	135	183	318
	%	42.45%	57.55%	100.00%
Total	Frequency	749	1262	2011
	%	37.25%	62.75%	100.00%

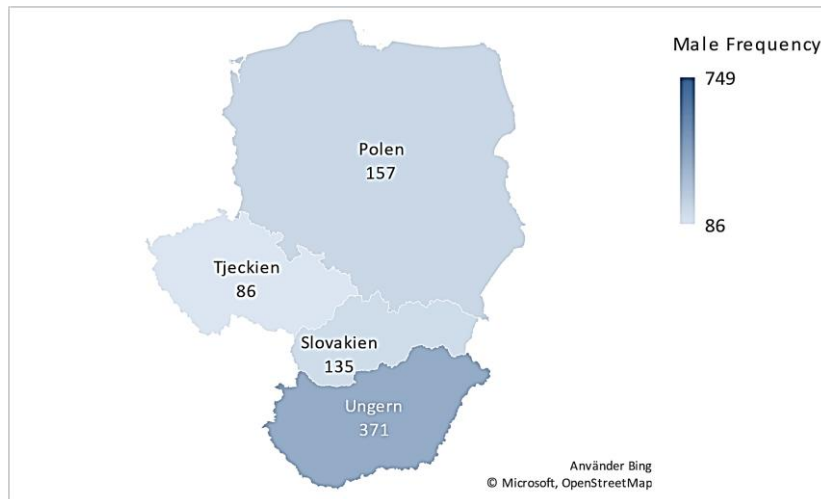


Figure 1. Male distribution of the sample

To conclude the methodological chapter, the authors summarize the steps of the applied methodology in Figure 2. This flowchart includes both the steps preceding and following the specific methodology, placing the applied procedures in context.

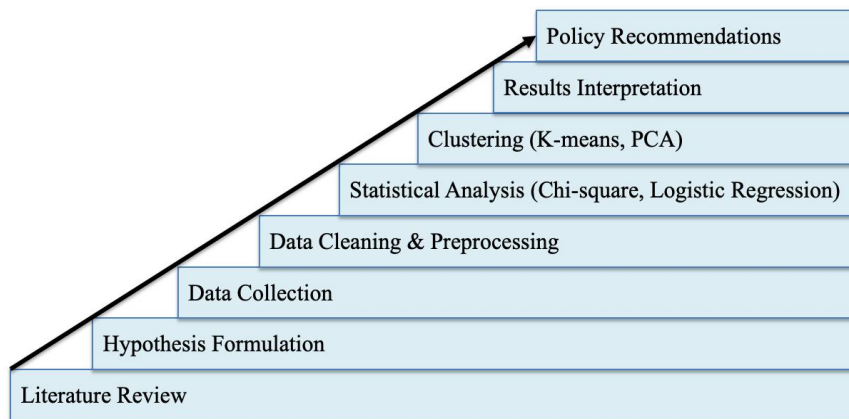


Figure 2. Flow chart of methodology in broader context

4- Results

4-1-Socioeconomic and Cultural Factors in Regional Trends

The bivariate analysis revealed significant differences based on the following key aspects:

1. Language skills: In every country examined, more women than men reported lacking adequate language skills; the difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). This disparity was most pronounced in Hungary, where 20.6% of women fully agreed that their language skills were inadequate compared to only 11.1% of men.
2. Professional networks: The majority of men have stronger professional connections than women. For instance, in Hungary, 28.9% of men and 23.2% of women have a strong professional network ($p = 0.063$).
3. Mobility and transportation: Women reported transportation and mobility issues more frequently, particularly in Hungary. For example, in Hungary, 46.2% of male respondents indicated that they were able to commute to work, compared to only 43.9% of women ($p = 0.011$). A slightly different trend was observed in Slovakia, where men more often mentioned relocation difficulties.
4. Job-seeking activity: In Slovakia, men tend to invest less effort in actively seeking jobs, preferring to wait for higher-paying positions. In contrast, women are more proactive in searching for jobs that meet their needs, with flexibility and worklife balance being important considerations for them.

4-2-Estimated P-Values, Coefficients, and Odds Ratios of Independent Variables

Table 2 presents the results of logistic regression. Accordingly, weak professional connections increase the likelihood that respondents perceive a language barrier in reaching their ideal job ($\beta = 0.657$; OR = 1.929; $p < 0.05$). This supports the role of networking in developing professional communication self-confidence. In contrast, opportunities for

international experience (studying, working abroad, exchange programs) reduce the perception of language barriers ($\beta = -0.327$; OR = 0.721; $p < 0.05$), as foreign experience increases confidence in language use. According to the model, language competence is not only a skill but also a self-assessment shaped by social and experiential factors.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Results for Language Barriers

Variable	Coefficient	P-value	Odds Ratio
Constant	0.128	0.453	1.137
Professional Connections	0.657	0.002	1.929
Foreign Experience Opportunities	-0.327	0.041	0.721

Table 3 presents the significance levels of the independent variables in the logistic regression. Professional networks are strongly associated with perceptions of language barriers ($p = 0.002$), whereas the effect of international experience opportunities is weaker but still significant ($p = 0.041$).

Table 3. Logistic Regression Significance

Variable	Coefficient Significance
Professional Connections	Highly Significant ($p = 0.002$)
Foreign Experience Opportunities	Marginally Significant ($p = 0.041$)

Based on the results of the model, respondents with a weaker professional network are almost twice as likely to perceive a lack of language competence as a barrier to job search ($\beta = 0.657$; OR = 1.929). This suggests that such individuals lack not only relational capital but also the social and professional environment that would facilitate their language development and confidence.

In contrast, international experience increases the flexibility of language use, reducing the perception of language barriers ($\beta = -0.327$; OR = 0.721), strengthening language skills and self-confidence. Although the significance level of the effect is marginal, the result underscores the labor market value and competence-developing role of international opportunities.

Figure 3 presents a scatterplot of respondents' professional networks, opportunities for international experience, and perceptions of language barriers when searching for a job. Each dot represents a respondent, and the color indicates whether they perceived a language barrier (orange = yes, blue = no). The x-axis shows professional connections—a higher value indicates a weaker network—and the y-axis shows the availability of international opportunities, where higher values indicate greater opportunities.

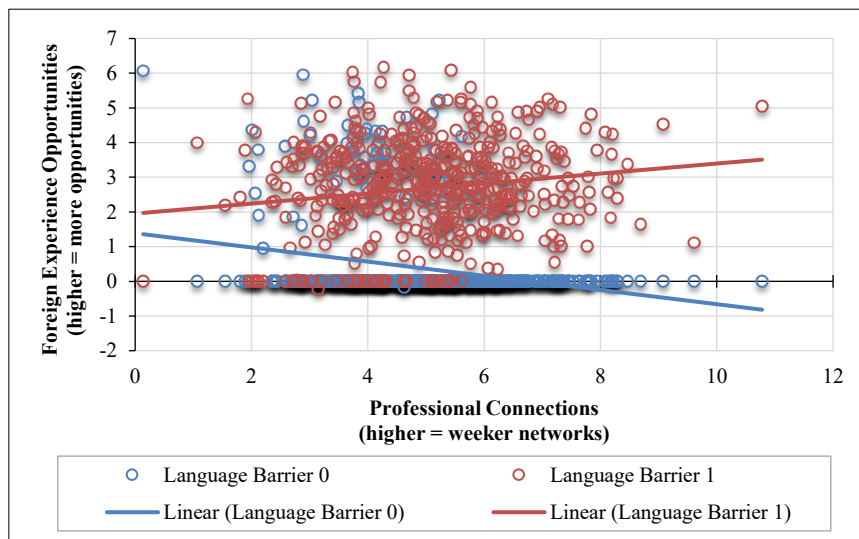


Figure 3. Networking opportunities by language barriers

The figure clearly shows that those with a weak professional network ($x > 5$) more often perceive a lack of language skills as a barrier. This result also confirmed the results of the logistic regression model, in which weaker connections were significantly associated with the perception of language barriers (OR = 1.929).

In contrast, those with higher international opportunities (upper region of the y-axis) have more blue dots, indicating that they perceive language barriers less. This result is consistent with the negative regression coefficient of the analysis

($\beta = -0.327$; OR = 0.721), which suggests that international opportunities improve language confidence. The figure also visually shows that both a lack of professional connections and lack of international experience contribute to the appearance of language barriers.

4-3-Cluster Groups Based on Key Variables

Based on cluster analysis, perceived problems with language skills, professional networks and international mobility opportunities differed significantly across groups (Tables 4 and 5). The respondents were classified into three distinct clusters, each of which faced different challenges.

Table 4. Foreign Experience Satisfaction

Cluster	Foreign Experience Satisfaction (mean)
Cluster 0	8.5
Cluster 1	4.9
Cluster 2	2.71

Members of Cluster 0 did not perceive any major obstacles in terms of language competence or professional network. In their case, the average satisfaction with international work experience opportunities was 8.5 (on a scale of 10), which is significantly higher than that of any other group (see Table 4).

Furthermore, members of this group mostly disagree with the statement that their professional networks or language skills are weak, suggesting that they are well-embedded, confident respondents.

Cluster 1, in contrast, is the most disadvantaged group. They perceive significant language and networking difficulties, which is also supported by the fact that their average satisfaction with international opportunities is 4.9, while their professional connections are rated as weak at 3.06 (Table 5). This group struggles the most with its labor market success.

Table 5. Professional Connections Dissatisfaction

Cluster	Professional Connections Dissatisfaction (mean)
Cluster 0	1.46
Cluster 1	3.6
Cluster 2	1.57

The members of Cluster 2 are in transition: they perceive fewer but still significant obstacles. Their satisfaction with international experiences was only 2.71, the lowest among all clusters. Although their professional connections are weaker, their situation is not as dire as that of Cluster 1.

PCA was used to further refine the differences between the three clusters. The first principal component captures satisfaction with specific professional networks and opportunities to gain international experience, while the second component mainly captures difficulties related to language skills. Based on the scatterplot shown in Figure 4, Cluster 1, which reports the most severe obstacles, is strongly separated from clusters 0 and 2. Members of clusters 0 and 2 perceive much less difficulty in finding a job.

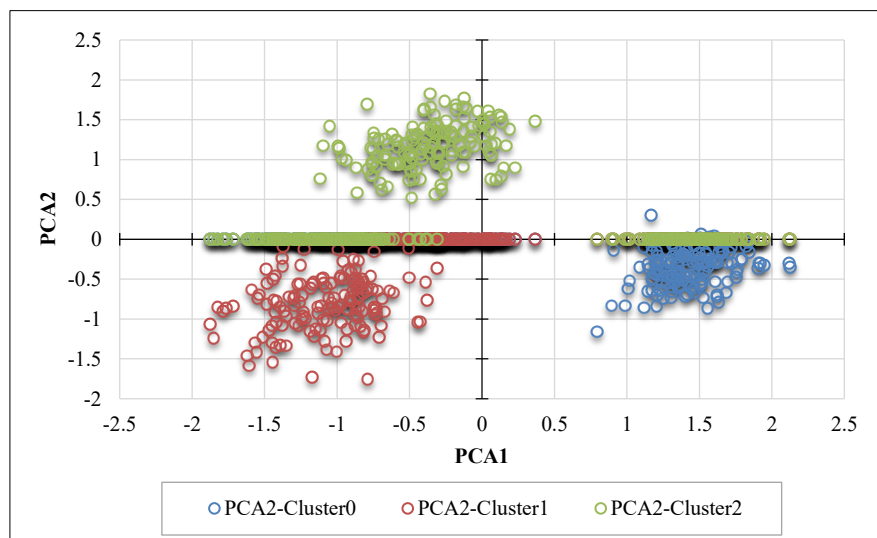


Figure 4. PCA Scatter Plot of Foreign Experience Satisfaction and Professional Connections Dissatisfaction

The results provide a detailed picture of how respondents deal with labor market challenges, especially problems related to language barriers, network capital, and mobility. Significant gender differences also emerge between the countries studied. In several countries, men prefer higher salaries, whereas women value worklife balance. The research highlighted that the two genders face different obstacles when searching for the ideal job.

These differences also vary by country, depending on cultural and economic factors. In Hungary and Slovakia, in particular, women reported severe language difficulties, whereas men reported a lack of professional connections and insufficient pay. The cluster analysis reveals that some groups face relatively few obstacles, whereas others face serious difficulties in several areas.

The results emphasize the importance of targeting policy measures. In the case of women, developing language skills and expanding their network would be an important task, for example through women's mentoring programs or flexible transportation options that facilitate professional integration. Overall, well-established professional relationships and international experience can significantly reduce the perception of language barriers. Accordingly, programs that support networking and international mobility can effectively influence labor market success.

4-4- Cluster Groups Based on the Gender vs. Language Skills Barrier

The cluster analysis based on the responses from the V4 countries examines the relationship between gender and perceived language skill barriers. First, data preprocessing was performed by identifying the relevant variables. Two of the most important variables identified were gender and language skill barrier. The gender variable is expressed numerically. Reaction to the language skills barrier were measured on a four-point Likert scale, starting from 1 - "strongly disagree" – indicating no language barrier - up to 4 - "strongly agree" - indicating a high perceived barrier in this respect. Empty values were purged for each variable to obtain a complete dataset.

The above variables were standardized using the z-score method to place them on equal footing for clustering; hence, gender and language have the same weight. We perform three-cluster K-means clustering. K-means clustering is an unsupervised learning method in which data fall into distinct groups based on similarities. This is because it iteratively assigns individuals to the nearest cluster and then performs a recalculation of centroids until it returns stable clusters.

The cluster interpretation was performed according to the averages of the two barriers presented in Table 6. Cluster 0 comprises people with medium gender values and higher perceived barriers to language. Cluster 1 mostly comprises people with smaller values for gender, possibly men, with medium barriers to language, whereas Cluster 2 includes people with the opposite profile: with a high value of gender, probably women, who reported minimal barriers in respect to language. A scatterplot displaying the distribution of the individuals across the three clusters illustrates how the clustering results interact with gender and the perception of language barriers.

Table 6. Distribution of the sample

Cluster	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Cluster 0	Gender	3.00	0.09	2	4
	Language Skills Barrier	3.37	0.48	3	4
Cluster 1	Gender	1.00	0.14	0	2
	Language Skills Barrier	2.16	1.2	1	4
Cluster 2	Gender	3.00	0.11	2	4
	Language Skills Barrier	1.42	0.49	1	2

5- Discussion

The hypotheses elaborated in this research address the following question: do gender-related differences exist in labor market barriers in the V4 countries? The first hypothesis, H1, assumes that women are more likely to perceive language skills as insufficient compared to men when seeking an optimal workplace. This hypothesis has been confirmed for the most part. The data provide grounds to believe that women, especially in Hungary and Slovakia, face much more serious problems related to language proficiency than men. H2: Men have more solid professional networks compared to women and therefore face lower chances of a language-related problem. This hypothesis was supported to some extent because men, in general, have more solid professional networks, although not invariably so. This leads to the full confirmation of H3, assuming that women face more considerable problems with mobility, especially in the case of Hungary and Slovakia, as they stated higher barriers to commuting and relocation. International experience was assumed in H4 to decrease barriers due to language, which, however, has proved only partly true. While opportunities for international exposure did mitigate the problem of language, it was much more pronounced among men than among women; hence, gender-specific strategies were needed in policy development. The confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses is summarized in Table 7, which presents a concise overview of the evaluation based on the research findings.

Table 7. Summary of the Hypothesis

No.	Purpose	Methods	Results	Status	Conclusion
H1	Assess the extent to which women in the V4 category are considering a lack of sufficient language skills as a factor preventing their employment.	Chi-square tests, logistic regression, and cluster analysis using SPSS Statistics	In particular, women from Hungary and Slovakia showed a rather high language barrier compared to men.	Partly confirmed	The major barrier to their participation is language. Targeted interventions—concrete language training—will be very important for these countries to achieve better labor market outcomes.
H2	Assess whether men in V4 countries have closer professional networks and therefore lower language-related job search barriers.		Men generally reported stronger professional networks, serving to counteract language-related barriers.	Partly confirmed	Although the impact varied from region to region, stronger professional networks among men helped overcome the language barrier. The need is to emphasize policies to strengthen women's professional networks.
H3	Whether women workers in the V4 countries suffer from serious labor market mobility problems, with the main focus on Hungary and Slovakia.		Women in Hungary and Slovakia have a disadvantage in commuting and relocation compared with other countries and thus have limited job opportunities.	Hypothesis confirmed	The limited mobility of women significantly reduces their labor market options, especially in Hungary and Slovakia. Part of the problem could be alleviated by flexible working or better transportation.
H4	Test whether international experience diminishes language barriers more significantly for females.		International experience lowers the language barrier for both sexes, but this effect is stronger in males.	Partly confirmed	International exposure brings improvements that help overcome linguistic deficiencies, especially among men. However, extending opportunities for international experience among women will contribute to a reduction in gender gaps regarding job search barriers.

These findings do not fully support H1: gender vs. language skill barrier. From the analysis, it was established that Cluster 2 female participants perceived the barrier of language skills to be lesser, having the lowest average language barrier of 1.42. However, males in Cluster 1 have higher levels of language barriers, averaging 2.16, which contradicts the original hypothesis that women perceive greater barriers in language.

The findings are consistent with the related literature on inequalities in the job market; for example, works like those of Blau [56] and van Hoof et al. [17] provide evidence that, indeed, the intensity of job search effort is the determinant of finding employment. However, this paper contributes to the literature by means of a gender-based analysis, while those from McDonald et al. [31] found an asymmetric distribution of social capital and networking possibilities, more often oriented toward men. This result also confirms the arguments of Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen [38], who found that structural obstacles, like language and mobility problems, affect women more severely. This paper contributes to the empirical evidence in the context of the V4 group of countries in terms of the fact that language proficiency and professional networks matter. Set against studies investigating more developed labor markets, such as Fiaz & Qureshi [57] for the case of Western Europe, V4 represents a different set of socioeconomic and historical challenges that make these barriers even greater and require especially targeted interventions.

This paper thus provides strong evidence of the urgent need for targeted interventions to fight gender-specific barriers in the labor market. It follows from the results that deficiencies in language skills, professional networks, and mobility pose more serious problems for women than for men in the V4 countries, while the existing labor market policies did not provide sufficient remedies to overcome these barriers. The powerful impact of international experience in bridging the gap in overcoming language barriers (H4) underlines, in particular, the need to support cross-border jobs and learning opportunities, especially for women. Furthermore, the fact that men generally reported better professional networks supports a gendered division in social capital at the labor market level, which may consolidate existing gender inequalities. The data support arguments that more gender-sensitive policies are required, especially those that target developing women's language skills and professional networks. It also appears that issues of mobility are a high concern for women, especially in Hungary and Slovakia. Flexible work arrangements or better transportation options are being implemented to enhance women's labor market opportunities. Embedding the perspective of the circular economy into the analysis of results enriches it further. Part of these gender-related labor market obstacles, such as not mastering the language, difficulties in getting around, or lack of professional contact networks, can be counterbalanced within the framework of these principles that improve sharing, networking, and equal opportunities. Another point is that the circular economy perspective might give room to reframe labor market policy targets toward more sustainable and inclusive models, thus addressing the very roots of gender inequality.

Therefore, any future research and policy effort should focus on designing and advancing gender-specific solutions to combat labor market barriers in the V4 countries. In addition, because obstacles to language, professional networks, or mobility are different for women, intervention at a targeted level is required to overcome this imbalance. Programs that promote women's participation in international exchange programs or internships can effectively reduce the barriers to insufficient language proficiency. All the steps taken or proposed with a view to facilitating women in professional networking—whether through mentorship programs or networking—are very close to my heart. Another possible solution to this mobility problem is the growth of hybrid and remote work models. It is high time that employers are encouraged to allow flexibility in work to give women a fair opportunity. Further investigation can also be conducted on how other socioeconomic factors, such as age or education, interact with gender-based impediments to the labor market to provide more detailed information about the V4 context.

6- Conclusion

The present research paper aims to identify gender inequalities in labor market barriers across the V4 countries, with a particular focus on how the development of language skills, professional networks, and mobility influence job-seeking processes. This argument is based on the concept of a circular society, which requires inclusion, sharing, and networking policies to overcome gender-related hurdles in the labor market. According to the principles of a circular society, the labor market structure can be designed to provide equal opportunities for all genders, especially in regions like Hungary and Slovakia, where significant challenges exist.

Apart from these linguistic and mobility barriers, women also face more serious problems than men, particularly in Hungary and Slovakia. Professional networks are stronger for men, who are able to overcome difficulties in finding work through such networks. International experience provides better opportunities for diminishing the role of linguistic barriers for men and women, although the impact is far stronger among men.

In addition, the findings imply a more responsive gender-oriented approach to labor market policy. Particular recommendations concern improved access to linguistic education and professional networks for women in the V4 countries. Another avenue could be flexible work arrangements as a tool to overcome the problem of female mobility. Future policy design should focus on equal labor market opportunities by addressing the root structural causes of such gender-based disparities.

7- Declarations

7-1-Author Contributions

Conceptualization, J.P., S.Z.M.S.Z., and S.Z.J.; methodology, B.G.K.; software, B.G.K.; validation, D.P.S., N.G.Y., and L.D.D.; formal analysis, S.Z.M.S.Z., J.P., S.Z.J., N.G.Y., L.D.D., and D.P.S.; investigation, J.P. and L.D.D.; resources, J.P., S.Z.J., and S.Z.M.S.Z.; data curation, B.G.K.; writing—original draft preparation, J.P., S.Z.M.S.Z., S.Z.J., N.G.Y., D.P.S., B.G.K., L.D.D.; writing—review and editing, J.P., S.Z.M.S.Z., S.Z.J., N.G.Y., D.P.S., B.G.K., and L.D.D.; visualization, J.P., S.Z.M.S.Z., S.Z.J., N.G.Y., D.P.S., B.G.K., and L.D.D.; supervision, J.P.; project administration, J.P., S.Z.M.S.Z., S.Z.J., N.G.Y., D.P.S., B.G.K., and L.D.D.; funding acquisition, L.D.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

7-2-Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

7-3-Funding

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7-4-Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

7-5-Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

7-6-Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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