

An evaluation of the existence and persistence of the gender pay gap and gendered jobs in a large UK retail company

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Introduction and context

This developmental paper reports on the first phase of a proposed three phase project commissioned by a large UK retailer (to be known as TRO) to provide a critical assessment of their workforce employment profile, as well as an evaluation of any possible factors that may be linked to the gender pay gap across the organisation. As per the requirement of the Equality Act 2010 (Gender pay gap Information) Regulations 2017, organisations with over 250 employees are mandated to report annually on their gender pay gap in the UK. This preliminary paper is based on the data provided by TRO, which gave access to individual employment data from 2017 to 2021¹.

While the research primarily supports the management's commitment to exploring issues related to the gender pay gap and the aim of taking effective actions to support employees across different parts of the business, we challenge the oft heard TRO management mantra of 'we don't have a gender pay gap, we have gendered jobs'. While we concur that traditional explanations for the gender pay gap such as human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and preference theory (Hakim, 2000) play a part in explaining why people do the jobs they do, we argue there are more significant social psychological behavioural aspects which contribute to the existence and persistence of gendered jobs and ultimately perpetuate the gender pay gap. The research aims to stimulate further dialogue both within the organisation and the wider academic community on future directions to address an ever-changing workforce, especially in an organisation with a large majority of female employees (78% female employees in 2021).

As we are primarily taking an empirical evidence-based approach the structure of the paper is as follows: we begin with an overview of the theoretical frameworks, then the methodology used to evaluate the datasets made available to us; then we discuss the findings and their implications before moving into theoretical development leading to recommendations for future practice.

¹ Note while the data includes periods where retailing was restricted as a result of Covid lockdowns, TRO was in the sector classed as 'essential retail'.

Theoretical framework

Organisations with more than 250 employees are required by the UK Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 to report annually on their gender pay gap in the UK. While the gender pay gap is defined as differences in pay between men and women in an organisational workforce, it is overly simplistic to assume that the existence of a gender pay gap is as a result of unfair treatment resulting in unequal pay. The reality is that different job roles are dominated by different genders attracting different levels of market-based pay this giving the impression of a gender pay gap based purely on a top-level snapshot analysis. This project explores the micro and macro factors that influence pay structure and occupational development within TRO. Men and women may make different choices as to their level of engagement in the workforce; there may be different perceptions as to what are considered to be 'appropriate' jobs for men and women. Therefore, it is important to look beyond the organisation to examine why people do the jobs they do, what factors influence their choices, indeed to what extent do they have choices; by looking 'under the surface' gives the opportunity to address the real issues of gendered jobs and the resultant pay gap.

Traditionally, the gender pay gap and issue of gendered jobs have been explained as a result of women choosing to restrict their involvement in the labour market (Hakim, 2000) or as a result of horizontal and vertical job segregation. Interventions to alleviate the gender pay gap, including better labour market attributes of women, training, job flexibility, and continuous work experience, have been offered by many organisations (Tharenou, 2012); however the gender pay gap remains a pervasive and insidious issue across many countries (Lips, 2012). In the UK alone, full-time women workers earned 89.8 % of comparable men's hourly earnings; among all workers, women's earnings were 86.7 % of men's in 2023 (Office for National Statistics, 2023) although this is further broken down as there being a pay gap of 7.7% between men and women in full-time employment and -3.3% for part-time employees. Literature highlights that there is a lack of awareness of the pay gap, and how organisations can address the issues emerged from gender pay imbalance (Lips, 2013; Tharenou, 2012).

On further investigation, the argument posited by Lips (2012) is twofold – she holds that there is an over reliance on using human capital theory as an explanation of the key determinants of the gender pay gap as it masks gender inequality which is supported by Tharenau (2012:201) who argues that 'simply because they are not men, women are paid less'. In rejecting human capital theory as an explanation, Lips (2012) suggests social psychological and behavioural influences have a much greater impact than credited for with Tharenau (2012:201) adding 'gender stereotypes cause the allocation of particular work roles to men and women'. Tabassum and Nayak (2021) in their comprehensive literature review on gender stereotyping further explain the behavioural aspects which help create and reinforce gender stereotyping as emanating primarily from family influences, social conditioning, physical and demographic characteristics, culture, education, among others however one pertinent area of categorisation is that of 'perceived threat to self-esteem' which plays a significant role in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and is potentially one of the most difficult to address.

Methodology

The scope of the research was to move away from a top-level snapshot analysis into a critical assessment of the macro and micro factors influence pay structure and occupational development within TRO. While men and women may make different choices regarding their level of engagement in the workforce, this research aimed to assess the demographic characteristics of the workforce, gender composition, and various employment profiles across business units. The study was supported by the analysis of data shared by TRO, which included workforce planning information. The data were scientifically analysed to identify the presence of gendered job roles by using gender, age, job role, and educational level to identify trends and patterns on gender pay gap.

The research was initiated in 2017 with the purpose of assisting management in explaining the existence of gendered jobs and providing a feasibility assessment of the organisation's approach to gender pay and occupational development. The scope of the research was to provide the organisation with a critical tool to inform future practices and make informed decisions on how to address any issues of gendered jobs and the resultant pay gap. Evidence suggests that cultural and societal attitudes play a significant role in shaping existing gender stereotypes, resulting in differential abilities being attributed to men and women employees, and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles. These attitudes can develop in various ways, including local communities, media, gender segregation of occupations, education, and lifestyle choices. By commissioning this project, TRO demonstrated its desire to examine closely the gender-linked effects and social psychological phenomena and behaviours that may influence current/future organisational practices.

Findings and analysis

Data analysis information

Gender pay gaps means measuring the difference in average men's and women's hourly pay as a percentage of the average men's hourly pay. The median gender pay gap measures the difference between the median men's and women's hourly pay as a percentage of median men's hourly pay. In this analysis, we use the mean and the median to measure gender pay gaps; each of them produces different results. The median hourly rate is not affected by extreme values, such as the rates of very low and very high earners. The mean is also important as women are disproportionately more than men in TRO.

The difference between gender pay gap and unequal pay is another important dimension. As set out in the [Equality Act 2010](#), men and women in the same employment performing equal work must receive equal pay. The gender pay gap might inform about men's and women's hourly pay; any statistical measures though can be affected by a range of factors, including the different number of men and women across jobs. In this sense, gender pay gap is different from unequal pay, which implies that men and women do not receive the same pay for doing work of equal value. Unequal pay for equal work constitutes unlawful pay discrimination.

Further to that, the data consisted of 232,978 individual observations between 2017 and 2021. For the descriptive analysis of the gender pay gap, we only excluded observations without a valid date of birth (9 observations).

Given that hourly pay rate data is right skewed, the mean hourly rate and subsequently the gender pay gap are affected by the extreme upper values and as such they are overestimated. In the regression analysis, the lower and upper 1% of hourly pay rates are excluded and working age employees (16-64 years) are included in the analysis. The natural log of hourly pay rate is used to reduce the skewness in the data. In this way, the regression analysis becomes closer to the mean effects.

Gender composition analysis

The nature of the work carried out by employees at TRO varies widely. Therefore, carrying out analysis at the organisation level may mask nuances of the gender pay gap that relate to employee-specific and job-specific characteristics. For this reason, throughout this paper, separate analyses are carried out for each of the four Business Units within the TRO organisation. Each Business Unit has a different focus: (1) *Stores*, (2) *Support Office*, (3) *Logistics Supply Chain*, and (4) *Stores Field Support & Area Teams*. Later in the paper, the characteristics of employees in each of these units will be discussed. Finally, the gender pay gap will be examined for various subgroups defined by these characteristics and this will help to understand why the gender pay gap is different when each Business Unit is examined separately. This breakdown illustrates an accurate assessment on individual business unit performance and indicate areas for improvement.

Gender Composition and the Gender pay gap

*****Please see Appendices for Figures*****

Figure 3 presents the gender composition of the entire the TRO organisation for each year from 2017-2021. The latest wave of data for 2021 indicates that 22% of TRO employees were male while 78% were female. There has been an approximately stable 22%-78% male-female split since 2017.

Figure 1 presents the mean gender pay gap over the years examined. Although males were paid more than females (on average) in every year examined, the mean gender pay gap has steadily decreased every year. The latest data for 2021 indicate that females were, on average, paid 18.12% less than males against the national mean gender pay gap of 14.9% in 2021. Therefore, the mean gender pay gap in the TRO in 2021 is above the national average. Figure 1 also presents the nominal mean hourly wage in each year examined. Specifically, in 2021, males were paid £15.33 per hour (on average) while females were paid £12.55 per hour (on average).

Figure 2 presents the median gender pay gap over the years examined. The gender pay gap is much smaller when this measure is used. This is because an examination of the median removes the large impact of extremely high and extremely low wages. The median gender pay gap has decreased from 5.53% in 2017 to 2.82% in 2021. This is almost identical to the median gender pay gap of 2.7% reported by the TRO (2021). As noted by the authors, this indicates that the median gender pay gap

in the organisation was well below the national average of 15.4%. Figure 2 displays the nominal median hourly wage in each year examined. This shows that the median wage for males in 2021 was £10.30 per hour, while the median wage for females was 10.01 per hour.

Figure 4 illustrates how the share of male and female employees in the TRO are spread across the wage distribution. The percentages for males sum to 22%, corresponding to the share of the organisation's employees who are male. The percentages for females sum to 78%, corresponding to the share of TRO employees who are female. It is striking that the largest proportion of male employees (7.88%) are in the highest paid quartile, while the smallest proportion of female employees (17.10%) are in the highest paid quartile. This indicates that there is a greater representation of males in the highest paid jobs as compared to the organisation as a whole.

Descriptive characteristics of employees

Table 1 presents key characteristics of employees in TRO between 2017-2021. There were records for 50,430 male employees at the entire organisation and 182,539 Female employees (at the time of the survey it includes seasonal staff and temporary workers). The mean age of male employees was 38.39 while the mean age of female employees was slightly older at 39.37. The largest proportion of both male and female employees fell in the 25-34 age group (28.88% for males; 23.06% for females). The majority of male employees were full-time (58.06%) while the majority of female employees were part-time (65.27%). A very small proportion of employees were on zero-hours contracts (1.71% for males; 2.22% for females). The majority of employees had >100 contracted hours (73.98% for males; 58.54% for females). There is close to an equal split of new and long-serving employees. Specifically, 50.61% of males and 56.89% of females have worked at the organisation for greater than 5 years.

Examining the specific Business Units, it is unsurprising to find that the vast majority of TRO employees were employed in the Stores Unit. However, the male-female differences are quite striking. Specifically, 60.73% of male employees compared with 90.25% of female employees worked in the Stores Unit. The Support Office Unit accounted for 15.88% of Males but only 6.44% of Females. The Logistics Supply Chain Unit accounted for 21.38% of males but only 2.27% of Females. Finally, the Stores Field Support & Area Teams Unit accounted for a very small proportion of employees (2.00% for Males; 1.04% for Females).

Key findings

The assessment of the mean gender pay gap across the organization suggests that the gap is higher than the national level, although there has been a slight decrease over time. However, it is important to examine this gap in the context of the various units within TRO, rather than at the organisational level. It is clear that any future efforts to address the gender pay gap must be informed by a detailed evaluation at the micro level, taking into account the unique characteristics of each business unit and demographic factors. In addition, a top-level strategy is necessary to demonstrate leadership commitment to addressing the gender pay gap in the long-term.

Firstly, there is a larger gender pay gap (24.14%) for longer-serving employees (5 years of service), compared with newer employees where a smaller gender pay gap (14.43%) identified. Gender has not

been seen as a barrier to affect pay structure; however, length of service seems to affect the level of pay across different business units. This could be explained by the type of employment (part-time vs full-time of employment), available career opportunities and personal commitment for promotion. Newer employees might be employed with different contractual requirements and/or with different expectations in terms of career promotion. Interestingly, the findings show that newer employees to the organisation have a lower mean wage when compared with their longer serving male and female colleagues. This is common across different organisations due to the evolving nature employment conditions and job requirements; however, pay structure amongst different subgroups should be constantly monitored to assess pay structure differences. Employees who have stayed with TRO for a considerable amount of time have a sound knowledge base of the company's culture, and its values; nevertheless, there is often high level of resistant to change and motivation to progress or/and self-development. This could affect the prospect of change, and perceptions about pay.

Secondly, the gender pay gap is larger for female employees, which is not surprising given that evidence suggests women are disproportionately affected by pay disparities. This highlights the urgent need for stronger action to address this issue and harness the valuable skills and talents of female employees. One contributing factor to the gap may be that female employees are more likely to work fewer hours due to family responsibilities or limited career opportunities. This trend is consistent across all four business units in the organisation. Secondly, the analysis indicates that male employees aged 45-54 earn higher wages on average, while those in younger age groups (less than 45 years old) earn lower wages than the base category of males aged 55 or older. It is possible that holding managerial or well-paid positions explains this discrepancy in pay. These findings emphasize the importance of taking a nuanced approach when addressing the gender pay gap and considering factors such as age and job title.

Thirdly, there are significant differences on pay and gender across the organisation. Looking at each Business Unit analysis, the findings shows that there is a largest gender pay gap in the stores field support and area team unit. This business unit is predominately female dominated with older employee, on average, across the entire organisation. This demonstrates the need to approach gender pay gap at unit level to assess what affects pay across each unit. For example, logistics supply chain unit has been seen to have the lowest gap (0.20%) compared with the stores field support and area team (26.27%). As highlighted before, this is the smallest percentage than the gender pay gap found across the entire organisation. Key differences includes the level of part-time employment, pay structure and gender with the logistics supply chain unit employing a high proportion of male employees. Higher proportion of male employees (higher than any other units) might also attribute to such an outcome. Evidence also suggests that gender pay gap is larger in older age groups. This is of high importance as there is a high proportion of older employees working for all four units. This shows that male-dominated business units differ from the female units.

Fourthly, part-time employment and other forms of contractual work contributes to pay gender gap. This is common across all part of the economy due to several internal and external factors. For example, in the logistics supply chain unit, 28% of the workforce are female employees. Most of these female employees are in part-time employment (77.16%), which mirrors the pattern for women across the entire organisation. There is a similar trend across other business units. This type of employment hampers career advancement especially for women. Full-time employment tends to

lead to more perceived job alternatives and increased job status and gender on career goal progress, ability development, and promotion speed.

Finally, male employees in managerial position earn 13.5% higher wages than those who are not. This can be justified because of the level of position in the organisation. However, there is a gap between male and female employees holding managerial positions. This discrepancy might be explained by the lack of female leadership roles across different business units. Analysis shows that gender inequality is not a compensation issue, but mostly a problem of unequal participation of female employees in higher paying positions and managerial jobs across all four business units.

Key Recommendations

Organisational level practices

To effectively address the gender pay gap, the organisation must take a multi-faceted approach focussing on behavioural change involving various operational, management, and policy actions. This includes developing policies, promoting staff development, managing workloads, improving communication, monitoring performance, and adopting wider employment practices. While publishing data is essential to meet legal requirements, it also serves as a crucial step towards demonstrating a strong commitment to addressing inequality.

To facilitate this process, it is crucial to enhance the behavioural and cognitive capacity of line managers and business unit leaders. By creating a safe and open environment for discussion, the focus should be on identifying potential barriers and organisational practices that indirectly contribute to inequality, rather than solely addressing the macro-level gender pay gap. The outcome of this initiative should be to recommend ideal, realistic, and minimum practices that management should consider at a strategic level, ensuring that all employees have the opportunity to progress in their roles. The result of this project demonstrates that a few ideal, realistic and minimum practices that the management should consider at strategic level:

- The gender pay gap should be integrated into the overall welfare and wellbeing agenda as a strategic dimension, rather than being approached as a single solution to managing employee welfare.
- It is important to acknowledge that the gender pay gap and gendered jobs are two interconnected, yet distinct issues that impact the workplace. The gender pay gap refers to the difference in earnings between men and women in the same position or occupation. It is influenced by a range of factors, including differences in work experience, education, and seniority, as well as discrimination and bias in hiring and promotion. Gendered jobs refer to the occupational segregation of men and women, where certain industries and roles are dominated by one gender. This can be due to a range of factors, including societal stereotypes, gender bias in hiring and promotion, and cultural expectations around gender roles. It is essential for organisations to adopt a comprehensive approach that addresses both the gender pay gap and gendered jobs, through measures such as pay transparency, unbiased recruitment and promotion practices, and efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and cultural expectations around gender roles. Such a comprehensive approach can lead to a more equitable and inclusive workplace that values and rewards the contributions of all employees, regardless of gender.

- Investing in career development and training opportunities for all employees, particularly women, can help increase the pool of qualified candidates for high-paying jobs and leadership roles.
- Undertake a review to identify best practices across all four units and areas for improvement to inform the integrated strategy. By leveraging the expertise and insights from across the organization, it is possible to develop a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the gender pay gap. Through this process, the organization can identify areas where bias and discrimination may be present, and develop targeted interventions to address them. By committing to an ongoing process of improvement, the organisation can make significant progress towards closing the gender pay gap.
- Review organisational policies on part-time employment, family support practices, flexibility and recruitment to examine whether any aspects of these policies/practices create barriers. Any action should be driven by specific principles emerged by the organisational strategy to inform any specific HR practices.
- Utilise staff survey and various forum to qualitative assess male and female employee intake into the issues around gender pay gap. This should include a comprehensive audit which includes consultation with staff across all four business units, different types of employee and length of service as they have the knowledge and high level of objectivity to assess properly workplace practices.
- Monitor key staff data to identify key areas of concerns and introduce initiatives. Regularly monitoring progress and adjusting strategies as needed is critical to ensuring that efforts to address the gender pay gap are effective. This includes regularly measuring and reporting on the gender pay gap and other key performance indicators.
- Take a nuanced approach when addressing the gender pay gap, considering factors such as age and job title. This can help identify specific areas where women may be disproportionately affected by pay disparities and inform targeted interventions.
- Consider the impact of length of service and type of employment (part-time vs full-time) on pay structure differences.

Business unit level practices

- The study has profoundly identified significant differences between each business unit when assessing individual employment data. This demonstrates the need for a business unit level approach in assessing current and future issues around gender pay gap.
- Enable each business unit to undertake a full review of employee practices and activities with the scope to address the lack of female leadership roles. This can be done through promoting diversity and inclusivity in leadership positions, mentoring and sponsoring programmes, and addressing systemic barriers to women's career advancements.
- Employee self-help resources: Incorporate a tool whether direct and indirect issues linked to gender pay gap or/and gender jobs are discussed at appraisal level. This offers a

personalised approach to the issues and foster effective communication between employees and line managers. Performance practices should give managers the confidence to tackle issues directly and isolate performance issues from adjustments.

- Monitor pay structure amongst different subgroups regularly to ensure that pay disparities are addressed in a timely manner. Regularly reviewing and adjusting pay structures to ensure they are fair and equitable can help reduce the gender pay gap. This includes addressing discrepancies in pay for employees with similar qualifications and experience.
- Review strategy on how different age groups are supported across the four business units and assess whether age and length of service are primary factors for specific issues around gender representation.
- Continue the work on female leadership representation and ensure more female employees are encouraged to consider leadership internal opportunities. This can involve a range of initiatives, including providing mentorship and sponsorship programs to support the career development of women, offering leadership training and development opportunities, and creating targeted recruitment programs to identify and attract qualified female candidates. Additionally, it may be necessary to review and revise existing policies and practices to remove any systemic barriers that may be preventing women from accessing leadership roles. By taking a proactive and sustained approach to promoting female leadership, organizations can help to create a more diverse and inclusive leadership team that is better equipped to meet the challenges of today's rapidly changing business environment.
- Address the impact of part-time employment and other forms of contractual work on the gender pay gap. Encourage full-time employment as it tends to lead to more perceived job alternatives and increased job status.
- Improve job sharing and secondment strategy across the organisation to mobilise further the workforce across all four business units.
- Review the way family support policies are interpreted across all four business units and how individuals perceive these policies.
- Strengthen further key relationship with local school and colleges to encourage female representation across different parts of the organisations with specific target for each business unit.

Wider changes and practices

- Raise awareness about age discrimination and representation in the workplace by introducing new internal and external campaign on key issues working with local organisations.
- Develop a checklist for each business unit with emphasis on prevention and support utilised by line managers as part of the performance management.
- Encouraging flexible work arrangements such as job sharing, remote work, and flexible schedules can help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. This can lead to a decrease in the gender pay gap and increase gender equality in the workplace.

Concluding remarks

This paper highlights the progress that TRO has made in addressing the gender pay gap in recent years. However, there are still many areas where the company can improve its operations and business practices. One way to further advance the gender pay gap is to empower business units to review their employee practices and further assess individual roles and access to these roles. It is essential to monitor pay structures and ensure that all age groups are adequately supported. Addressing the impact of part-time employment and improving job sharing and secondment strategies can also help to mobilise the workforce and promote gender equity. By taking these steps, TRO can continue to make progress towards closing the gender pay gap and creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

While the above has provided an in-depth analysis of the current position within TRO in terms of the gendering of jobs and resulting gender pay gap; it also provides us with a clear overview of steps to be taken in order to progress. It is clear that the ideas of what is 'supposed' to be appropriate job roles for men and women play a significant part in the perpetuation of the issues and we argue for an increased focus on behavioural change both within the organisation and in their wider ongoing outreach activities in the community.

While this paper presents the current position within the organisation and advances our understanding of the instances of gendered jobs and their impact on the gender pay gap, more needs to be done to generate a stronger understanding of the influences impacting upon initial job choice and subsequent career pathways. We appreciate our findings here do not fully address the issues raised in the theoretical framework however these are to be the focus of further investigation via a survey developed using the job-demands resource model as a guiding theoretical framework.

We argue that men and women face different work-life/life-work demands that direct them to work in specific jobs, roles, and sectors. This follow up project aims to investigate why men and women choose the jobs they do, which individual factors influence these decisions, and to what extent do job characteristics and HR practices contribute to these choices. Through answering this question, we dig deeper not only in understanding the reasons why women work in certain areas, but how can organisations can design jobs and HR practices and policies that attract, retain, and accommodate engaged and committed women (and men) more readily into the workforce this going some way towards addressing the issue of gendered jobs and gender pay gaps.

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Appendices

Figure 1. Mean gender pay gap in TRO, 2017 - 2021

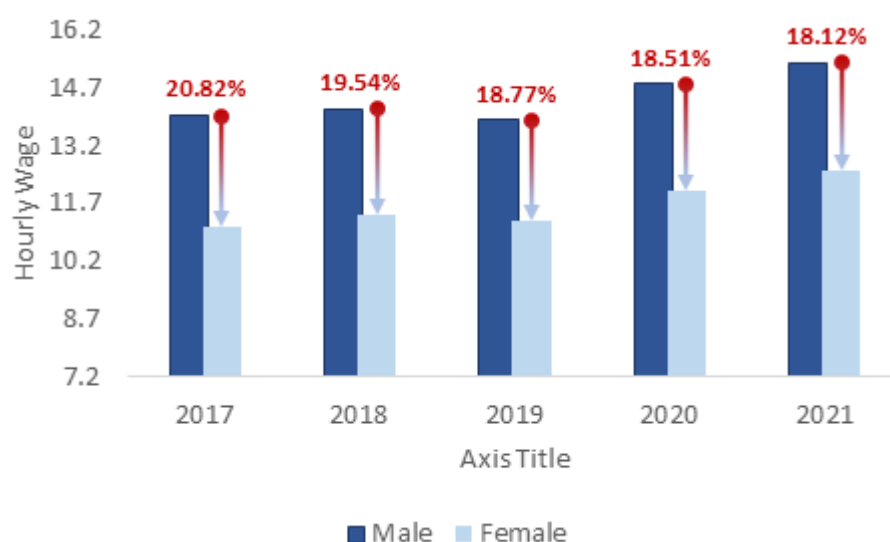


Figure 2. Median gender pay gap in TRO, 2017 - 2021

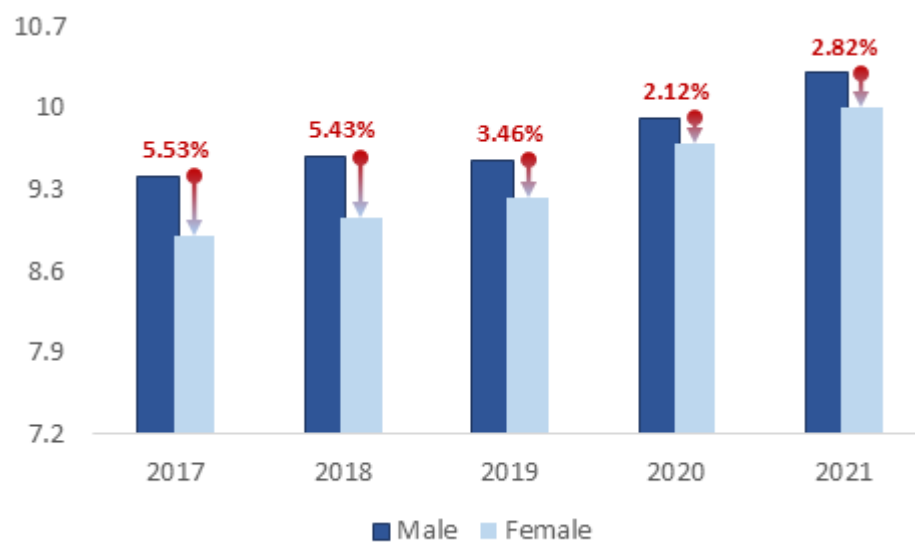


Figure 3. Gender composition in TRO, 2017 – 2021

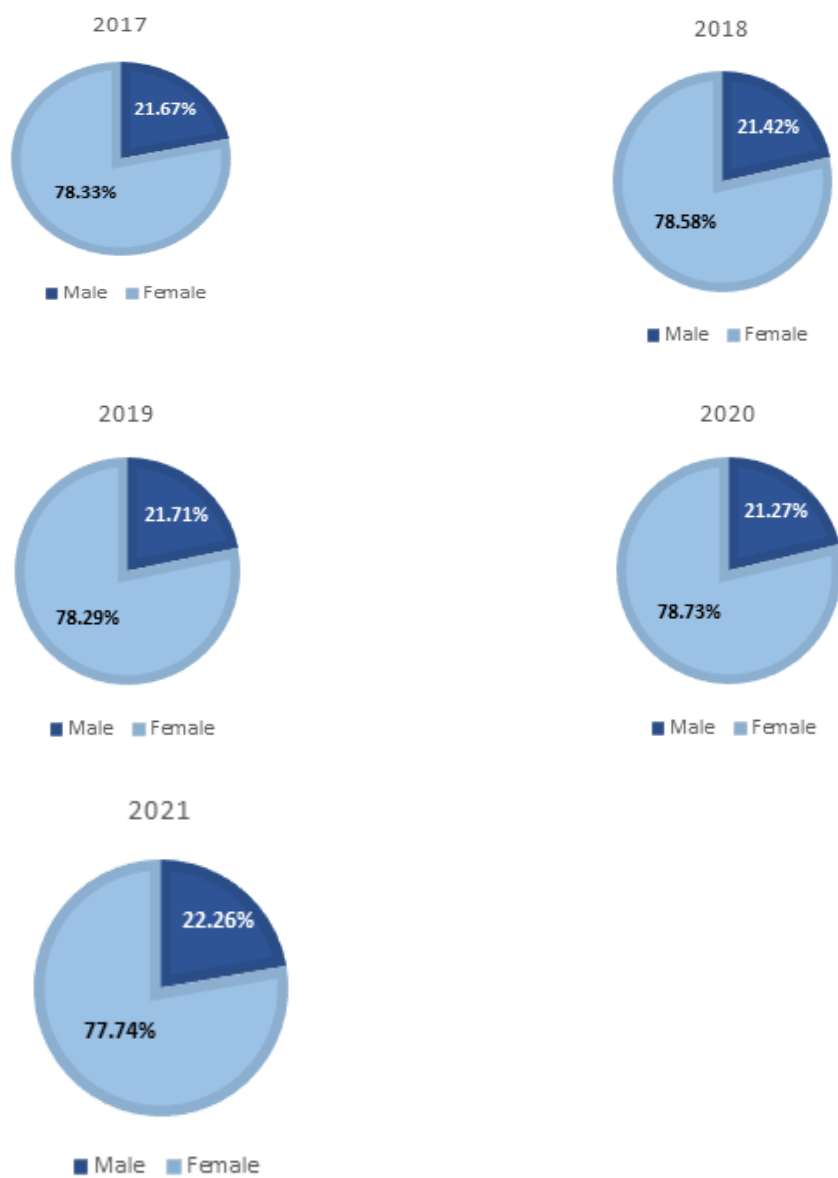
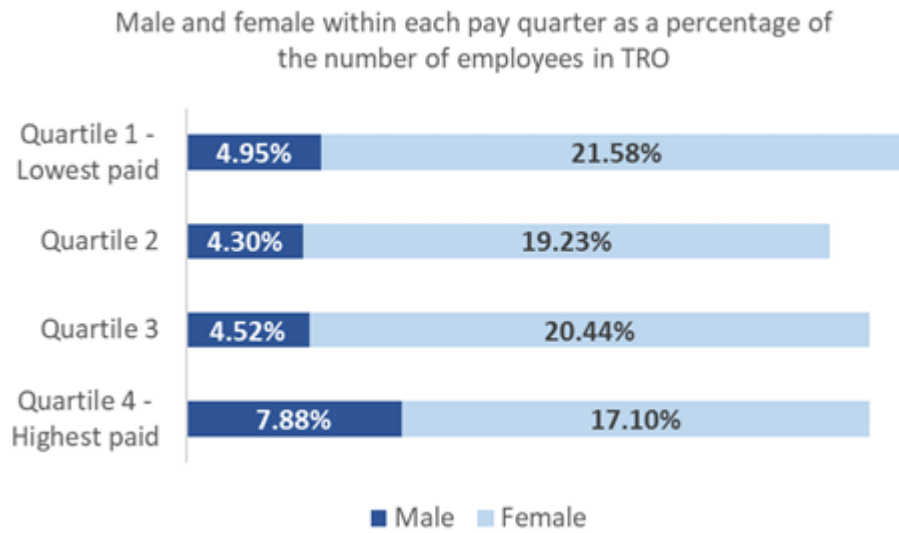


Figure 4. Pay Quarters in TRO, 2017 – 2021



Biog details

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Dr Stefanos Nachmias is the Head of the Department of Management, Nottingham Business School. Stefanos is an active researcher. His scholarship and research activities focus on Diversity and Equality, particularly issues related to equal pay and diversity management. He has collaborated in the production of three series of edited textbooks (with Dr Valerie Caven) on various aspects of diversity and equality in partnership with Palgrave Macmillan. Stefanos also has a keen interest in Human Resource Development and specifically in leadership development.

Dr Amairisa Kouki is an applied microeconomist. Her research is within Labour Economics, Family Economics and Gender Economics. She is particularly interested in workplace flexibility and how it affects female labour supply to evaluate initiatives and public policies aimed at influencing women's lifetime outcomes. She holds a PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London and has been a Senior Lecturer at Nottingham Business School since 2019.

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