

Gender Issues in a Company Operating in a Female-dominated Industry: Using an Audit as an Example

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tional or personal conflicts of interest.

Abstract: This study investigates the gender issues prevalent in Russian companies where more than 80% of the workforce is female. The objective is to describe the existence and nature of gender-related challenges in industries with predominantly female employees, as well as to identify their underlying causes and potential consequences. Data for the study were gathered from audit firms and a sample survey of auditor salaries in Russia, which were statistically analyzed. The findings indicate that companies do not implement modern strategies or practices to address gender imbalances. Specifically, gender issues such as the "glass ceiling," wage gap, and unequal career advancement opportunities persist in the auditing sector. Although these companies report progress on various gender-related indicators in their public relations materials, the actual implementation of policies remains insufficient. To address these challenges, the scope of gender-related disclosures in corporate reports must be expanded, and broader academic discussions should be initiated. A limitation of the study is that it focuses solely on one profession, and the results should be validated in other comparable occupations. Furthermore, salary evaluations were conducted using indirect methods due to the lack of sufficient disclosure.

Keywords: Auditing, gender imbalance, management, profession, salary.

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Asuntos de género en una empresa que opera en una industria feminizada: el caso de la auditoría como ejemplo

Resumen: esta investigación analiza los asuntos de género presentes en empresas rusas en las que más del 80 % de la fuerza laboral está compuesta por mujeres. El objetivo principal es describir la existencia y naturaleza de los desafíos relacionados con el género en sectores con una alta concentración de trabajadoras, así como identificar sus causas raíz y posibles consecuencias. La información del estudio se recopiló a partir de datos de firmas auditoras y de una encuesta muestral sobre los salarios de los equipos de auditoría en Rusia. Esta información fue posteriormente analizada estadísticamente. Los hallazgos revelan que las organizaciones no aplican estrategias ni prácticas modernas para abordar los desequilibrios de género. En particular, persisten fenómenos como el "techo de cristal", la brecha salarial y las desigualdades en las oportunidades de desarrollo profesional dentro del sector de la auditoría. Si bien las empresas reportan avances en diversos indicadores de género, comunicados en sus materiales de relaciones públicas, la implementación efectiva de políticas al respecto continúa siendo insuficiente. Para afrontar estos desafíos, es necesario ampliar el alcance de la información sobre género en los informes corporativos e impulsar un debate académico más amplio. Una limitación del presente estudio es su enfoque exclusivo en una sola profesión, por lo que se recomienda validar los resultados en otras ocupaciones comparables. Asimismo, las estimaciones salariales se realizaron mediante métodos indirectos, debido a la limitada disponibilidad de información pública.

Palabras clave: auditoría, desequilibrio de género, gestión, profesión, remuneración.

Questões de gênero em uma empresa que opera em um setor dominado por mulheres: usando uma auditoria como exemplo

Resumo: Este estudo investiga as questões de gênero presentes nas empresas russas, onde mais de 80% da força de trabalho é feminina. O objetivo é descrever a existência e a natureza dos desafios relacionados ao gênero em indústrias com funcionários predominantemente do sexo feminino, bem como identificar suas causas subjacentes e possíveis consequências. Os dados para o estudo foram coletados de empresas de auditoria e de uma amostra de dados salariais dos auditores na Rússia, que foram analisados estatisticamente. Os resultados indicam que as empresas não implementam estratégias ou práticas modernas para lidar com os desequilíbrios de gênero. Especificamente, questões de gênero, como o "teto de vidro", diferença salarial e oportunidades desiguais de progressão na carreira, persistem no setor de auditoria. Embora essas empresas relatem progresso em vários indicadores relacionados ao gênero em seus materiais institucionais de relações públicas, a implementação real das políticas permanece insuficiente. Para enfrentar esses desafios, o escopo das divulgações relacionadas ao gênero nos relatórios corporativos deve ser expandido e discussões acadêmicas mais amplas devem ser iniciadas. Uma limitação do estudo é que ele se concentra apenas em uma profissão, e os resultados devem ser validados em outras ocupações comparáveis. Além disso, as avaliações salariais foram realizadas com base em métodos indiretos devido à falta de divulgação suficiente.

Palavras-chave: auditoria, desequilíbrio de gênero, gestão, profissão, salário.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, call for all actors to implement policies and legislation to promote gender equality and empower women. However, government efforts alone are insufficient to achieve these goals. Every company operating within the economy must recognize its role in advancing gender equality. In recent years, gender equality issues have garnered significant attention from individual shareholders, institutional investors, and governments. Shareholders, regulators, and other stakeholders have increasingly acknowledged the importance of gender equality to the long-term sustainability of companies (Adams & Simnett, 2011). Consequently, there is growing demand for companies to disclose more information about governance, social, environmental, and sustainability matters, including non-financial information in their annual reports (Camilleri, 2018; Needles *et al.*, 2016; Velte & Stawinoga, 2017). These requirements extend to gender equality policies, prompting companies to be more transparent, which in turn influences the evolution of their gender equality practices. However, the issue of adequate disclosure remains a significant challenge.

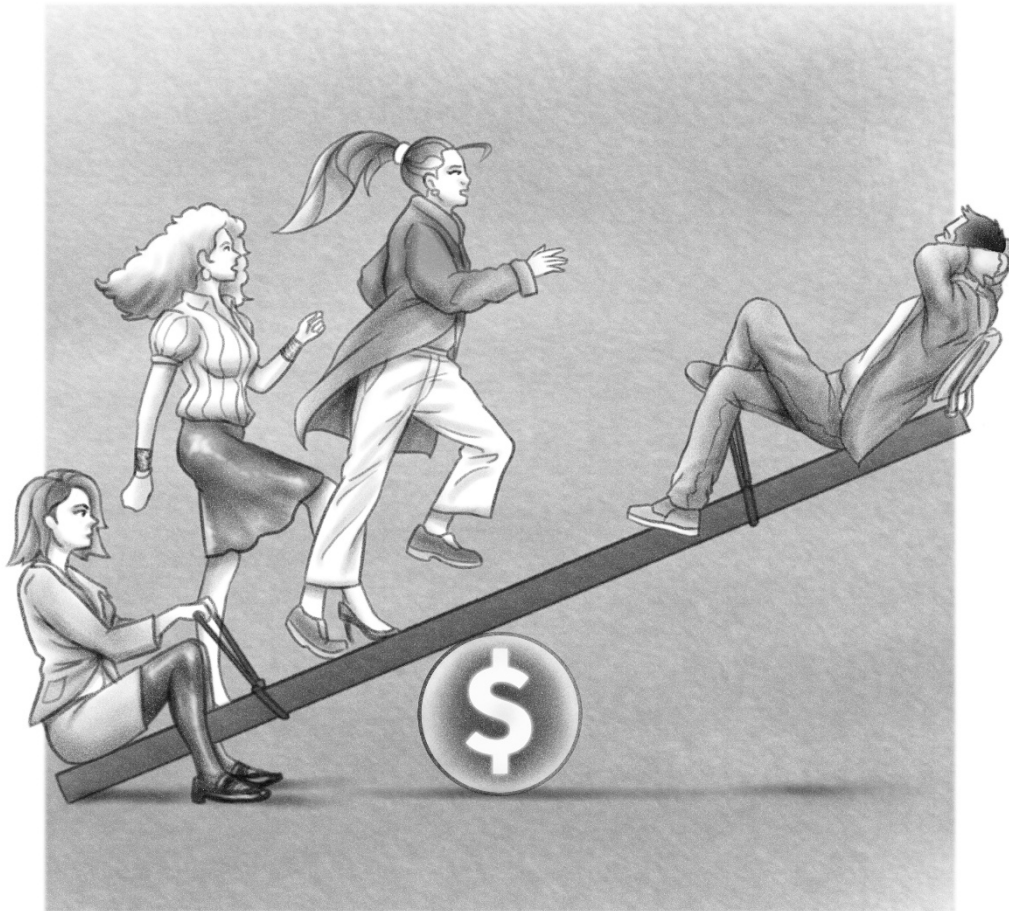
Key areas of focus in today's society include the representation of women in management positions and the gender pay gap (Ragins *et al.*, 1998). Yet, full resolution of these issues is still distant. According to U.S. economists, if the current trajectory of the gender pay gap persists, achieving pay equality will take at least another 80 years. In response, many countries have enacted legislation to address the issue. Gradual implementation of gender pay gap disclosures into business practices is underway, with half of the 38 OECD countries requiring private-sector companies to systematically report on the gender pay gap. Nine OECD countries have also introduced mandatory equal pay review procedures for private-sector employers.

Despite these efforts, practices vary significantly across countries, raising several concerns. Frey (2021) argues that equal pay auditing is the most comprehensive government strategy for reducing the gender pay gap through wage transparency. However, effective disclosure of wage-related information in company financial statements necessitates specific methodologies. Researchers have identified several challenges that must be addressed for this measure to become an effective tool in reducing gender disparities.

A detailed analysis of the studies we have conducted, as presented in our paper, highlights several key points. Information disclosure is only effective when it is made public. Legislation that mandates internal disclosure or audit requirements without public accountability does not yield meaningful results. For assessing the actual pay gap, disclosure should not be made across the entire organization, but rather to specific horizontal departments within the company.

One important issue that remains underexplored in current research is the evaluation of gender-related challenges outside the immediate context in which the company operates. The gender composition of organizations can differ significantly depending on their industry. For

example, in Russia, up to 70% of employees in the extractive industries are male, while in sectors such as education and accounting, up to 90% of employees are female. The lack of attention to these discrepancies not only hinders progress toward gender equality but also perpetuates—and, in some cases, worsens—gender imbalances. The greatest risk in this regard arises in sectors where women have traditionally dominated the workforce.



In the Russian economy, entire professional enclaves consist primarily of female employees. However, the insufficient focus on this issue within both business and academic circles exacerbates gender disparities in these professions and industries, manifesting in challenges such as the "glass ceiling," gender pay gaps, and work-life balance struggles (Kuschel, 2017). These issues have detrimental effects not only on women but also on the companies themselves. In the auditing sector, for instance, the persistence of such problems contributes to negative outcomes for the industry's sustainable development. Companies are facing an aging workforce, difficulty retaining

highly qualified professionals, and an overall decline in industry stability. As a result, organizations are increasingly focused on survival rather than addressing gender issues, which are seen as secondary.

Almost all previous research on the relationship between gender pay gaps and the disclosure of this information has focused on geographic regions or market segments, identified using quantitative criteria. Our study takes a novel approach by focusing on a sector of the economy characterized by a high concentration of female workers in firms. In such cases, companies may present formally positive indicators of gender equality policies, suggesting the absence of a "glass ceiling" or wage gap, even when this is not reflective of reality. For this study, we selected companies from the auditing sector in Russia, where the majority of employees are women. The diversity in company size within this sector—from very large to small—allows for a comprehensive assessment of various indicators that may influence the factors under investigation. Furthermore, the auditing sector is monitored by both government agencies and self-regulatory organizations, enabling verification of the information provided by companies.

The current gender composition in the auditing profession reveals a skewed gender pyramid, with women holding the lowest positions despite their significant representation, indicating the presence of gender-related challenges. Although the proportion of women in top management positions appears relatively high, this creates an illusion of progress and fosters a "gender trap"—a scenario where significant gender issues are overlooked by both society and the companies themselves.

The main hypothesis of this study is that Russian auditing firms caught in a "gender trap" fail to adequately address gender imbalances and are unable to rectify the situation. Even when a company employs a significant number of women, a formal gender balance on the board and in top management conceals the underlying imbalances. This scenario leads to dysfunctional management processes within the company, making gender issues—such as the pay gap—systemic, with no operational factors capable of positively impacting the resolution of these issues.

The purpose of this study is to examine the existence and nature of gender-related challenges in Russian companies operating in industries with predominantly female workforces, using the auditing industry as a case example. The objectives are: i) to analyze the gender composition of auditing firms in Russia and identify the key factors influencing the representation of women in the profession; ii) to assess the presence of common gender-related issues, including the "glass ceiling," the "skewed gender pyramid," and the gender pay gap; iii) to evaluate the consequences of neglecting gender issues for a firm's success in the auditing sector, using swot analysis; and iv) to assess how gender issues are reflected in corporate reports and whether the current level of disclosure can contribute to resolving these challenges.

This study is structured into an introduction, three main sections, and a conclusion. The first section reviews existing scientific research on gender issues at both international and Russian levels, emphasizing the importance and relevance of this topic for Russia. The second section provides an overview of the current state of the auditing industry as an example of a female-dominated sector in Russia, along with details of the research methodology and initial findings from the analysis of auditing firms. This section also includes a thorough examination of the wage gap as a key consequence of gender disparities in Russian auditing firms. The third part highlights the lack of open discussion on gender issues in Russian auditing firms.

Literature review

A comprehensive review of the literature reveals two distinct phases in the understanding of gender issues. In the early twentieth century, significant attention was devoted to examining gender differences in occupations and the causes of the "glass ceiling." Research on gender during this period focused on both formal mechanisms of occupational activity (such as employment, on-the-job training, and certification) and informal processes (such as team events), with the aim of understanding how accepted corporate models reinforced a culture of male homosociality within organizations.

Role models and social factors were a major focus (Coffey, 1993). In particular, it was found that models of job selection and "team spirit" often contained hidden characteristics that aligned more closely with male role models (Halford *et al.*, 1997). It is important to note that gender studies were conducted not only in academic settings but also in professional contexts. For example, in the auditing profession, major firms expressed serious concerns over their inability to retain women in top positions, leading to studies exploring the underlying reasons (Dalton *et al.*, 1997). These studies primarily focused on on-the-job training, mentoring, and the development of social and professional skills among employees, as well as their integration into the profession. The findings from these studies led to the development of targeted approaches to mentoring and social support for employees, which have proven particularly beneficial for women (Scandura & Viator, 1994).

Research on vocational training revealed that both informal and formal processes shaped perceptions of the social skills required for the job, which often reflected a male gender model (Anderson-Gough *et al.*, 2005). In Russia, gender studies are typically conducted by sociologists, and there is a notable absence of research on gender issues in the field of auditing (Soboleva & Zuga, 2020, 2022). Gender-related topics remain largely unaddressed in academic research on auditing.

In summary, the first phase of research not only established the existence of gender differences within organizations but also identified the barriers that create gender-based constraints, which persist independently of the stated gender goals and aspirations of the

professional community. This understanding has enabled the development of new social and organizational models for managing professional environments and introduced practices aimed at breaking through the "glass ceiling."

In the 21st century, research on gender issues has advanced to a new level, shifting from the general study of gender distribution to a more focused examination of women's career opportunities. This shift aims to optimize the potential of female employees within organizations while fostering a professional environment that enhances their work efficiency. The auditing profession provides a rich context for these inquiries. For instance, Akers and Eaton (2003) suggest that female auditors demonstrate more ethical behavior than their male counterparts. Similarly, Kaplan *et al.* (2009) found that female auditors are more likely than male auditors to report signs of financial fraud via anonymous channels. Gul *et al.* (2013) explored the influence of gender on audit outcomes and found that gender has a statistically significant effect on audit quality, facilitating more effective task allocation within firms. Research by Jones *et al.* (2019) also revealed that gender differences diminish as professional socialization increases.

Further studies have focused on the social psychotypes of women and the development of tailored interventions to support their professional well-being. Guthrie and Iii (2012) investigated the distinct causes of occupational burnout in women and men, finding that women often experience a sharp decline in personal performance due to burnout, while men report higher levels of depersonalization. Based on these findings, the authors proposed individualized interventions aimed at mitigating burnout for both genders. Such research plays a key role in unlocking the full potential of female professionals in the workplace.

In Asian countries, particularly in China, there has been greater focus on gender socialization. For example, research in Chinese auditing firms highlights a hidden male bias in top management decision-making literature, as male CEOs dominate corporate leadership, and the leadership qualities of female CEOs remain underexplored (Ho *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, a study of auditor training in Chinese accounting firms found that women and men prefer different approaches to professional development. The research also revealed that aspiring auditors in larger certified public accountant (CPA) firms tend to be more satisfied with their jobs compared to those in smaller firms, attributing this disparity to a lack of consideration for gender differences in internship programs (Liu & Ren, 2019).

In general, it can be said that Western gender studies have reached the second stage, moving beyond general issues of gender equality and the challenge of overcoming the "glass ceiling" to focus on the professional mentality of women in the workplace. This body of research helps to facilitate women's advancement in their careers and demonstrates how to effectively leverage gender-specific traits of women's work styles in corporate management. Unfortunately, Russia has not transitioned to this second stage of research. Solutions to gender-related issues in auditing have not become a focal point for professional researchers in the field.

Corporate efforts to address gender issues, particularly in corporate reporting, have emerged as a significant trend in the 21st century. The most controversial aspect is the approach to disclosing the gender pay gap, which is of particular relevance to our research. Proponents of disclosure argue that increasing the transparency of wage information for employees and consumers will pressure firms to address the pay gap. On the other hand, opponents contend that such measures are ineffective or inappropriate. For instance, Bennedsen *et al.* (2019) found that pay gap disclosure measures in Denmark successfully reduced the corporate pay gap, with women's earnings rising by two percentage points relative to men's. Meanwhile, Gulyas *et al.* (2021) examined Austria's 2011 Wage Transparency Act, which mandates companies above a certain size to publish internal reports on the gender pay gap. The researchers concluded that this measure had no significant effect on the wages of men and women, and the gender pay gap remained unchanged. It is important to note that, in this case, companies were not required to publicly disclose this information, leading some researchers to argue that public disclosure, rather than internal reporting, is essential for motivating firms to address the issue. This leads many researchers to believe that public relations are the most important tool to get companies to address the gender pay gap issue. For example, Mas (2017), after examining public sector disclosure policies in California and changes in gender pay inequality, shows that the highest paid city employees received lower wages after disclosure because the public was reluctant to pay exorbitant salaries.

Of particular interest to our research is the finding that media influence played a crucial role in capping high salaries and narrowing gender inequalities. Studies conducted in the United Kingdom further support the importance of wage transparency (Blundell, 2021; Duchini *et al.*, 2020). These studies found that requiring companies to publish job advertisements with salary information resulted in a reduction of the gender pay gap by 1.6 percentage points, primarily due to wage decreases among men, rather than changes in the composition of the workforce.

Disclosing information about wages not only promotes pay equity but also enhances the firm's image, making it more attractive to potential employees. Hedblom *et al.* (2019) found that companies that publicly disclose wage data experience an increase in job applications. This trend highlights the importance of transparency in attracting talent.

Disclosure is particularly crucial given the recent stagnation in gender equality progress. While earlier decades saw notable improvements, recent data shows a deceleration in key gender equality indicators. In some cases, progress has even stalled, suggesting that further advancements require substantial institutional and cultural change (England *et al.*, 2020).

Thus, the analysis of the studies consulted has shown that the resolution of gender equality issues in corporate governance should be achieved through targeted work by the company with its employees. In this case, the main task of companies is to become aware of the existence of gender issues and to understand what methods and tools should be used in the company to ensure the professional development of employees, taking into account their gender (Blau *et al.*, 2017).

On the other hand, current research shows that changes often occur when a company is forced to present its gender equality performance to the public. This is where public reports on corporate social responsibility play an important role. However, these reports must take into account the specifics of the information. For example, many studies show that general reporting of gender pay gaps without disaggregating this information by employment structure and company position is less effective than disclosing this information. So, it is obvious that researchers have different approaches to these questions. There are authors who believe that disclosure is not required by law. Another group of authors believes that only clear disclosure of information in accordance with applicable legal requirements can help promote equality. Our hypothesis is that disclosure by companies is a prerequisite for progress. Disclosure forces companies to actively implement progressive gender standards.

In our view, disclosure of information about the overall gender balance in the company is essential. We believe that a "gender trap" is created when the gender composition of the company has a pronounced female profile. When disclosing information to the public, the company will demonstrate a high level of gender balance: a high percentage of women on the board of directors and executive committees, low indicators of gender pay gaps. Such a situation of formal well-being leads to the neglect of gender issues within the company itself. To confirm the negative effects of the "gender trap," our study is based on an industry in which all companies are characterized by a high proportion of women in the total workforce.

Research methodology

There is currently a developed market for auditing services in the Russian Federation, where 2440 companies operate, 87% of which have been active for over seven years. As in many other countries, the Russian audit services market is divided into three segments: the largest firms, large firms, and smaller companies. The four largest firms in the market employ over 100 auditors each, with total staff ranging from 1,500 to 3,000. These firms were formerly affiliated with the international audit groups PWC, Deloitte, KPMG, and EY Global. Collectively, these four firms account for 45% of the Russian audit market's total revenues. The large firms, ranking in the top 50, employ at least 25 certified auditors and hold a 21% share of the market's revenue. Among these, three companies are particularly prominent: FBK (previously affiliated with Grant Thornton International), Unicon International (formerly with BDO), and FinExpertiza, a member of the FinExpertiza International Audit Group, originally headquartered in Moscow. However, in March 2022, all of these companies withdrew from their international audit and consulting groups, leading the Big Four firms to rebrand. The remaining smaller firms account for 34% of Russia's audit revenues.

In Russia, all auditors and auditing organizations must be members of the sole self-regulatory organization, the Audit Association "SRO AAS" (<https://sroaas.ru/>). To gain membership, auditors are required to pass professional examinations and have a minimum of three years of experience in

accounting, along with two years of auditing experience. The self-regulatory organization enforces strict requirements on auditing firms concerning their reputation, the number of certified auditors on staff, and the ownership structure—at least 50% of a firm's capital must be owned by certified auditors. Stricter regulations apply to firms auditing socially significant organizations. Audits in Russia are conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (ISA).

In order to assess the specifics of gender management in auditing in Russia, statistical data on the number of women and men working in the profession were studied and the gender profile of the profession and top management was compared.

It should be noted that there is currently no specific data collection on gender issues in business management within the auditing sector in Russia. Until 2010, professional associations regularly published statistical reports that included information on the gender and age distribution of auditors. However, this practice has since been discontinued. Consequently, the assessment of the gender structure of the profession was conducted using previously published retrospective data and a 35% sample survey of official data from the Register of Certified Public Auditors, which is available on the official website of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation (Ministry of Finance). This register, as of 2020, includes a total of 18,615 registered auditors in Russia.

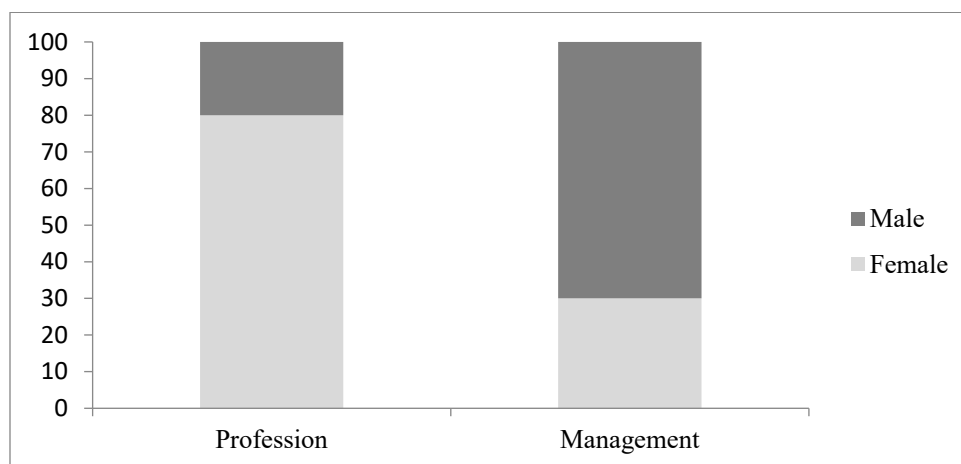
The research findings indicate that the gender structure of auditors in Russia is relatively stable, with a gradual increase in the share of female auditors, rising from 80% in 2008 to 82% in 2020. This gender composition is consistent across all Russian auditing firms, including those within the Big Four, as well as larger and smaller companies.

A comparison of the gender profiles of the auditing profession and top management reveals a contrasting gender composition. This conclusion is based on the results of a sample survey conducted among the top management of leading auditing firms, which indicates that the majority of partners are predominantly male (figure 1).

As the results show, the gender profile of management within auditing firms does not align with the gender profile of the profession. A notable characteristic of the Russian context is the high proportion of women within the overall professional field, contrasted with the comparatively low percentage of female partners in auditing firms, especially when compared to industrialized countries. This discrepancy has resulted in what can be described as a "skewed gender pyramid" in the auditing sector.

An assessment of wage levels within the firms studied was undertaken, with the hypothesis that wages are discriminatory. It was anticipated that wage inequality would increase with ascending job positions. Factors influencing both the percentage of women employed in auditing firms and wage levels were examined. It was posited that overall financial performance of the firm would affect wage levels; specifically, as the firm's revenues increase, both wages and the proportion of men in the workforce should also rise.

Figure 1. Gender profiles of the auditing profession and management of the largest auditing companies in the Russian Federation in 2020.



Source: Register of Certified Public Auditors.

To analyze the potential causes of gender imbalance, a correlation and regression analysis was conducted to explore factors that might lead to wage increases and changes in the proportion of women within the workforce of audit organizations. Additionally, we identified supplementary factors that could influence the effectiveness of a firm's gender equality strategy and assessed their relationship with the proportion of female auditors in the organization. To evaluate the gender pay gap, we also conducted an analysis of information disclosed in the companies' non-financial statements alongside an assessment of salary levels.

A sample of the one hundred largest auditing firms in Russia was conducted in accordance with the rating prepared by RA - Expert for 2020. Companies that did not have data on all the listed factors were excluded (table 1).

Table 1. Variable review.

Variable	Notation	Calculation	Obs.	Source
Proportion of female auditors	y	Annual rate (%)	39	Authors' calculation
Company revenue for the year	x ₁	Annual rate (thousand rubles)	39	Ranking RA – Expert
Proportion of audit revenue	x ₂	Annual rate (%)	39	Ranking RA – Expert
Audit revenue	x ₃	Annual rate (thousand rubles)	39	Authors' calculation
Average number of employees	x ₄	Annual rate	39	Ranking RA – Expert
Average number of auditors	x ₅	Annual rate	39	Ranking RA – Expert
Revenue per auditor	x ₆	Annual rate (thousand rubles per auditor)	39	Authors' calculation

Source: authors.

The analysis of the resulting indicator—proportion of female auditors—revealed that its average value reaches 73.7%, which is comparable to the value obtained in the previously conducted sample survey of the Register of Certified Public Auditors. Additionally, the coefficient

of variation for this indicator is 17.9%, suggesting that the investigated companies exhibit a homogenous distribution regarding the proportion of female auditors. In contrast, the variation of other indicators is significantly higher, indicating that auditing firms in Russia are less similar concerning these variables (table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Proportion of female auditors	73.7	13.2	30	100
Company revenue for the year	535,117.7	1,401,683.0	8,570.0	6,977,116
Proportion of audit revenue	67,3	26,0	18,9	100,0
Audit revenue	385,604.5	1,180,689.7	7164,0	6,872,459.3
Average number of employees	198.3	350.9	3	1,558
Average number of auditors	51.4	58.2	3	295
Revenue per auditor	4,201.3	4,951.7	467.4	23,296.5

Source: authors.

We also examined whether the proportion of female auditors (y) depended on certain factors: x1 - company revenue for the year; x2 - proportion of audit revenue; x3 - audit revenue; x4 - average number of employees; x5 - average number of auditors; x6 - revenue per auditor; and a matrix of pair correlation was constructed for the listed factors (table 3).

Table 3. The matrix of the pair correlation for y and the factors x1 – x6..

	y	x1	x2	x3
y	1			
x1	- 0.1234	1		
x2	0.2795	0.0717	1	
x3	- 0.1172	0.9619	0.1598	1
x4	- 0.2219	0.9236	0.0198	0.8639
x5	- 0.1237	0.8454	0.1244	0.8488
x6	- 0.2033	0.8266	0.1760	0.8037

Source: authors.

All six factors are clearly weakly related to the proportion of female auditors, implying that they have little effect on its change. Moreover, the relationship is inverse for all factors except the proportion of audit revenue (x2). At the same time, the relationship between the proportion of female auditors (y) and the proportion of audit revenue is the strongest available and positive (+0.2795), which distinguishes this variable.

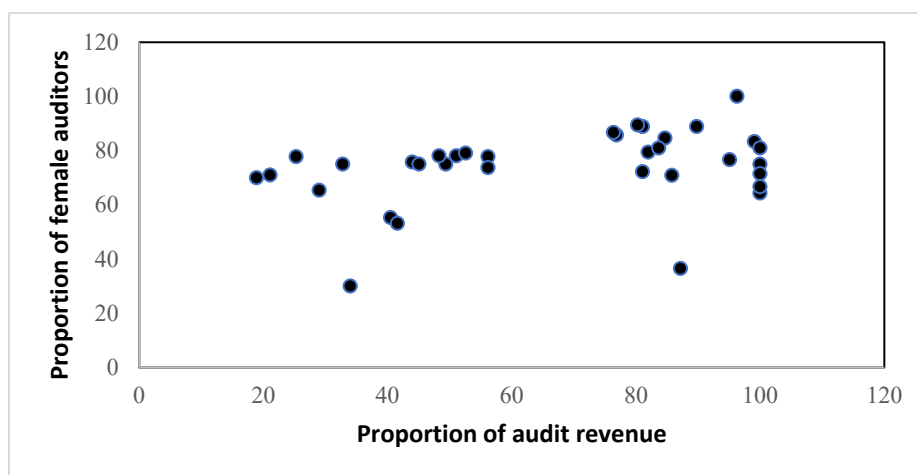
Then, an additive model of multiple correlation was constructed:

$$y = 68.950 + 1,391x_1 + 0.177x_2 - 5.328x_3 - 0.024x_4 - 0.037x_5 - 0,001x_6.$$

Evaluation of the quality of the model using the F-ratio test ($1.70 > 2.42$; the significance of the F-ratio is 0.1) shows that the model cannot be considered satisfactory. It can be concluded that none of the considered factors has a significant impact on the proportion of female auditors in auditing firms.

The relationship between the proportion of audit revenues of the largest Russian auditing firms and the proportion of female auditors was analyzed in detail (figure 2). The linear correlation coefficient of +0.28 indicates a weak positive relationship between these indicators. This suggests a potential link between an increase in the proportion of female auditors and the proportion of audit revenues, which could be of significant interest to company management.

Figure 2. Ratio between the proportion of audit revenue of an auditing firm and the proportion of female auditors in that firm 2020 (%).



Source: authors.

The correlation diagram between the studied indicators demonstrates that there is no significant correlation between the proportion of audit revenues in the largest Russian auditing firms and the proportion of female auditors within these firms. The results of the analysis reflect a weak influence of the studied factors in individual companies on the proportion of female auditors. It can be concluded that the gender status of companies in the industry mirrors the overall challenging economic situation of the auditing profession in Russia, leading firms to attempt to address financial difficulties by reducing labor costs through the hiring of women.

The data indicate that the companies are in an equilibrium state of gender devaluation, where none of the significant factors notably affect the proportion of women employed. We hypothesize that the proportion of women and low wages are related indicators. Future research should aim to assess the overall wage levels in the auditing industry and compare them to the

average wage levels in the Russian economy, as well as identify the gender wage gap within these companies.

To confirm this conclusion, a comparison was made between auditor salaries and the average salary in the financial sector as well as the overall business sector. A sample survey of auditor salaries in Russia was conducted using data from one of the largest job search websites, Headhunter (<https://hh.ru>). Eight major regional centers of Russia were surveyed, representing approximately 15% of the total population of the country. All advertisements were systematically organized according to several parameters, including work experience and salary. As a result, a total of 267 auditor vacancies were included in the sample. For the comparative evaluation, the salary levels were calculated according to the following formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n x_i}{n},$$

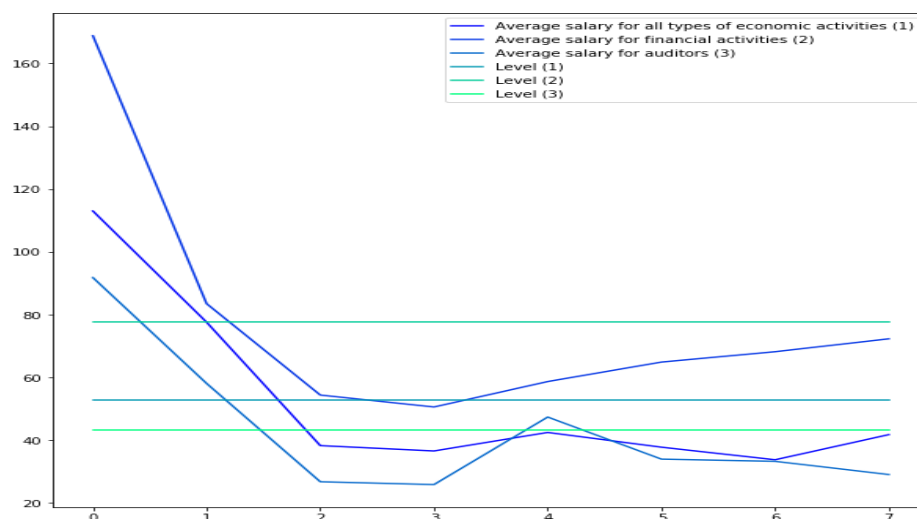
where \bar{x} is the average salary (for level [1] - the average salary in the region as a whole for all types of economic activities, data source – Rosstat (<https://rosstat.gov.ru/>); for level [2] - the average salary for financial activities, data source - Rosstat; for level [3] - the average salary for auditors, calculated by the authors using data source – Headhunter) and n is the number of regions studied.

Figure 3 compares salary levels with the average salaries in the studied regions. The salary of auditors is notably low, regardless of gender differences: the salary in the financial sector, which includes auditing, is 1.8 times higher than the average salary in auditing, while the average salary across the entire country for all types of economic activities is 1.2 times higher than the average salary in auditing. In other words, salaries in auditing are generally not commensurate with those expected for high-skilled professionals; rather, they align more closely with the general indicators applicable to low-skilled workers.

Thus, the results of the analysis indicate that the persistently low salary levels in auditing are cited by many Russian researchers as a significant factor contributing to the worsening personnel issues faced by auditing companies (Cheremisina, 2014).

In this situation, the implementation of the concept of "glass ceiling" by the management becomes quite obvious when the percentage of women in promotion to the top positions of the company decreases and at the same time there is a significant salary gap between top positions and middle positions. To prove this, we conducted a statistical analysis of the labor market for auditors, paying particular attention to salary.

Figure 3. Average salaries in certain regions of the Russian Federation for financial activities and for auditors in 2020.



Source: authors.

Note: 0 – Moscow; 1 – Saint Petersburg; 2 – Rostov; 3 – Stavropol; 4 – Nizhny Novgorod; 5 – Sverdlovsk; 6 – Novosibirsk; 7 – Primorsky Krai.

The skill level required by employers was analyzed in detail, focusing on the presence or absence of professional qualifications as an indirect indicator of the qualifications necessary in the auditing labor market. According to the results of our sample survey, 54.2% of vacancies require a Russian auditor certificate, 14.5% require a Certified Internal Auditor (CIA) certificate, and 12.2% require a certificate by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). These findings indicate that auditing firms seek highly qualified workers with recognized credentials; however, as previously noted, they offer relatively low salaries.

It was necessary to determine if the salary was low for all positions or if there were significant salary differences. The analysis of this key characteristic should help to understand and explain the gender situation in this profession (Table 4).

Table 4. The salary differences for open positions in auditing (%).

Vacancy	Auditor	Senior auditor	Head of the department
Chain relative growth of the salary	+ 137.2	+ 0.2	+ 40.1
Relative growth of the salary (base – trainee auditor)	+ 137.2	+ 137.7	+ 232.9

Source: authors.

The analysis of job vacancies for male and female auditors revealed a significant difference in average salaries, with male prospective auditors earning 137.2% more than their female counterparts. However, there is virtually no increase in salaries for other positions. Accumulated experience, developed competencies, and progression to the next higher professional level result in

only a minimal salary increase of 0.2%. In contrast, salaries increase sharply by 40.1% for senior manager positions. Overall, salaries rise by a factor of 3.3 throughout career advancement, from auditor to executive. This indicates that the profession has a low salary ceiling for entry-level, mid-level, and even highly skilled employees, with substantial salary increases predominantly associated with male-dominated positions.

Consequently, the industry reflects a typical pattern of gender inequality, where high salaries are linked to male-dominated roles. Comparing the data on the number of women in top positions with the identified gender profile of the profession highlights the presence of a "glass ceiling" problem. The study also identified that low wages serve as an additional negative factor in the gender disparity faced by Russian companies in this sector. Thus, the issue extends beyond being merely "intra-industry"; these sectors act as "collection points" for the gender wage gap across the broader economy.

Considering existing data limitations, particularly the lack of disclosure of gender wage gap data in company reports, a supplementary review of results was conducted. This analysis drew on wage inquiries during employment searches, based on published job postings from 2021. Previous studies have indicated that women often accept lower wages, especially when aware of the corporate pay gap. For instance, women may be willing to accept a salary that is 4.9% lower to avoid employers with significant pay gaps (Blundell, 2021). We posited that, in an industry marked by gender differences and lacking public information, the situation would be even worse for underestimating women's salary potential.

The sample comprised 187 applications in which applicants specified their expected salary levels. A comparison was made between applications from men and women for similar positions. The survey results indicate no significant differences in salary expectations among applicants with up to three years of work experience. For professionals, the differences ranged from 8 to 12%. However, as professional experience increased and positions improved, female applicants for managerial roles expressed, on average, salary expectations that were 25% lower than those of male applicants. Our assumptions were thus confirmed.

Results and discussion

The existence of a problem necessitates broad discussion if society wishes to address it. In Western countries, the disclosure of gender aspects of corporate governance is mandatory in annual reports and other sources, such as corporate websites. Transparency regarding the percentage of women in the workforce, their representation in management positions, wage disparities, and the measures companies take to address gender issues can help mitigate gender-related challenges.

The significant gender imbalances observed in the companies within the industry under study prompt questions about the extent to which these firms are willing to disclose relevant information. Accordingly, we examined various information sources to assess the professional gender discourse, including company websites, annual reports, and data from professional associations. In that sense, the objective of this study was to evaluate the quality of companies' disclosure of gender-related information, to understand how they assess their own gender status within the profession, and to identify the measures they employ to foster a more contemporary gender model of corporate governance. Additionally, the study aimed to determine whether these companies conduct specific research aimed at improving the social integration of women in the profession.

The review of selected information sources revealed that Russian companies do not actively disclose gender-specific information in their reports. Only the largest firms provide data on the percentage of women in management roles, and expanded information is available from only two companies. For one of these companies (BDO), the information presented is largely promotional, aimed at encouraging women to enter the workforce even if they have young children, while asserting that the company will provide the necessary conditions to support them. The second company (Deloitte Russia, operating as Business Solutions and Technologies since 2022) published its commitment to gender equality, specifically stating that it aims to reduce the gender gap in top positions. However, details regarding its support for women are not disclosed.

In essence, while the largest companies acknowledge gender issues on their agenda and may implement some progressive social practices, this information remains undisclosed and does not contribute to reducing the gender gap within the organizations. Monitoring of other large companies in the Russian Federation indicates a general neglect of gender issues in corporate governance, which are not deemed relevant or important. This oversight significantly hampers efforts to address gender inequalities. Studies suggest that only an awareness of long-term values enables the implementation of best practices for workforce development (Grueso Hinestroza, 2010).

Thus, the findings of this study indicate that Russian companies operating in female-dominated industries face substantial gender-related challenges, including the "glass ceiling," gender pay gap, and distorted gender pyramid. The problem of gender inequality in these firms extends across industries, as wage levels in these organizations are lower than the national average, thereby exacerbating broader economic challenges. Simultaneously, formally successful gender indicators that reflect a relatively high proportion of women in top positions often obscure these underlying issues. Efforts to reduce gender inequality in corporate governance, even when implemented in specific instances, do not adequately resolve these problems.

The analysis further demonstrates that a strategy of passive gender management poses significant risks for modern companies. In a gender trap, organizations may lose their adaptability to contemporary technological challenges, as they struggle to attract personnel who possess or are

willing to develop the skills necessary for current technological advancements (Talent Corp & ACCA, 2013). Moreover, if a company fails to employ gender-sensitive human resource management practices, employee loyalty and their capacity to contribute their full potential to the organization will diminish. As a result, the company may inadvertently forfeit its most qualified employees with modern skills.

External risk factors include both weak adaptation of the company to new technological requirements and negative public perceptions of the company's gender equality policy. This can lead to a significant risk of reduced investment attractiveness. Effective management of the company's gender equality policy can substantially mitigate external and internal risks.

Research suggests that companies with gender-diverse boards raise capital at a lower cost. This has implications for UN Goal 5 and underscores that shareholders of large non-manufacturing companies benefit significantly from board diversity in the context of debt.

Evolving practices in OECD countries indicate that society is beginning to view gender pay equality as a critical element in achieving UN Goal 5. An increasing number of countries are introducing various legal provisions to regulate wage disclosure. However, our research demonstrates that the information disclosed should be detailed and consider, among other factors, the company's overall gender profile. Consequently, companies with a high proportion of women in their workforce may find themselves in a vicious circle.

Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that there is currently a "gender trap" in occupations and industries dominated by women in Russia, highlighting an unfavorable gender situation. A primary indicator of this gender imbalance is the low percentage of women in top management and the significant gap in average salaries between men and women in this profession. Additionally, there is a "glass ceiling" in the profession, where promotion to management positions is much easier for men due to the existing tradition of nepotism.

Identifying gender issues poses significant external and internal risks to companies. If inappropriate practices are adopted, the company will not gain the necessary appreciation from its female employees. Moreover, the company will struggle to retain employees or retrain them for new requirements in a changing technological environment. Consequently, the company may not be prepared to face the new challenges posed by modern digital technologies.

In our opinion, reason for this situation may be the seemingly successful gender development indicators that do not apply to female-dominated industries. To overcome this situation, management must accelerate the implementation of a gender strategy and foster a broad public

discussion of these issues. Unfortunately, attention to gender issues in the audit environment is currently minimal. There are no specific studies or programs that enable women to advance in their careers, and management does not view it as necessary to address gender issues in its reporting. As public awareness of gender issues increases, companies face escalating external threats, such as the risk of failing to attract investors. For instance, Goldman Sachs does not conduct IPOs for companies that lack women on their boards.

The primary contribution of this study is the application of a new approach, focusing on an industry characterized by a high concentration of working women in Russian companies, using auditing as a case study. The peculiarity of such companies is that the gender issue is obscured by formally positive gender indicators. However, when these positive indicators are compared with the characteristics of companies that maintain a balanced gender structure, they can be interpreted as negative. The results obtained suggest that companies should introduce specific disclosure requirements in corporate reporting and provide detailed disclosures of their gender equality policies. Implementing these specific disclosure requirements will compel companies to adopt effective gender equality policies.

Given the obvious relevance of studying gender issues and their impact on business efficiency, it is essential to continue this research in other female-dominated professions and industries, such as accounting, education, and commerce. The study found that in sectors with a predominantly female workforce, significant gender imbalances can occur when firms implement strategies aimed at eliminating the gender pay gap. The analysis reveals that these strategies only exacerbate existing problems within the companies and do not facilitate new paths for development. From a gender equality perspective, these companies may present satisfactory performance in financial statements regarding the percentage of women in management structures.

Companies operating in sectors with a predominantly female workforce in Russia will not be able to independently resolve issues of gender imbalance in the short term. To address these challenges, mechanisms must be developed that are both regulatory, to compel companies to enhance their policies, and social, to support workers in these sectors. Identifying such mechanisms and instruments will be the primary focus of future research.

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