

Care

Gender-sensitive infrastructure ⁽¹⁾

Public services such as care facilities, public transport and health centres play an essential part in the well-being of Europeans. We use public service infrastructure every day; it underpins our lives, and is essential for the functioning of society. Infrastructure is meant to deliver services that address the diverse needs of women and men

and contribute to equal opportunities for all.

Access to care infrastructure has a direct impact on how people who care for children, older people and persons with disabilities use their time. It also affects their opportunities to take up employment, participate in education or training, and take care of their physical and mental health.

Care infrastructure makes everyday life easier

In a survey carried out by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), respondents ranked nine public services in order of how they helped them to participate in seven everyday life activities. The results show that women and men perceive the importance of childcare infrastructure differently (Table 1).

Health services and medical centres were top of the list for both women and men, followed by public transport. Women perceived childcare services as more important

for helping their everyday life than men. Women placed nurseries for children in third, fourth, and fifth place, because they enable participation in work and education. In contrast, men placed nurseries for children aged over 3 years in seventh place because they allow them to participate in education. In the last two positions, men placed nurseries for children aged 0–3 for enabling the carrying out of domestic and care work, and nurseries for children aged over 3 years for enabling participation in paid work as employed or self-employed.

Table 1. Services that help with everyday life (on an ascending scale of importance from 1 to 10)

How important is the service to your everyday life?	Women's ranking	Men's ranking
Health services and medical centres because they enable taking care of physical and mental health.	1	1
Public transport because it enables moving around and reaching destinations independently.	2	2
Nurseries from 3 + years because they enable participation in paid work as employed or self-employed.	3	10
Nurseries from 3 + years because they enable gaining of knowledge through participation in education.	4	7
Nurseries for 0 to 3-year-olds because they enable participation in paid work as employed or self-employed.	5	No ranking (*)
Pavements and footpaths because they enable moving around and reaching destinations independently.	6	3
Parks and green areas because they enable leisure.	7	4
Parks and green areas because they enable taking care of physical and mental health.	8	5
Public transport because it enables the gaining of new knowledge through participation in education.	9	6
Street lighting in residential areas because it enables moving around and reaching destinations independently.	10	8

(*) Men placed 'Nurseries for 0 to 3-year-olds because they enable carrying out domestic and care work' as number 9.

⁽¹⁾ EIGE's work in this field is based on the conceptual framework and methodology to assess the benefits of gender equality through the provision of public infrastructure, developed by Dr Gloria Alarcón García and Dr José Colino Sueiras (University of Murcia, Spain). EIGE conducted a restricted survey in the 28 EU Member States (EU-28) on the benefits of gender-sensitive infrastructure. Dr Gloria Alarcón García lead the survey design, and the EIGENET framework of contractors was engaged in the survey implementation, involving 23 organisations and consortiums. The later analysis of the survey results was carried out by a research group led by the University of Murcia, Spain. Authors include Dr Gloria Alarcón García (principal researcher and research group leader), Dr Tindara Addabbo, Dr Edgardo Ayala Gaytan, Dr Estela Fernandez Sabiote, Dr María Rubio Aparicio, Dr Andreu Castellet, Dr Angela O'Hagan, Dr José Manuel Mayor. EIGE's Gender Mainstreaming team coordinated the work. Dr Vaida Obelene, Dr Paula Franklin and Dr Irene Riobóo Lestón provided quality assurance and carried out further analysis of the data.

Parenthood and caring responsibilities are one of the main reasons for women's under-representation in the labour market. Across the EU, the employment rate of women with young children is nine percentage points less than women with no children and in some countries the difference is larger than 30 percentage points ⁽²⁾. In 2014, only 55 % of women with three or more children were employed compared to 83 % of men. Moreover, family formation is associated with the levelling off of women's earnings. While the total gender gap in net monthly earnings in the EU stands at 31 % (to the detriment of women), for couples with children under the age of 7, the gender gap in net monthly earnings peaks at 48 % ⁽³⁾. Furthermore, 44 % of women with at least three children and

living with a partner had earnings too low to keep themselves out of poverty (i.e. their earnings were below the national poverty threshold). The economic independence of women with children living in couples is very limited and they have to rely on their partners' income and/or social security ⁽⁴⁾.

A report on *Quality of society and public services* (2013) ⁽⁵⁾, based on the European Quality of Life Survey, notes how services, such as childcare and professional care for older people, can provide employment opportunities by freeing people from domestic work or reducing compatibility problems in time use. This is particularly relevant for women in their role as main carers.

Perceptions of care service infrastructure slightly differ for women and men

The survey results show that health services and medical centres are considered to be most important, closely followed by urban mobility infrastructure, including public transport. The services deemed least important were all facilities supporting the care for children or adults, such as nurseries, homes for the elderly, and for the long-term disabled. This implies that people still perceive care as something that belongs to the private or family domain as opposed to the public domain. Furthermore, home-based care is preferred over institutional care.

Public care services are an integral part of better work-life balance, which benefits not only women and parents but also the wider society. EIGE's report on the *Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union* (2017) highlights that care services are beneficial because an increase in the labour market activity of women has positive results for the economy ⁽⁶⁾. Women's increased labour force participation is likely to enlarge the tax base and increase tax revenues, so that eventually more public funds will be available to support even stronger and more comprehensive care policies ⁽⁷⁾.

EIGE's survey asked all respondents to assess the importance of all the infrastructure/public services in general. The responses reflect the value given by citizens to each of these services. Women and men gave the same average importance ranking to the services.

EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2019 ⁽⁸⁾ shows that the male breadwinner model has been largely replaced by dual-earning and single-headed families, as more women work outside of the home and not all families have a mother and a father. This has had a significant impact on childcare at a time when extended family members, such as grandparents, are less engaged in looking after their grandchildren. A broader range of family and work circumstances, which has led to parents needing more and varied childcare services, has put pressure on public policies and services.

⁽²⁾ European Commission, 'Towards a European Pillar of Social Rights – Gender equality and work-life balance'. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/gender-equality-work-life-balance_en.pdf

⁽³⁾ EIGE, *Tackling the gender pay gap: not without a better work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/tackling-gender-pay-gap-not-without-better-work-life-balance>

⁽⁴⁾ EIGE, *Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU – Review of the implementation of Area A: Women and poverty of the Beijing Platform for Action*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/poverty-gender-and-intersecting-inequalities-in-the-eu>

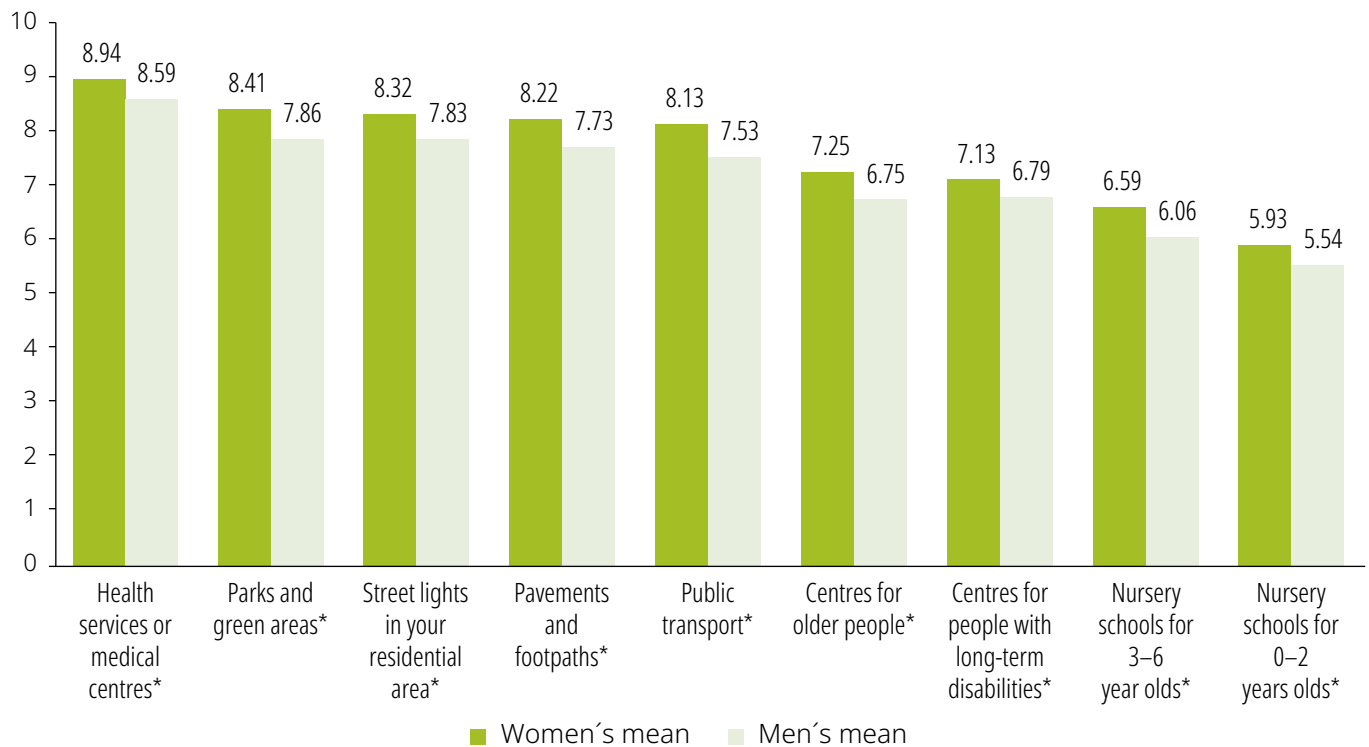
⁽⁵⁾ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), *Third European Quality of Life Survey – Quality of society and public services*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2013. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1361en.pdf

⁽⁶⁾ EIGE, *Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union – Report on the empirical application of the model*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/economic-benefits-gender-equality-european-union-report-empirical-application-model>

⁽⁷⁾ Eurofound, *The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1638en_1.pdf

⁽⁸⁾ EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2019 – Work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-work-life-balance>

Figure 1. The importance of public services (on an ascending scale from 1 to 10)



Countries with high female employment rates are those where people face fewer difficulties when accessing and using childcare services⁽⁹⁾. However, in many countries the number of childcare centres does not meet the demand. In the EU in 2016, 14 % of households reported that their needs for childcare services were unmet. This ranged from 22 % of households in the United Kingdom to 3 % of households in Bulgaria⁽¹⁰⁾. Public policies can contribute to reducing the burden of unpaid work, by increasing childcare provision. Formal childcare is a main objective of the EU's employment strategy⁽¹¹⁾. The European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) highlights the crucial importance of childcare and long-term care services for socially inclusive growth in the EU. The Barcelona targets set in 2002, concern the provision of childcare facilities, highlighting the importance of such infrastructure. The European Council set targets to ensure coverage of formal childcare to at least 90 % of children between 3 years and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years

by 2010. However, in 2017, around 66 % of children under 3 years in the first 28 countries of the EU (EU-28) were not enrolled in any formal childcare. Collectively, the EU has achieved the first Barcelona target of 33 % for children below the age of 3, but fifteen Member States still fall below the target. The EU-28's progress on the target of providing 90 % of children from 3 years of age to mandatory school age with formal childcare reached 85 % in 2017, while 10 Member States (Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom) fell below this average⁽¹²⁾.

Care infrastructure supports the well-being of carers

Informal care work often has a cost on the health and economic well-being of carers⁽¹³⁾. Looking after someone can be a very time-consuming and burdensome activity for carers, who may have to balance their caring duties with other work and family commitments. Furthermore, they may not have received any training for the work they are doing.

⁽⁹⁾ Eurofound, 2013.

⁽¹⁰⁾ EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2019 – Work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/20190360_mhaf19001enn_002.pdf

⁽¹¹⁾ European Commission, *Barcelona objectives – The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2013. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_08_592

⁽¹²⁾ EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2019 – Work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-work-life-balance>

⁽¹³⁾ European Commission, *Joint report on health care and long-term care systems & fiscal sustainability – Volume 1*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2016. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/economy-finance/joint-report-health-care-and-long-term-care-systems-fiscal-sustainability-0_en

Mental health problems among carers have been estimated as being 20 % higher than among non-carers and are particularly high for people who provide very intensive care (more than 20 hours per week). Given the demands on their time, carers may be less likely to look after their own health needs and may fail to take preventive health measures ⁽¹⁴⁾.

EIGE's survey found that care infrastructure services not only enable labour market participation, but also enable everyday life activities that support the well-being of carers. Among the respondents who spent more than 30 hours in paid work and more than 14 hours on domestic and care work, women valued nursery schools for children aged more than 3 years to take care of their own physical and mental health, more than men. In the same category, women also placed more importance on centres for older people. However, men working short hours (less than 30) in paid work and long hours (more than 14) on domestic and care work, perceived nursery schools for

children aged more than 3 years as more important than women in enabling them to take care of their own physical and mental health. These findings indicate that people who have caring responsibilities, regardless of gender, need care infrastructure to support their well-being. They are an essential part of moving towards a more equal work-life balance for both women and men.

The stress of combining paid and unpaid work falls heavily on women. In the EU-28, men work in a paid job on average 39 hours per week and women 33 hours. On top of paid work, women do unpaid work for 22 hours per week and men 10 hours ⁽¹⁵⁾. The Gender Equality Index 2019 shows that gender inequality in time use is persistent and is a growing issue in the EU. Only every third man engages daily in cooking and housework for at least 1 hour. More importantly, over the last 10 years, there has been almost no improvements towards a gender balanced distribution of domestic work across the EU. This situation has

Table 2. Which public services help carers take care of physical and mental health? (on an ascending scale from 1 to 10)

Public services		< 30 hours in paid work and < 14 hours in domestic and care work	< 30 hours in paid work and > 14 hours in domestic and care work	> 30 hours in paid work and < 14 hours in domestic and care work	> 30 hours in paid work and > 14 hours in domestic and care work
Nursery schools for 0–2 year olds	women	7.55	6.54	5.83	6.69
	men	4.4	7.3	6.02	6.29
Nursery schools for 3–6 year olds	women	6.95	6.74	6.41	7.19
	men	5.81	8.25	5.98	6.31
Health services or medical centres	women	8.48	7.84	7.91	8.11
	men	6.94	8.09	7.63	7.48
Centres for older people	women	7	6	5.55	6.27
	men	4.4	5.43	5.6	4.62
Centres for people with long-term disabilities	women	7.1	6.25	5.67	6.79
	men	5.71	7.33	6.44	6.08
Pavements and footpaths	women	6.53	5.62	6.07	6.63
	men	6.3	6.85	5.84	6
Parks and green areas	women	6.89	6.65	6.92	7.62
	men	7.25	7.72	6.89	6.99
Public transport	women	6.4	5.71	5.87	6.61
	men	5.95	6.49	5.77	5.89
Street lights in your residential area	women	6.09	5.75	5.88	6.7
	men	6.15	6.88	5.79	5.88

(*) The public services are more important for women in enabling them to take care of their physical and mental health. Differences in means between women and men reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

(*) The public services are more important for men in enabling them to take care of their physical and mental health. Differences in means between women and men reached statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Eurofound, *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update)*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2017. Available at: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1634en.pdf

Care. Gender-sensitive infrastructure

consequences at the individual and societal levels. EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2019 concludes that the negative impact of parenthood on women's employment is largely due to their disproportionate take-up of care duties and career breaks. Therefore, a key challenge to overcome is how to involve men more in household and care activities.

EIGE's report on *Reconciliation of Work and Family Life as a Condition of Equal Participation in the Labour Market* (2013) ⁽¹⁶⁾ concludes that the traditional model where parenting and care work are considered a primary duty of women needs to change. This would create a solid

base for gender-balanced sharing of family responsibilities and the advancement of women. Family policies, such as parental leave, should be combined with the availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of early childhood education, and dependent care facilities for older people and persons with a disability ⁽¹⁷⁾. A new directive on work-life balance for parents and carers in 2019 introduced for the first time at least 10 working days of paid paternity leave and proposed an additional incentive (paid non-transferable parental leave of 2 out of 4 months) to encourage greater take-up by fathers.



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⁽¹⁶⁾ EIGE, *Reconciliation of work and family life as a condition of equal participation in the labour market*, 2013. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/reconciliation-work-and-family-life-condition-equal-participation-labour-market-report>

⁽¹⁷⁾ European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), 'ETUC position on the first-stage consultation of the EU social partners on a "new start" for work-life balance', 2015. Available at: http://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/ETUC_position_on_work-life_balance.pdf

Conclusions

EIGE's survey showed that care service infrastructure can be both fulfilling and enable better participation in public life through the services they deliver. In addition to providing care for children, older people and persons with a disability, this infrastructure allows carers to participate in employment and education, and to take care of their physical and mental health. In short:

- public care services are essential for women's employment and for gender equality;
- care infrastructure forms an essential part of work-life balance;
- care services support the well-being of carers.

It is crucial to ensure that basic infrastructure services integrate a gender perspective. This means recognising the needs of women and men, understanding how they are different, and carefully considering how the services allow everyone to live their lives to the full.

About EIGE's survey

EIGE conducted a restricted survey on the benefits of gender-sensitive infrastructure. The survey asked 5 378 women and men in the EU about nine infrastructure services, and covered seven activities of daily life.

All respondents, regardless of whether they used the infrastructure services or not, were asked to assess the im-

portance of the existing infrastructure services for everyday activities on a scale from 1 to 10.

The European Pillar of Social Rights endorses everyone's right to accessible, good-quality and affordable child-care and long-term care services. The 2019 directive on work-life balance for parents and carers also introduced a new right for workers to take at least 5 working days per year of carers' leave where a relative has a serious illness or dependency. These provisions aim to remove some of the barriers faced by informal carers, especially women, to both entering and staying in employment. EIGE has proposed indicators to measure work-life balance in the EU. It includes aspects related to public infrastructure, such as childcare, long-term care and public transport.

Gender assessment of care infrastructure and its role in the everyday lives of women and men in the EU is crucial for an effective design and implementation of measures to address the work-life balance challenges faced by working parents and carers.

This factsheet is part of a series on gender equality and infrastructure. You can find our other factsheets on urban mobility and health service infrastructure, as well as the methodological report on EIGE's website: <https://eige.europa.eu/>

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

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