

Gender Equality Index 2019. Work-life balance

Highlights of the Gender Equality Index 2019

Main findings

The EU keeps moving towards gender equality at a snail's pace. While the Gender Equality Index score for the EU rose from 66.2 points (out of 100) in 2015 to 67.4 in 2017, the EU still has a lot of room for improvement. Since 2005, the EU's score has increased by only 5.4 points.

Although the power domain has the lowest score, improvements in this domain contributed to nearly three quarters (74 %) of the progress between 2015 and 2017.

The persistent gender segregation in different fields of study in tertiary education contributes to making knowledge the second lowest domain in the Index.

The Gender Equality Index 2019 expands the analysis of intersecting inequalities by highlighting the situation of LGBTQI* people and Roma and Muslim women in areas where statistics are available.

Convergence analysis shows the different trends in gender equality across the EU. In 2005-2017, despite the different starting points, 16 Member States (AT, CY, DE, EE, IT, LV, MT, PT, SI below the EU average and BE, DK, FI, LU, NL, SE, UK above) grew in gender equality faster than the EU average and decreased their distance to gender equality. Another eight Member States (BG, CZ, EL, HR, HU, PL, RO, SK) improved in gender equality, but at a slower pace than the EU average. Spain, France and Ireland started with higher scores than the EU average and grew at a faster rate, increasing their distance from the EU average. Lithuania had lower scores than the EU in 2005, and it is the only Member State whose scores declined as the EU's average increased, widening the gap.

Domain of work

With a total EU-28 score of 72.0 points, the domain of work spotlights the incremental overall progress of 2.0 points made since 2005, including 0.5 points since 2015.

Segregation and quality of work remains a particular gender equality challenge for the EU and all Member States, with a respective sub-domain score of only 64.0 points in 2017, amidst slowly rising employment rates. In 2017, the FTE employment rate in the EU was 41 % for women and 57 % for men, an increase of about 1 percentage point (p.p.) for both genders

from 2015 and with the most acute gender gap observed among the couples with children. Being a parent continues to hinder women in the labour market, reflecting the disproportionate weight of care duties on mothers. This leads to women's predominant reliance on part-time work, even at the cost of consigning them to jobs with poorer career progression. In 2018, 31 % of women and 8 % of men aged 20-64 worked part-time in the EU.

Domain of money

The EU-28 score for the domain of money showed continuing improvement since 2005, including a 0.8-point increase since 2015. This made it possible to reach 80.4 points in 2017: the second highest ranked domain in the Gender Equality Index.

Nonetheless, progress in the sub-domain of economic resources (87.7 in 2017, still 2.0 points lower than in 2005) remains fragile, and with a recent worsening of the situation in Member States such as Luxembourg, Lithuania, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Malta and Sweden.

In 2017 the EU-28 gender gap in mean monthly earnings was 20 % to the detriment of women, increasing substantially for couples with children (36 %), lone parents (31 %) or those with high educational qualifications (33 %). Throughout the course of a life, these inequalities lead not only to a gender gap in mean monthly earnings of 38 % among those aged 65 or more, but also to increased exposure to poverty for women in retirement.

Domain of knowledge

The EU-28 score (63.5 points) has remained virtually static between 2015 and 2017 and only improved by 2.7 points over the entire 12-year period from 2005. Increasing educational attainment among women and men drives slow but positive change in the domain, while more significant progress is being held back by strong gender segregation and low engagement in lifelong learning.

In the EU more women and men graduate from universities than in the past and the gender gap continues to increase to the detriment of men. Both women and men limit their fields of study as only 21 % of men students choose to study in the field of education, health and welfare, humanities and arts, and women constitute only about 33 % of graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) tertiary education.

Adult participation in education and training is low in the EU and has barely altered since 2005. Adult learning sharply decreases with age and is particularly low among the working-age population (aged 25-64) with a low level of qualifications.

Domain of time

Gender inequalities in time use are persistent and growing: the EU-28 2017 score of 65.7 is not only 1 p.p. lower than that of 2005, it also represents a 3.2 p.p. drop from the gains that had been achieved up until 2012.

Women are engaged disproportionately more in unpaid care work: almost 38 % take care of children, grandchildren, older people and/or people with disabilities every day for 1 hour or more compared with 25 % of men. Even more strikingly, only 34 % of men are engaged in cooking and housework every day for 1 hour or more in comparison with 79 % of women, with the situation barely changing in more than a decade.

Gender inequalities in unpaid domestic work are highest between women and men living in a couple and having children. Women aged between 25 and 49 are those most likely to do unpaid care work every day.

Women and men with disabilities need care, but they are also carers. The Index shows 29 % of women and 20 % of men with disabilities in the EU are doing care work every day. Women with disabilities also do the biggest bulk of the cooking and/or other housework (79 %) compared to men with disabilities (41 %).

Domain of power

The domain of power has seen the biggest advances in gender equality but remains the most gender unequal in the Index. At the same time, it made the biggest improvement: a 13-point increase since 2005. Between 2015 and 2017, the EU score for this domain rose from 48.5 to 51.9 points (+ 3.4 points).

Improvement in the domain of power is driven by the increased number of women in national parliaments and on the boards of the largest publicly quoted companies. The impact of gender quotas has had a relevant impact. In Member States that have instituted legislative candidate quotas to increase the gender balance in parliaments, women's representation has improved since the application of a quota. The same for the presence of women members of boards, which has increased strikingly in the Member States that have introduced quotas to address the gender imbalance.

The social power sub-domain (research, media and sports decision-making) is the one with the slowest progress since 2015, when data was collected for the first time.

Domain of health

The EU-28 health domain score of 88.1 points in 2017 has not only barely changed since 2015 (+ 0.7 points), it has also made scant progress since 2005 (+ 2.2 points). This domain's scores have consistently ranked among the highest of all six core domains measured in the Gender Equality Index.

While women in the EU can expect to live to the age of 84 compared to 78 for men, they spend a higher share of their lives in poor health: 19 years compared to 15 years for men.

Some population groups face challenges in accessing adequate healthcare: lone mothers and fathers (6 % and 8 % respectively) and women and men with disabilities (8 % and 7 % respectively) report unmet needs for medical examinations. While no comparable data is available, those identifying as LGBTQI* are also known to face significant health inequalities.

Domain of violence

Data on all forms of violence against women remains scarce across the EU. Reliable, systematic and comparable data covering various aspects of violence against women, disaggregated by sex and the relationship between the survivor and perpetrator, is key to designing effective EU-wide strategies to end violence against women.

The EU is experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality. In several Member States, the ratification and/or full implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) (2011) has been hindered by 'anti-gender' opponents, thereby undermining political and legal efforts to eradicate violence against women.

Among LGBT groups, transgender people are most likely to report experiences of violence. In the EU, about one in three transgender persons experiences either physical or sexual violence or the threat of violence.

Work—life balance

In the EU, 34 % of women and 23 % of men aged 20-49, are ineligible for parental leave, with four Member States providing universal access to parental leave. When only the employed population is considered, in the EU-28, 10 % women and 12 % of men are ineligible for parental leave despite being in employment. In nine Member States all of those employed (women and men) have an opportunity to access parental leave. Member States with more universal parental-leave schemes create better opportunities for gender equality: those Member States with higher eligibility rates have higher scores in the Gender Equality Index as well as in the sub-domains of work and time.



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In the EU, 29 % of households report unmet needs for professional home-care services in 2016 and much of the care is provided informally, disproportionately by women of pre-retirement age. Of those aged 50-64, 21 % of women and 11 % of men provide long-term care (LTC) for older people and/or people with disabilities at least several days a week. Overall, in Member States where women disproportionately bear the burden of LTC, gender inequalities in labour participation are higher. More particularly, in the Member States with larger gender gaps in the provision of care for older people and/or people with disabilities, there are lower scores in the sub-domain of participation in the labour market. Fewer than one in two women (48 %) involved in informal LTC is in paid work.

The EU has reached the first Barcelona target (also called the 'Barcelona objectives') of 33 % of all children under 3 years of age being enrolled in a formal childcare institution. At national level, only 13 Member States have achieved this objective. Overall, 14 % of households in 2016 reported unmet needs for childcare services, primarily due to financial reasons (50 %). Women's greater involvement in informal childcare interferes with their employment opportunities, thereby increasing the risk of poverty and economic dependency. In households where the youngest child is under 7 years of age, women spend on average 32 hours a week on paid work and 39 hours on unpaid work compared to 41 hours and 19 hours for men respectively. Gaps in care services constitute a serious obstacle for women's participation in the labour market, while care responsibilities do not substantially affect men's engagement in paid work. In the EU, 10 % of women work part-time or are inactive due to care duties, while this applies to only 0.5 % of men.

For public infrastructure to benefit the whole population, its design, location and accessibility should take into account the differences in gender needs. Commuting enables people not only to take on work but also to access better jobs. This is highlighted by its strong association with the Gender Equality Index, and in particular with its time and work domains. Nonetheless, due to gendered sharing of duties at home, women's commuting time is shorter compared to men's time (40 minutes and 45 minutes, on average). Furthermore, lack of access to a car and the longer travel times involved in the use of public transport make it even more difficult for women, particularly lone mothers, to achieve a good work—life balance.

In the EU, 57 % of women and 54 % of men have no possibility of changing their working-time provisions, while 14 % of women and 19 % of men could determine their own working hours completely. The private sector not only accounts for a higher share of male employment, but also ensures a higher level of flexibility in working time. Given women's concentration in public-sector jobs, this implies that women have fewer chances for work–life balance via flexibility at work. It is one of the reasons why only 14 % of women in part-time employment can move into full-time jobs, whereas 28 % of men can do so. The Gender Equality Index (in its entirety and across all its domains) shows a significant correlation to the availability of flexible working schedules in Member States, highlighting their importance in how women and men are able to allocate their time for home and paid work activities, as well as for their education and training opportunities.



For one family in two, cost is an obstacle to accessing the childcare services they need

Gender equality in the domains of work and time is positively associated with higher participation in education and training for both women and men. However, time-related barriers, such as family responsibilities or work-schedule conflicts, can put participation in lifelong-learning activities out of reach for many adults. In the EU-28, 40 % of women and 24 % of men cannot participate in learning due to family responsibilities. In nearly all Member States, men report work-schedule conflicts as an obstacle to participation in education and training more often than women.