

Gender Equality Index 2019. Work-life balance

Lifelong learning

A catalyst for gender equality in the making

Policy debates on work–life balance traditionally do not consider education and training. Yet constant technological advances require workers to continuously upskill and keep abreast of new developments during their careers. Lifelong learning is also instrumental in women’s reintegration into the labour market following a career break due to care responsibilities. It can be a catalyst for greater gender equality provided both women and men can access it despite work and family constraints. However, lack of time or financial resources can significantly hamper access to adult learning and training and inhibit certain groups of women and men more than others.

The Europe 2020 strategy set a goal of 15 % of the population participating in at least one education and training activity measured on a 4-week basis (European Commission, 2010). Three types of learning are recognised: formal, non-formal and informal learning.

- 1 | Formal education and training refers to lifelong-learning activities that take place in organised settings and are credential based.
- 2 | Non-formal education also takes place in organised settings but is not certified. It largely focuses on learning opportunities organised in the workplace, but it can also refer to education and training that take place in organisations stimulating adults’ personal interests and development.
- 3 | The third type, informal learning, tends to refer to learning activities in our daily lives that are mostly incidental and unintentional (Coffield, 2000).

The EU goal only refers to participation in formal and non-formal education, as it is expected that (nearly) everyone engages in informal learning on a daily basis.

Women focus on education and training, men engage more in work-related training

In 2017, the EU-28 average of women and men aged 25-64 years participating in education and training in a 4-week period was 12 % and 10 % respectively, well below the Europe 2020 target (Figure 66). The gender gap of 2 p.p. in favour of women was evident among 25-49-year-olds, and it remained the same among women and men aged 50-64 years, despite overall participation in education and training sharply decreasing as people approach retirement^[1] (see Chapter 4). The EU trend followed similar lines among those in or out of work: 13 % of employed women and 10 % of employed men were engaged in education and training; among unemployed people, it was 11 % of women and 9 % of men^[2].

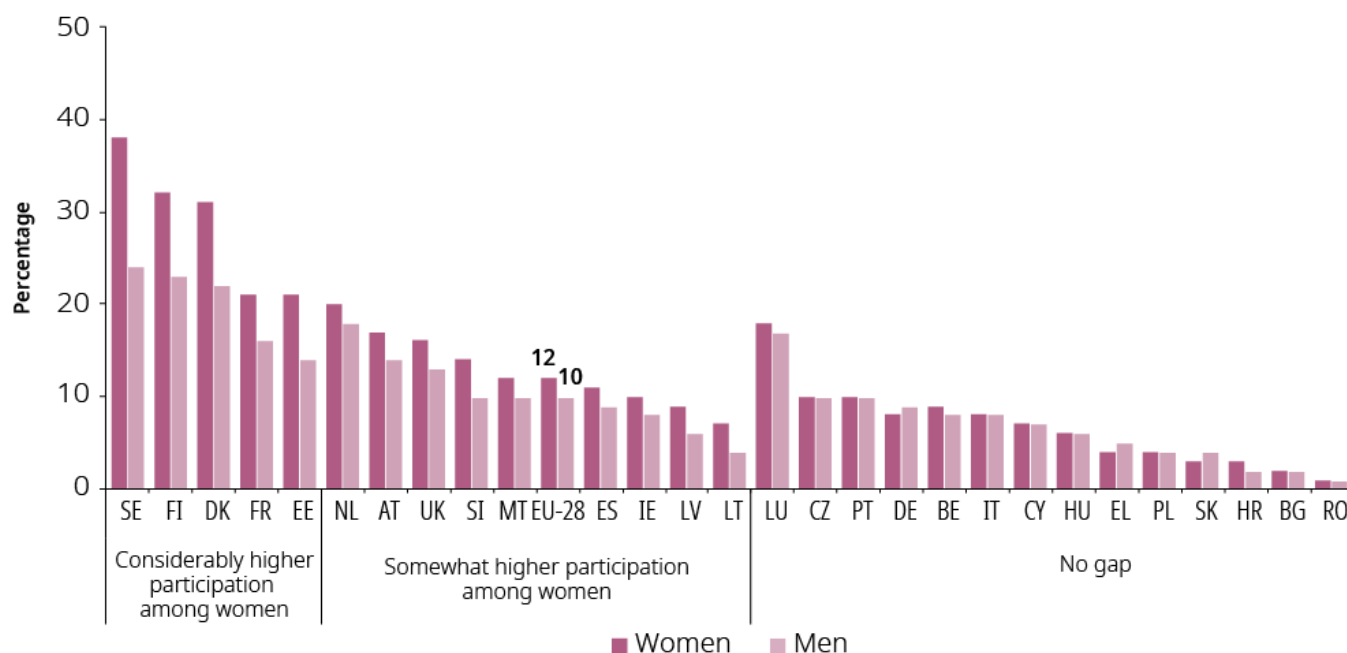


Figure 66: Percentage of women and men participating in formal and non-formal education and training (last 4 weeks) (25-64), 2017 (Indicator 14)

Note: Member States are grouped on size of the gender gap. 'Somewhat higher': gender gap 1-5 p.p. 'No gap': gender gap from - 1 to 1 p.p. 'Considerably higher': gender gap as > 5 p.p. Within the group, Member States are sorted in descending order.

Regardless of levels of educational attainment, women also participated more in education and training activities than men across the EU, although overall participation dropped sharply among people with secondary or lower education. Only 4 % of women and men aged 25-64 years with lower than secondary education participated in lifelong-learning activities^[3].

Similar patterns were evident in most Member States. More women than men aged 25-64 years participated in lifelong-learning activities in 24 Member States. In the remaining four Member States (DE, EL, RO, SK), the gap in favour of men was lower than 1 p.p. However, overall participation levels varied significantly among Member States. Nordic Member States had the highest participation rates in education and training among both women and men and also the highest gender gaps in favour of women. In Sweden, for example, 38 % of women and 24 % of men aged 25-64 years had participated in education and training in a 4-week period. In contrast, Member States in southern and central Europe tended to have lower participation rates in lifelong-learning activities. In Romania only 1 % of women and men participated in adult education and training, while in another five EU Member States (BG, EL, HR, PL, SK) the rates were below 5 % (Figure 66).

Women's over-representation in lifelong learning shrinks or disappears in work-related training. In 2016, average participation rates in non-formal education and training during working time in 27 EU Member States was 64 % and 75 % for women and men aged 25-64 years respectively (Figure 67). The same pattern was discernible in all Member States except Denmark, where the gender gap was only slightly in favour of women (0.5 p.p.). Gender patterns favouring men also appeared when looking deeper into incentives for employees to participate in non-formal education and training.

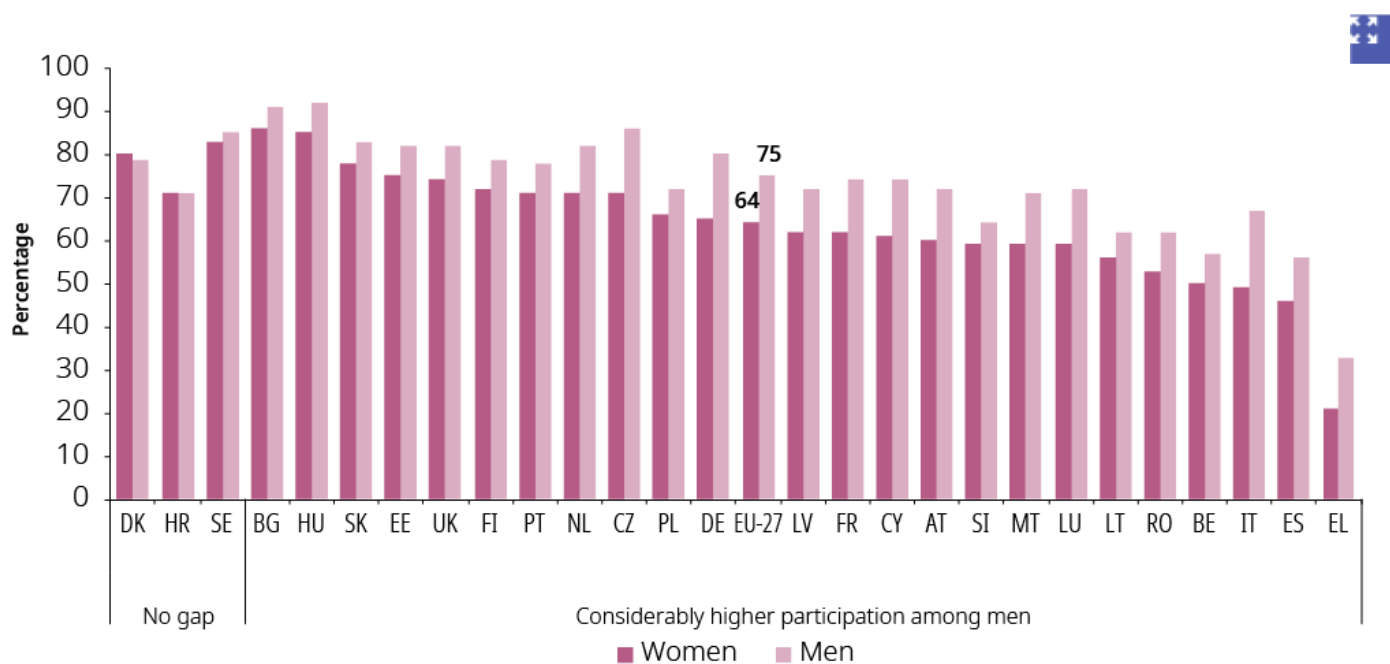


Figure 67: Percentage of women and men participating in non-formal education and training during working hours (% of all participants in education and training during the last 12 months) (25-64), 2016
 Note: Member States are grouped on size of the gender gap. 'No gap': gender gap from - 1 to 1 p.p. 'Considerably higher': gender gap > 5 p.p. Within the group, Member States are sorted in descending order.

In all Member States except Cyprus, men were more likely to receive financial contributions from employers to engage in education and training^[4]. Generally, employees in higher positions – less likely to be achieved by women – have more opportunities to participate in work-related training, including training on transferable skills that enhance their chances for promotion (Evertsson, 2004). In contrast, investment in women’s training tends to be more job specific and task related (Evertsson, 2004). These differences can have negative implications for the work–life balance of men and women as men grow further in their roles as the main family breadwinner, and women continue in jobs that help them better combine work with family duties.

The Gender Equality Index domains of time and work strongly correlate with women’s and men’s participation in education and training across Member States. Member States that had higher participation rates in adult formal and non-formal education displayed higher scores in the domain of time (Figure 68, Panels A and B) and a strong link to scores for the domain of work (Figure 68, Panels C and D). The correlation with the domain of time suggests a link between the better sharing of care responsibilities within a family and a higher engagement in lifelong-learning activities by both women and men.

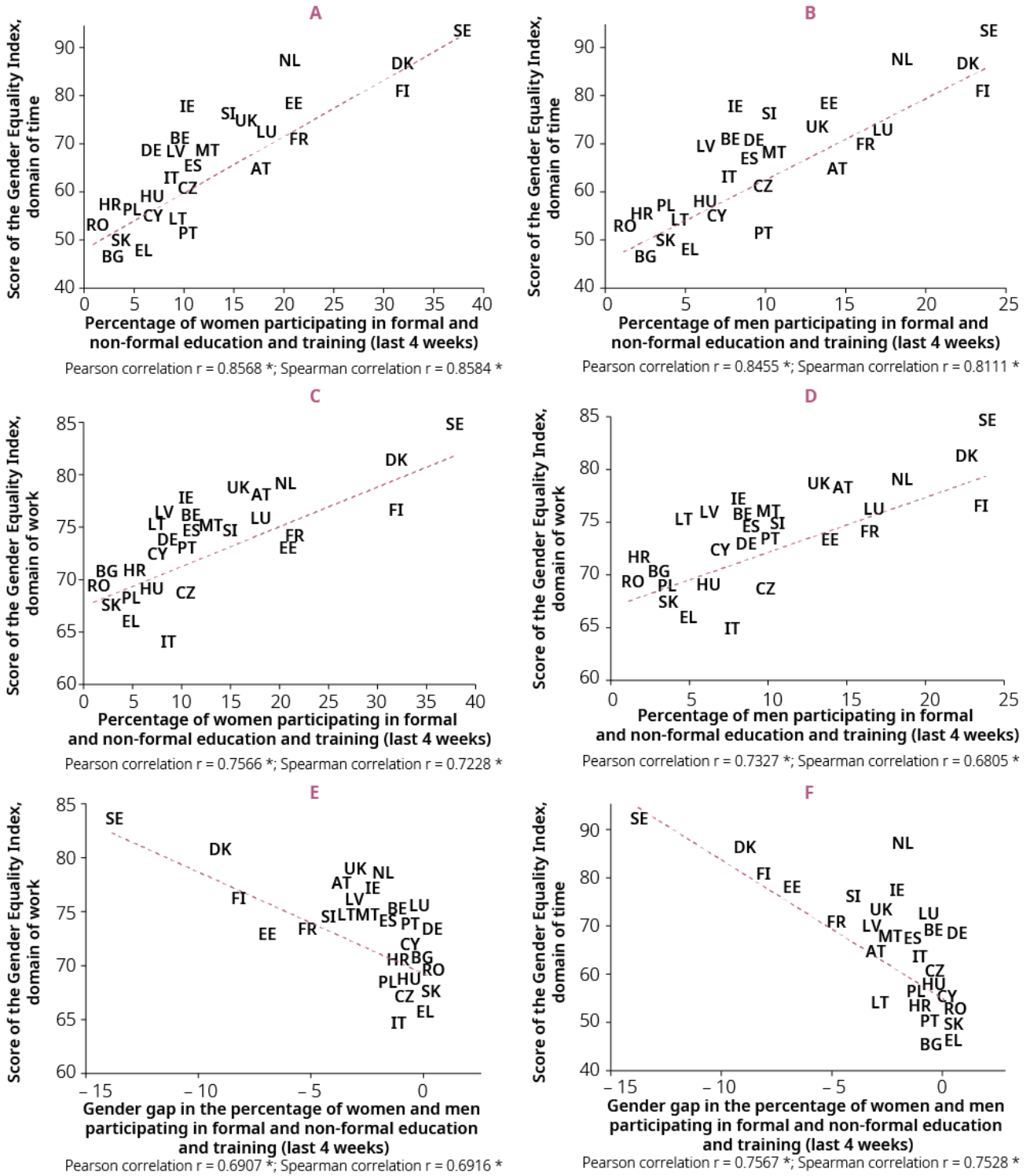


Figure 68: Percentage of women and men participating in formal and non-formal education and training (last 4 weeks) (value and gap) and Gender Equality Index scores (domains of work and time) (25-64)

Note: EIGE's calculations, EU LFS, Gender Equality Index, (*) refers to significance at 10 %.

The availability and affordability of formal childcare services are similarly important factors, as Member States with a higher provision of formal childcare for children below 3 years of age also had greater participation of women and men in the labour market and in lifelong-learning activities. The correlation with the domain of work is due to a mutually reinforcing connection between participation in adult education and higher gender equality in the labour market: those who engage in lifelong learning have better opportunities in the labour market, while higher levels of employment of both women and men (especially full-time) create more opportunities for work-related education and training.

When examining the relationships between gender gaps in participation in education and training and the domains of work and time, Member States that were more gender equal in employment and in the sharing of care responsibilities had higher gender gaps in favour of women in lifelong-learning participation (Figure 68, Panels E and F). This suggests that gender equality in the domains of work and time is not only positively associated with higher participation in adult education for both women and men, it particularly increases women's participation. Sweden is a good example of such an effect. Among EU Member States, Sweden has the highest levels of participation in education and training for both women and men, the highest gender-equality scores in the areas of work and time and the highest gender gap in adult education and training participation in the EU (14 p.p. in favour of women).

Women and men face different barriers to education and training

Not everyone can or wants to participate in education and training. Apart from weak interest in learning, a range of barriers can put participation out of reach for women and men. These include cost, access to formal and informal education and training activities, poor health and time. The latter is considered to be one of the strongest barriers to lifelong learning, with work-schedule conflicts, care responsibilities and household duties being the key time issues. Women experience a higher time deficit because of family-related responsibilities (Figure 69). In contrast, work-schedule conflicts were bigger barriers for men in most Member States (Figure 70).



Women across Europe undertake the bulk of care duties after having children, with implications for their employment opportunities, involvement in social, leisure and cultural activities (see Chapter 5) and participation in lifelong learning. On average, 40 % of women in the EU-28 who faced obstacles to participating in education and training activities could not take part due to family responsibilities (Figure 69). The same reason was reported by only 24 % of men. In all Member States except Denmark, more women than men reported family responsibilities as an obstacle, with the highest numbers reported in Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Austria and Spain (> 50 % of women identified this reason). Where the availability of formal childcare services is low and work–life balance policies are undeveloped, women might choose jobs that do not require continuous skills investment through education and training, and therefore allow more of their time for care duties (Sidle, 2011).

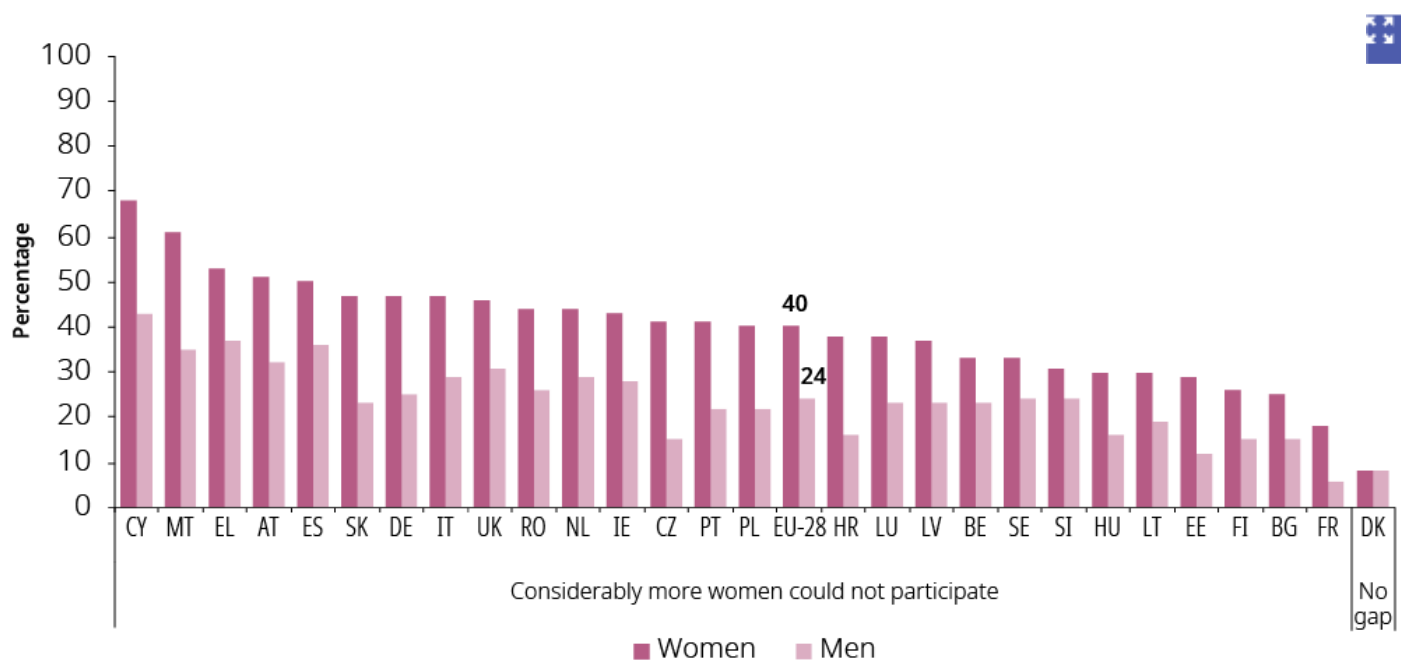


Figure 69: Percentage of women and men not participating in formal or non-formal education and training by the major time-related barriers (family responsibilities) (25-64), 2016 (Indicator 15)

Note: Member States are grouped on size of the gender gap. 'Somewhat higher': gender gap 1-5 p.p. 'No gap': gender gap from - 1 to 1 p.p. 'Considerably more': gender gap > 5 p.p. Within the group, Member States are sorted in descending order.

Once a child enters the family, traditional gender roles tend to become more entrenched. Men strengthen their role as breadwinner as the partner active on the labour market (Becker, 1985; Dieckhoff & Steiber, 2010). This can potentially lead to difficulties in combining work and family responsibilities with adult education and training activities. Although the pattern is not universal, in the vast majority of Member States men tended to report their work schedule more as a barrier to participation than women did. On average, 43 % of men and 38 % of women in the EU who faced obstacles to participating in lifelong learning activities could not participate in lifelong learning due to work responsibilities (Figure 70).

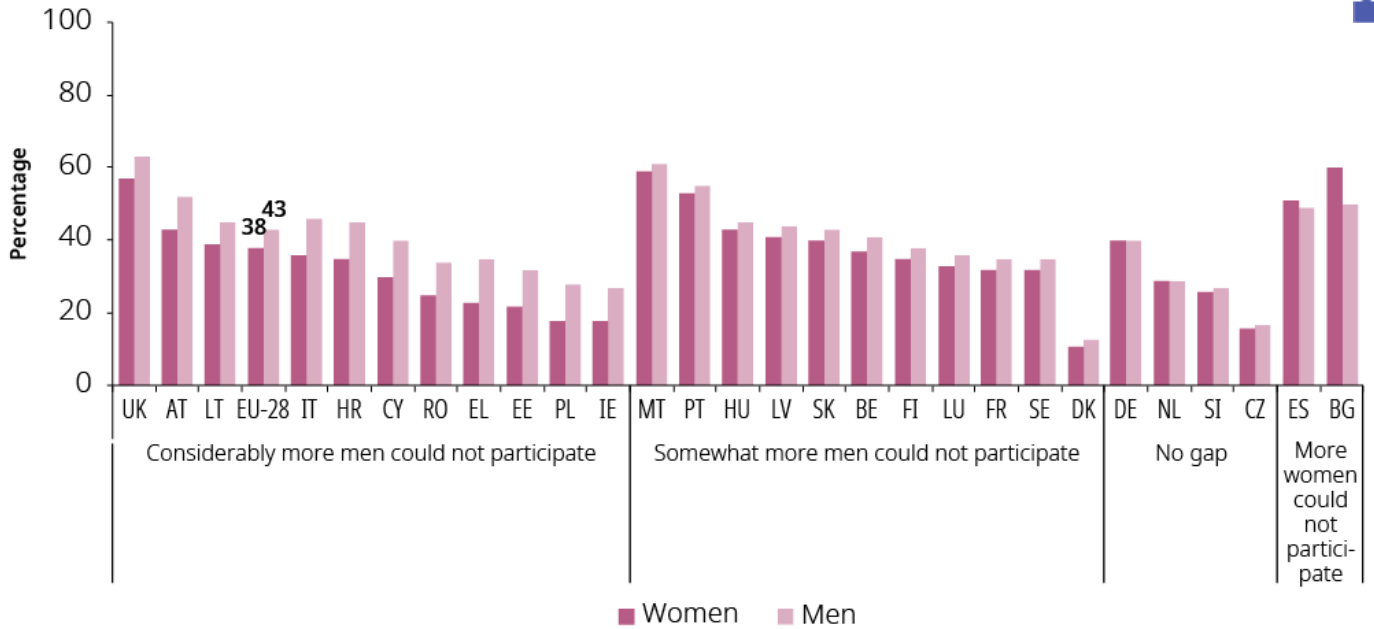


Figure 70: Percentage of women and men not participating in formal or non-formal education and training by the major time-related barriers (work schedule) (25-64), 2016 (Indicator 15)

Note: Member States are grouped on size of the gender gap. ‘Somewhat more’: gender gap 1-5 p.p. ‘No gap’: gender gap from – 1 to 1 p.p. ‘Considerably more’: gender gap > 5 p.p. Within the group, Member States are sorted in descending order.

The policy goals of better work–life balance and higher participation in lifelong learning are high on the EU agenda, but potential synergies and conflicts between them are rarely discussed. In a rapidly changing knowledge economy, continuous learning throughout life is essential for both women and men, but finding the time to maintain and increase skills and knowledge is challenging. As women and men tend to face different time-related barriers to lifelong learning, better work–life policies would not only allow a more satisfactory combination of job and family responsibilities, they would also free up time for continuous investment and growth in people’s skills and knowledge.

Footnotes

[1] EIGE’s calculation, Eurostat, European Union Labour Force Survey (trng_lfs_01).

[2] Eurostat, Education statistics, 2017 (trng_lfs_03).

[3] Eurostat, Education statistics, 2017 (trng_lfse_03).

[4] EIGE’s calculations, Adult Education Survey (2016), data not available for IE.