

Gender Equality Index 2019. Work-life balance

Transport and public infrastructure

Women rely more on public infrastructure for work–life balance

Access to quality and sustainable public infrastructure such as care and educational facilities, health services and transportation is fundamental to people’s well-being and participation in social and economic activities. The complex interplay between mobility, out-of-home activities, care responsibilities and paid work underscores the critical role of public infrastructure in determining employment opportunities for women and men and in balancing paid work with other life duties and needs.

Traditional gender roles assigning women to care work, paid or unpaid, result in women using and contributing to public infrastructure more than men (OECD, 2019). For public infrastructure to benefit the whole population, its design, location and accessibility should take into account the differences in gender needs.

Due to the scope of this analysis, and given that women’s and men’s access to healthcare (see Chapter 7), care services (Sections 9.3 and 9.4) and educational facilities (see Chapter 4 and Section 9.7) are covered elsewhere, greater focus is put herein on other physical public infrastructure, and in particular on transport.

Both transport and related travel behaviour, as well as the presence and quality of other facilities and services, are highly relevant to the analysis of work–life balance and gender equality. The existing literature provides much evidence on how transport and commuting explicitly support work–life balance. However, the use and accessibility of other public infrastructure facilities and services in relation to work–life balance per se have not been as extensively examined as gender and employment (Schwanen & de Jong, 2008).

Nonetheless, limited availability of gender-disaggregated data on physical public infrastructure means that the current scoreboard (Section 9.1) contains only one transport-related indicator. It measures the time women and men spend on commuting between home and work. A number of other aspects regarding transportation and travel behaviour can also be captured through such information as the average time women and men spend on various categories of travelling or the gender differences in the mode of transport typically used, which are also discussed in this section.

Commuting patterns reflect and perpetuate gender roles at home and at work

Due to existing gender inequalities across various domains of life, women and men have different access to transport and public infrastructure, which affects them differently. A large body of academic literature has demonstrated significant gender differences in the travel patterns and behaviour of women and men, in particular in their journey to work (EIGE, 2016a). For example, women are more likely to travel shorter distances than men and undertake more complex and multi-purpose trips (CIVITAS, 2014).

These travel patterns are the result of women's dual role in work and care, as well as the unequal distribution of household chores (Blumen, 1994; EIGE, 2016a). Greater household responsibilities mean that women are more likely to work shorter hours (part-time) and closer to their home so as to be able to fulfil other tasks, including care and shopping (Bowling, Göllner, & O'Dwyer, 1999). In this respect, women with young children are particularly disadvantaged regarding job choice and location because of the space-time fixity of work, childcare and other household tasks. This constrained mobility makes it harder for women to participate in the labour market on the same footing as men, in turn increasing the gender pay gap and women's risk of economic dependency and poverty (Blumen, 1994). Men's lower engagement in care and other household activities reflects their higher focus on successful and stable career pathways, accompanied by greater options on commuting type or time.

Commuting is not only necessary for people to reach their work place, it also gives them more freedom to choose positions that suit their educational background, even if it means travelling further. Men typically spend somewhat more time commuting and are also more likely to engage in linear, single-purpose trips (to and from work), in contrast to women. Overall, on average in the EU, commuting to and from work constitutes close to 30 % of all daily travelling time for women and close to 40 % for men. Travel related to shopping and other services, however, takes nearly a quarter of all travel time for women but less than one fifth of men's^[1]. Evidently, these differences indicate travelling being a wider reflection of gendered structures in both the labour market and the private sphere.

In time actually spent, women’s daily commuting time (to and from work total) was 39 minutes on average in the EU in 2015, and 44 minutes for men (Figure 55). In line with wider literature (Crane, 2007), the referred commuting time does not directly reflect travel distances or travel modes, which may perpetuate further gender differences. About-the-same commuting time can entail major differences in travel distances as well as in speed and costs associated with the differing transport modes used to reach workplaces. Among Member States, the longest commuting time for women was noted in Denmark (48 minutes), and for men in the United Kingdom (58 minutes). The shortest commuting times were observed in Cyprus, for both women and men. In seven Member States (AT, DE, IE, BE, LV, UK, SE), where gender gaps on commuting time were much more notable, average commuting times, especially for men, were also longer compared to Member States with smaller or near-equal gender gaps (e.g. CY, PT, IT, BG, EL).

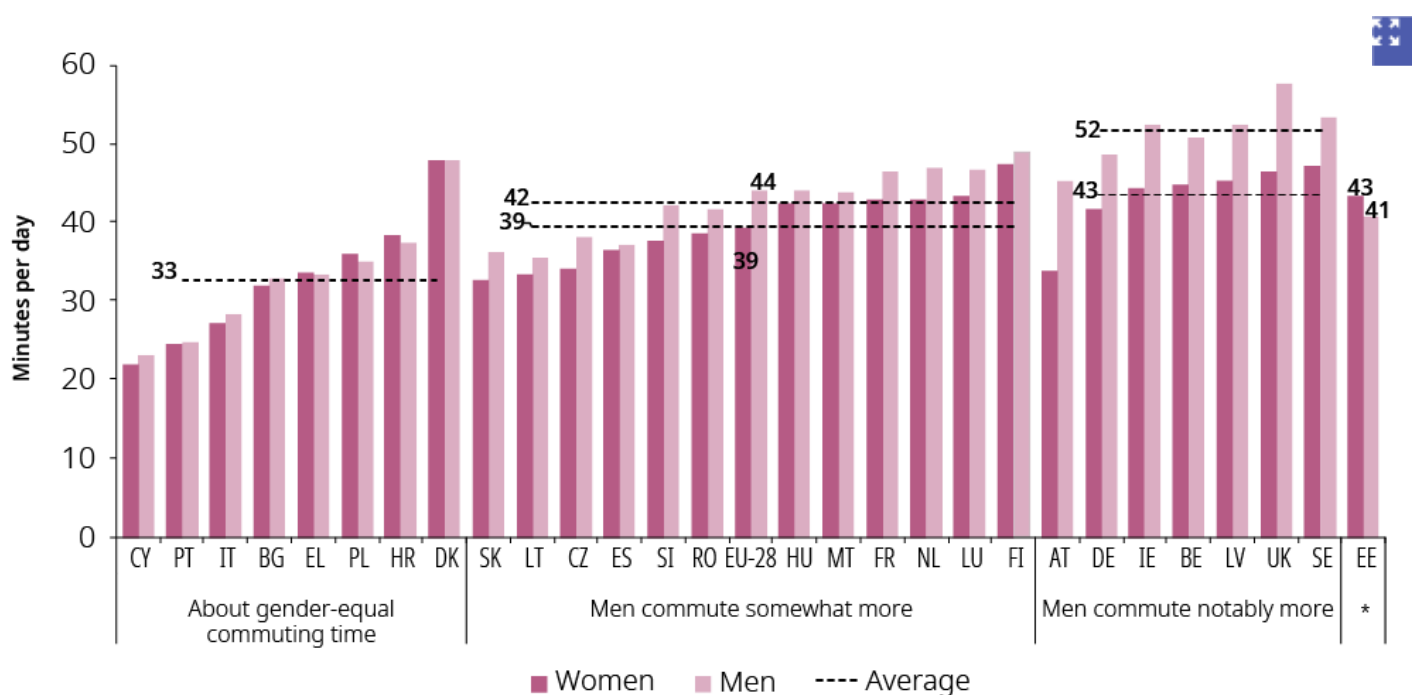


Figure 55: Average number of minutes per day women and men spend commuting to and from work (15+), 2015 (Indicator 11)
 Note: The EWCS questions applies only to the working population; Member States are grouped on the basis of gender gaps in commuting time. ‘Somewhat more’: gender gap 2-5 minutes. ‘Notably more’: > 5 minutes. * Estonia is the only Member State where women commute somewhat more. Dashed lines refer to average commuting time by women and men within the respective group of Member States.

Given the often subtle but complex ways mobility and gender intersect, differences in commuting times are more pronounced among certain groups of women and men. For example, commuting times are longer among employees with a higher level of educational qualifications, especially among men in the prime earning years of 35 and above (Lee & McDonald, 2003). This underlines once again the importance of commuting as an enabler of accessibility to desirable jobs.

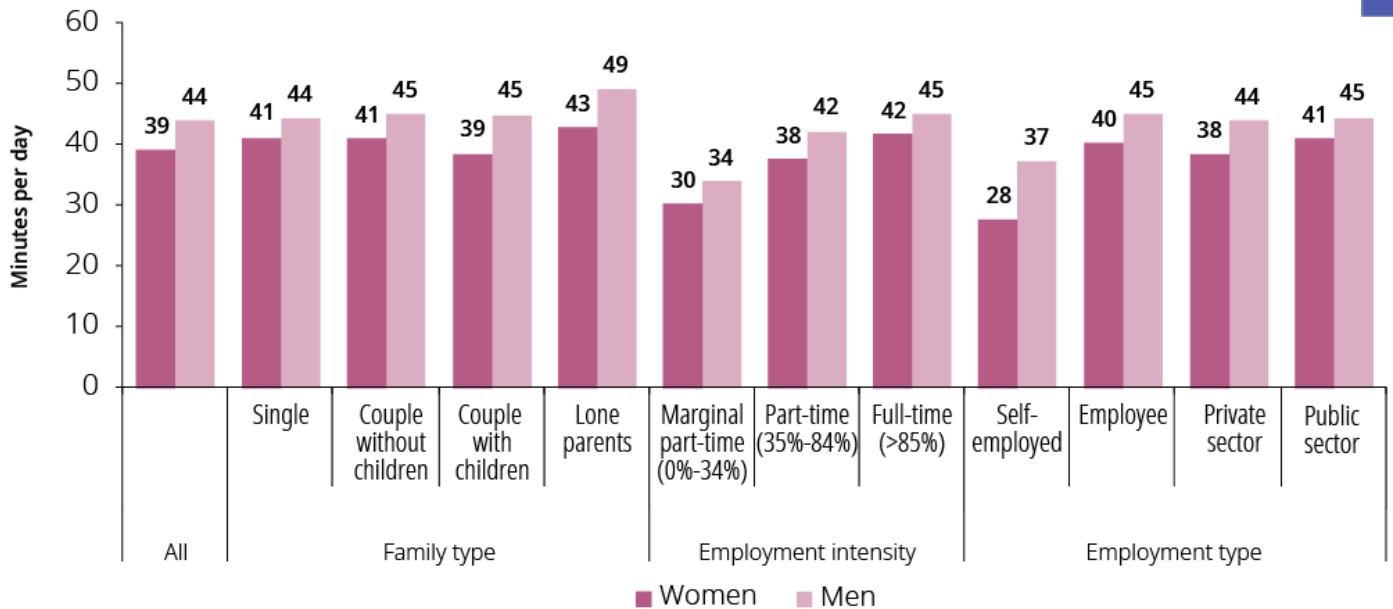


Figure 56: Average number of minutes per day women and men spend commuting to and from work (15+) by family type and work attributes, EU 28, 2015

On average in the EU, commuting times were consistently shorter for women than men across various family and work dimensions (Figure 56). More notable dips in mobility were seen among women living in couples with dependent children. At the same time, lone parents had longer commuting times, potentially from increased efforts to combine family and work at any cost. When taking into account different patterns of employment, the mobility of women in self-employment or in marginal part-time work was particularly constrained. In addition, the commuting times of women working in the private sector were shorter than those of equivalent men and those of women and men in the public sector.

Gender differences in commuting times across various categories of employment intensity might reflect not only overall gender segregation in the labour market (see Chapter 2), but also the influence of flexible working arrangements. As noted in Section 9.6, despite lower overall availability of flexible working arrangements (particularly in the public sector), women’s higher take-up of such arrangements in comparison to men’s take-up is a strong reflection of women’s push for balance in paid work and household duties.

Equal access to transport can empower women

Commuting time is not only strongly linked to the entire Gender Equality Index^[2], but also to two of its domains – time and work – as demonstrated by Figure 57. It can be viewed as an enabling factor for gender equality across various domains of life, particularly regarding women’s and men’s employment opportunities and their access to high-quality jobs.

In the domain of time, the strongest link is with the scores for the sub-domain of care activities. This suggests that in Member States where women's mobility is higher, women and men are more equally involved in caring for children and other dependents, as well as in household activities. This means that gender equality on how time is spent, even on issues such as commuting and mobility, has knock-on effects for equality in other areas of life. An important additional example is in the domain of work. Higher commuting times for women go hand in hand with higher gender-equality scores for the sub-domain of segregation and quality of work. This shows that women's greater mobility is not only possible, unleashing a more equitable share of care activities in the process, it also leads to better and more diversified job options that reduce gender gaps in the world of work.

It should also be noted that although the correlations in Figure 57 focus on linkages between the commuting time of women who work full-time, equivalent linkages could be established with the commuting time of men working full-time. In addition, respective associations could be displayed on average commuting times pointing to mobility as a strong predictor of women's and men's overall engagement in economic and social life, irrespective of working intensity or family settings. In general, the existence of these linkages suggests that commuting time acts as a strong enabling factor in balancing paid work and care activities, thereby influencing gender-equality outcomes across Member States.

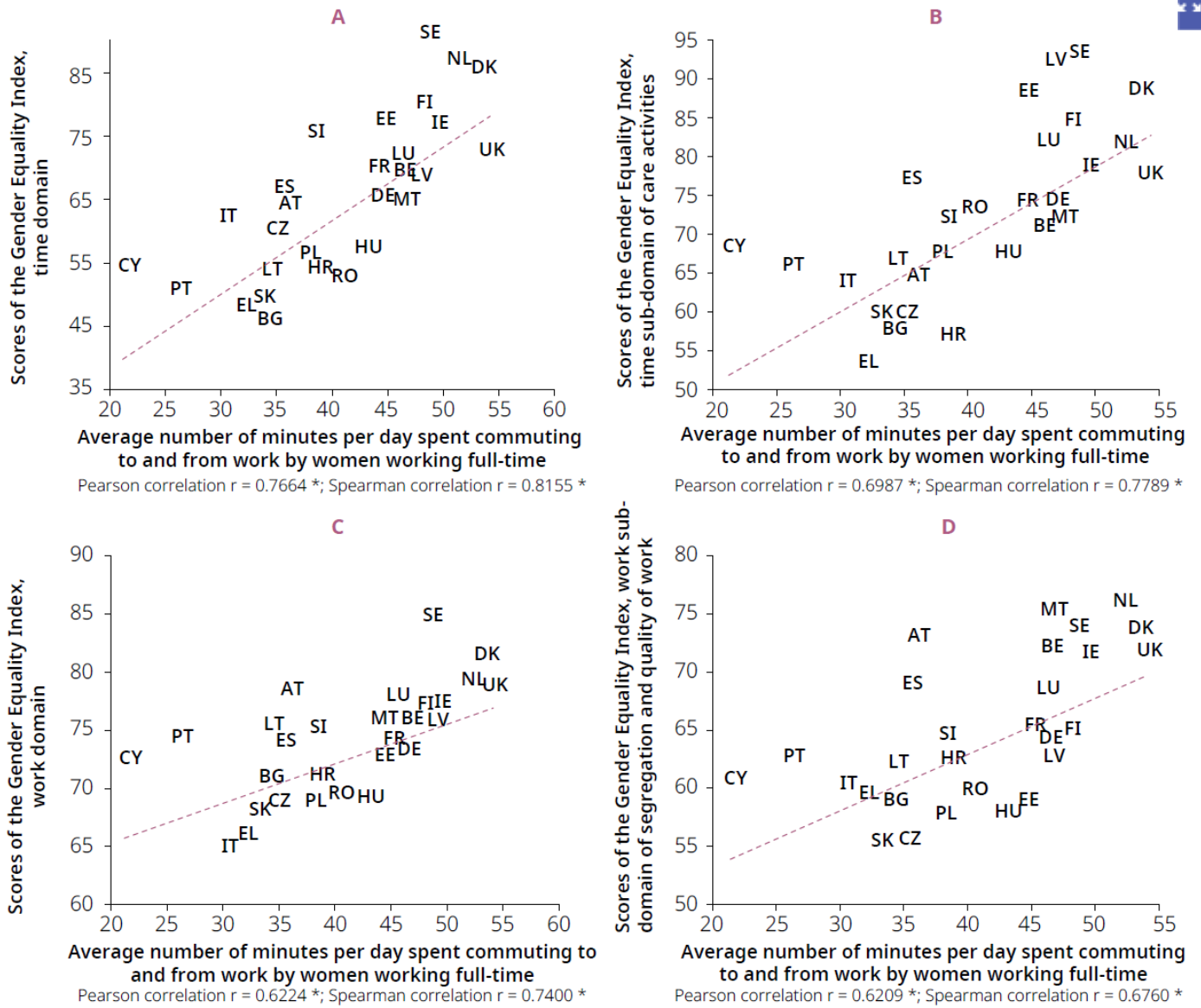


Figure 57: Gender Equality Index scores and average number of minutes per day spent commuting to and from work by women working full-time (15+), 2015

Note: EIGE's calculations, EWCS (2015), Gender Equality Index, (*) refers to significance at 10 %.

Besides commuting time, there are substantial differences in the mode of transportation used by women and men. Data shows that men have access to faster and more comfortable modes of transport, most notably private cars. A number of studies suggests that the allocation of a car within a household is based on deeply rooted gender norms, with the result that cars are more likely to be attributed to men (Blumen, 1994). Access to a private vehicle tends to grant men access to a wider range of labour-market opportunities, as distance and time to commute are not obstacles. Consequently, men are more likely to be employed further away from their home than women. In contrast, women use cars less and public transport more than men, notably, for example, due to lower (personal) incomes (Blumen, 1994; Bowling et al., 1999; CIVITAS, 2014; Lang, 1992; Uteng & Cresswell, 2016). It is also argued (Blumen, 1994) that preference given to

men in the use of the family car is associated with men's higher income. This leads to a vicious circle, as women's inaccessibility to a car often restricts their employment opportunities to poorly paid occupations that are found closer to their home.

Figure 58 shows that larger families in the EU were more likely to have cars as the most typically used transport mode. Men used cars more often than women regardless of family type, with gender gaps wider among families with children and childless couples than single people. This reflects the greater needs and (income) possibilities of such families. Couples with children, for example, rely on cars as a means to better balance work and private-life needs. Lone parents with children, however, were less likely to be able to afford a car (see Chapter 3 as regards income situation), reporting no alternative mode of transport available to them other than public transport (18 %) or walking (22 %)^[3]. In general, access to public transport in the EU was viewed as either very or rather difficult for about a quarter of women and men with lower incomes (first quartile), as well as for a fifth of women and men with higher incomes (fourth quartile)^[4].

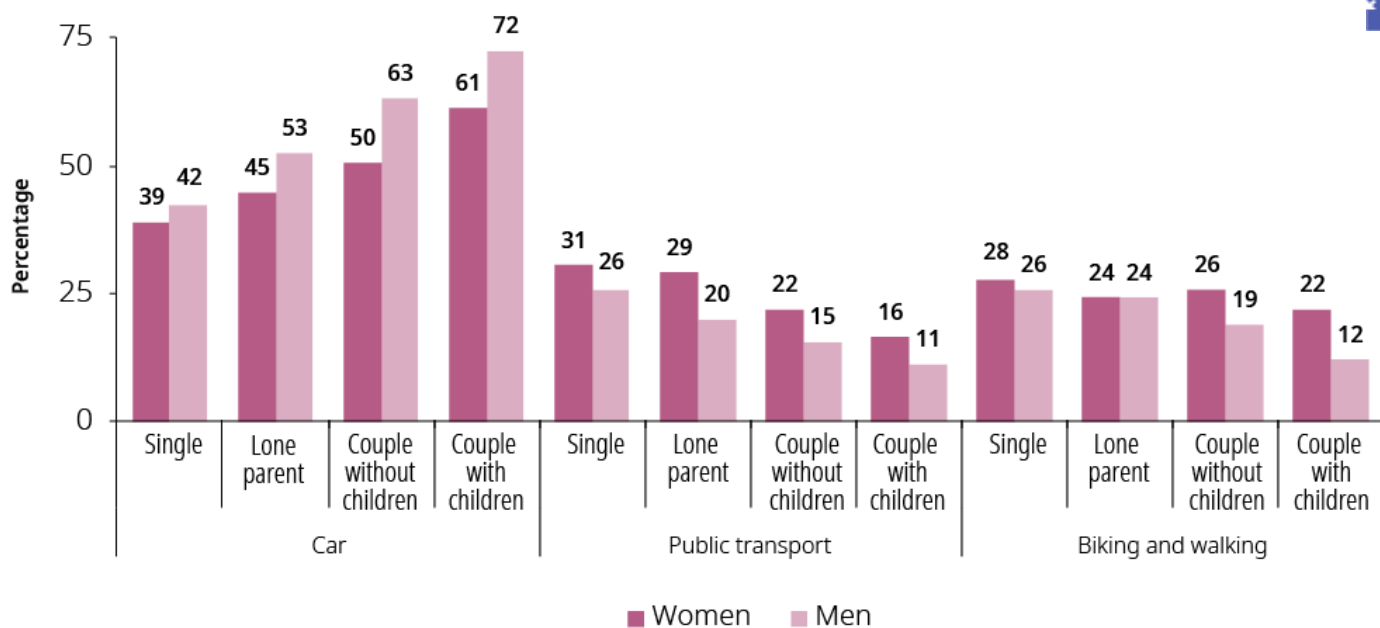


Figure 58: Distribution of women and men by mode of transport typically used (15+, %), by household type, EU-28, 2014

Generational factors also come into play on the link between gender and transport modes. For example, single women and men, who are mainly those from younger age groups, were also most likely to resort to public transport, biking or walking (Figure 58). The largest gender gap among those typically using public transport was among lone parents, with women more dependent on it. Among those biking or walking, the gender gap was greatest among couples with children and those without, with women again more reliant on these transport modes.

Clearly, the travel and commuting statistics provided above highlight that women's access to private transport has a crucial impact on their economic autonomy, particularly given existing transport infrastructure. Lack of access to a car for daily use restricts women's employment options, while the longer travel times involved in the use of public transport makes it even more difficult for women, particularly lone mothers, to achieve a good work–life balance. As a result, it becomes increasingly necessary to reduce their working time, with consequences for their income levels and financial independence. It should be stressed that these findings reflect the current transport situation, which favours the use of private cars. At the same time, and given the gendered patterns of unpaid care and paid work division, the availability, accessibility and cost of currently available public transport is a particularly strong determinant of whether women and men can work, how much they can work and where. Rethinking (environmental) sustainability and greater investment in public transport infrastructure with these factors in mind could go some way to addressing gender inequalities in work–life balance.

The quality and safety of public transport are of importance too in determining how women and men use it. For example, sexual harassment on public transport is a major concern for women, impacting negatively on their overall mobility (Gardner, Cui, & Coiacetto, 2017). This is especially the case where there is no option to use a private car or to cycle, while walking carries security risks. Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable targets of sexual assault on public transport (Iudici, Bertoli, & Faccio, 2017), adding to the multiple other challenges they face (see e.g. Chapters 2 and 3).

While this chapter highlights complexities and close links between transport/public infrastructure and its shaping of gender-equal outcomes across the various spheres of life, it is important to stress the need for cautious interpretation of the available data and in the given time frame. Tackling gender equality via improved access to public infrastructure and transport is not only about seeking the same opportunities for women and men, it is also about a sustained, forward-looking understanding of the relationship between gender and mobility (Hanson, 2010), and mobility and work. Commuting times between home and work, for example, could be less of an impediment to balancing work and life if opportunities for flexible working arrangements were greatly expanded (see Section 9.6). This would allow for a reallocation of how time is spent: from commuting to more time with families.

The future relationship between gender equality and mobility could also be affected by such developments as smart transportation and the impact of digitalisation on gender equality (EIGE, 2018d, 2019a). Lastly, if gender equality was better mainstreamed into public infrastructure developments, and with greater investment in public transport overall, private transport would play a less crucial role in determining job options. This would open more opportunities for a better work–life balance for both women and men (EIGE, 2016a) and reduce transport’s environmental footprint.

Footnotes

[1] EIGE calculation based on Eurostat Harmonised European Time-Use Survey (HETUS), 2010 (Tus_00hhstatus). ‘Time spent, participation time and participation rate in the main activity by sex and household composition’, with data including information on 13 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Serbia.

[2] Pxcorr r = 0.6427 *, linking overall gender-equality scores and commuting time of women who work with full-time intensity (> 85 %).

[3] EIGE calculation based on Eurobarometer 82.2 (2014) data.

[4] EIGE calculation based on EQLS data (2016).
