

# Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

## Gender-based violence intersects with multiple axes of oppression

Minority groups face different kinds of discriminations in Europe. The intersection between belonging to a minority group and identifying as a woman creates a particularly vulnerable condition that poses several threats to physical and psychological integrity.

For example, extensive research shows that Muslim women are disproportionately affected by Islamophobic attacks across Europe, as wearing a headscarf makes their religious affiliation easily recognisable (Abdelkader, 2017; Mahr and Nadeem, 2019; Seta, 2016). Attacks on these women – usually perpetrated by unknown white men – are motivated by a combination of Islamophobia and sexism (Seta, 2016).

Older women are disproportionately exposed to the risk of abuse, compared with older men (Saripapa, 2019). Gender is a risk factor for victims of elderly abuse not only because women have a longer life expectancy and are over-represented among people in need of long-term care (EIGE, 2020e) but also because gendered power dynamics are exacerbated by old-age physical and economic fragility (Van Bavel et al., 2010).

In December 2019, Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) launched its Multi-Agency Responses to Violence against Older Women project to develop provision of support to elderly survivors of violence. Later life stages reflect the accumulation of a lifetime of inequality, economic dependence, violence and abuse, which makes older women particularly vulnerable, including to femicide (Brennan et al., 2017). This is especially true for those in need of long-term care and medical assistance (WAVE, 2019).

Disability, too, substantially increases women's vulnerability to violence (EIGE, 2020a). Like older women, women with disabilities are more likely to be in some way dependent on their abuser, which prevents them from accessing help (Tatara et al., 1998).

In its EU-wide survey on violence against women, FRA found that women with disabilities were more likely to be victims of all forms of violence (physical, sexual and psychological violence and stalking) than women who did not identify as having disabilities (FRA, 2014b). Of women with disabilities, 34 % have suffered intimate partner violence, compared with 19 % of women without disabilities (EIGE, 2020a).

Within the LGBTQI\* community, the gender component exacerbates the risk of violence and discrimination. According to FRA's 2012 EU LGBT survey, individuals whose gender expression did not match the sex they were assigned at birth were twice as likely to experience hate-motivated violence than those who fitted with societal expectations. This included not only transgender individuals<sup>[1]</sup>, but also gay men presenting in a 'feminine' way, and bisexual and lesbian women presenting in a 'masculine' way (FRA, 2014a).

Indeed, the latest version of FRA's LGBTI survey revealed that 46 % of bisexual women and 29 % of lesbian women experienced harassment due to their assigned sex, in addition to their sexual orientation, compared with only 2 % of gay men (FRA, 2020).

Another form of violence affecting the LGBTQI\* community is intersex genital mutilation, the practice of subjecting intersex<sup>[2]</sup> infants to 'corrective' genital surgeries to modify their sex characteristics (Jones, 2017). According to FRA (2020), in Europe 62 % of these interventions are non-consensual, as they are performed on infants who are unable to express their informed consent to the treatment.

The gendered aspect of intersex genital mutilation is particularly relevant, since the medicalisation of intersex bodies consists in the non-consensual mutilation of gender-non-conforming bodies, in order to 'normalise' them and align them with the assigned gender roles and sex of rearing (Carpenter, 2016).

In February 2019, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the rights of intersex people (2018/2878 (RSP)), recognising that such surgeries are medically unnecessary (serving only a cosmetic purpose) and cause lifelong damage to the physical and psychological integrity of intersex people. The Parliament thus 'strongly condemns sex-normalising treatments and surgery; welcomes laws that prohibit such surgery, as in Malta and Portugal, and encourages other Member States to adopt similar legislation as soon as possible' (European Parliament, 2019b).

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## Footnotes

[1] Individuals who are openly transgender or intersex are the most likely to be sexually or physically assaulted (24 % and 26 % prevalence of attacks, compared with 11 % among LGBTI respondents overall) (FRA, 2020).

[2] The term refers to 'a range of physical traits or variations that lie between stereotypical ideals of male and female. Intersex people are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. Many forms of intersex exist; it is a spectrum or umbrella term, rather than a single category' (ILGA-EUROPE, 2015, p. 5).

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