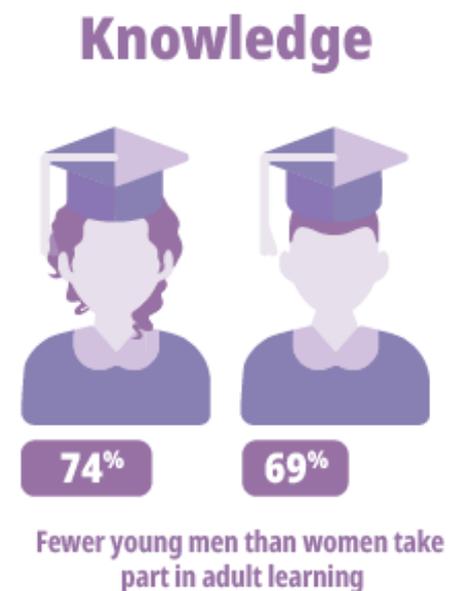


EIGE-2021 Gender Equality Index 2021 Report: Health

Domain of knowledge

Equal access to quality education is a key driver of change in the work, money and power domains, and is essential for gender equality. Educational attainment continues to steadily increase among both young women and men, with women now outpacing men. Gender segregation remains the key challenge in this domain. The previously upwards trend in the proportion of men studying education, health and welfare, humanities and the arts has plateaued, as has the upwards trend in the proportion of women studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Participation in adult learning decreases with age, and engaging hard-to-reach groups remains a challenge.

Education, training and lifelong learning have always been high on the EU policy agenda but are now critical in an increasingly digitalised economy and for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan emphasises the importance of adults, particularly from disadvantaged groups, upskilling and reskilling to increase their employability, boost innovation, close the digital skills gap and ensure social fairness. The action plan also set a target of 60 % of adults undertaking training each year by 2030^[1]. Reskilling and upskilling are also policy priorities in the recovery plan for Europe.



Equally important to tackle is segregation in education – the concentration of women and men in different fields of study and subsequent careers, including teaching. The 2020–2025 EU gender equality strategy stresses the importance of addressing gendered choices, while the 2021–2027 digital education action plan aims to boost the number of women in STEM by providing digital skills through education and training. Through the updated European Skills Agenda, the Commission aims to work closely with Member States on measures promoting gender balance in ICT-related jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to the closure of education facilities and a forced shift to digital education. Digital technologies, while enabling many pupils, students and adult learners to continue learning, proved to be a major barrier for others. Many families in difficult socioeconomic situations had little or no access to the equipment required for online learning, and many parents lacked the digital skills or time needed to help their children. Adding to these barriers is the fact that the majority of educators had little, if any, experience of online teaching. For lone parents and working couples with children, especially in younger ages, there were additional difficulties due to need to continue working despite increased care responsibilities at home.

Tackling gender norms and inequality in this domain could have major benefits not only on gender-balanced learning and careers, but also in other areas. As reported in Section 9.1., well-established empirical evidence highlights how education impacts health by affecting behaviour, including the use of preventive health services (OECD, 2006). It has been found that education substantially affects health outcomes, even after factoring in characteristics such as income level and family background. This suggests that educational policies have the potential to substantially improve health (WHO, 2015). Nonetheless, research evidence points that due to gender norms educational impact on health outcomes for women and men is different (Cutler and Lleras-Muney, 2007).

Footnotes

[1] The Gender Equality Index indicator on women's and men's participation in education and training measures the participation during the preceding 4 weeks.