

EIGE-2021 Gender Equality Index 2021 Report: Health

Fragile pace of change since 2010

The domain of work^[1] is among the domains to have experienced slowest progress in the EU-27 since 2010. Its score increased by only 0.2 points in 2019, following an increase of only 0.3 points in 2018 (Figure 4). This slowdown was anticipated in the 5th Index, as progress during 2010–2018 was largely driven by recovery from the 2008 economic crisis and the relative stability after the crisis (EIGE, 2020g). Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in the workforce, the score for 2019 is worrying.

Progress in this domain has been minimal in part because few gains have been made in the participation subdomain. The score increase in this subdomain was low, at 0.4 points, in 2019, lower even than 2018, when it increased by 0.5 points. The subdomain of segregation and quality of work made even less progress in 2019, increasing by only 0.2 points. Since 2010, the score for this subdomain has risen by only 0.5 points overall. Such creeping gains in the area of gender segregation in the labour force underlines the fragility of gender equality progress and the intractability of the challenge faced across the EU (Figure 4).

The progress noted above does not take account of changes in two indicators because of a lack of data availability. Specifically, an indicator on being able to take a few hours off during a working day to take care of personal or family matters and a Career Prospect Index remain unchanged, as the most recent data is from 2015. Consequently, uncertainty remains as to what extent gender equality progress or regress should be attributed to such important aspects of work–life balance, given the low Index score of 63.1 points for the subdomain of segregation and quality of work.

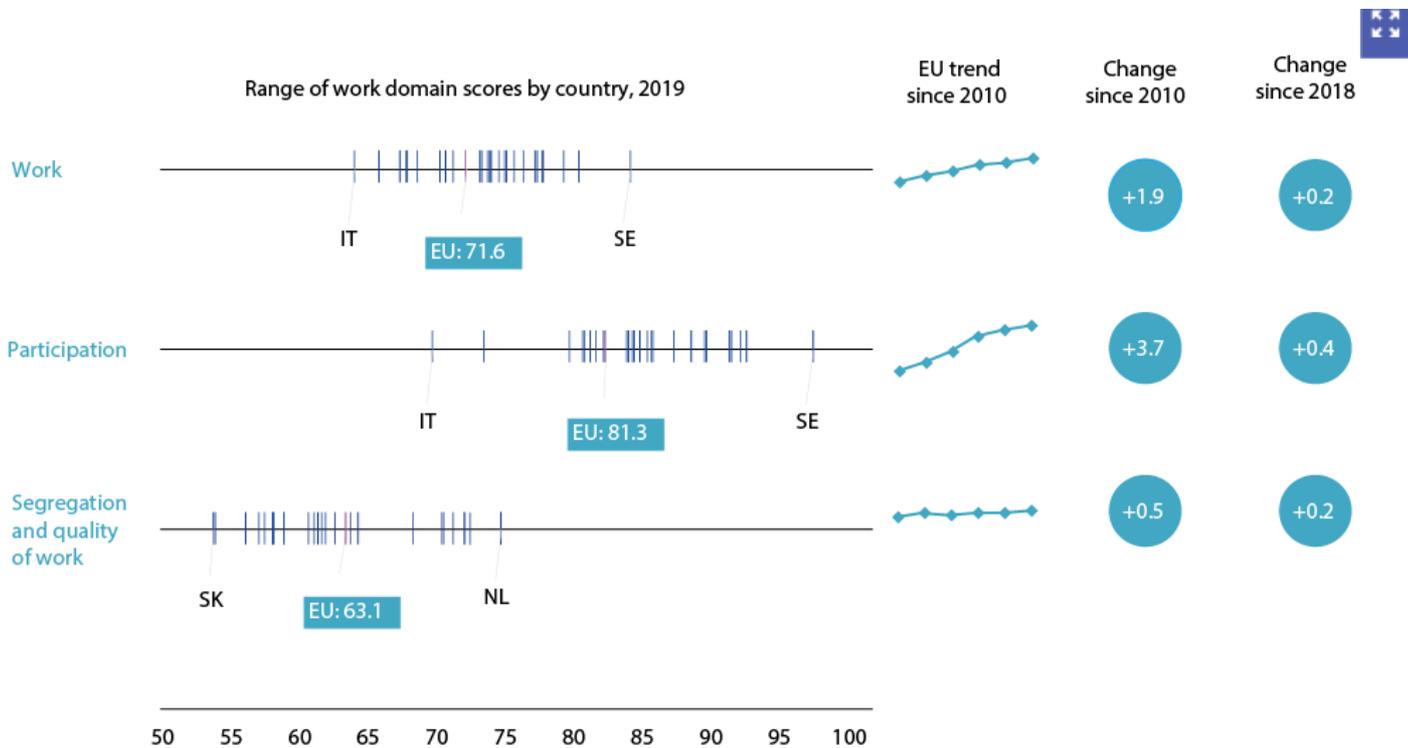


Figure 4. Scores for the domain of work and its subdomains (2019), and changes over time

The relatively high Index score of 81.3 points in the participation subdomain masks enormous gender gaps across the EU and in forms of employment. For example, women’s FTE employment rate in 2019 was 16 p.p. lower than men’s (see Section 2.2.). The gender gap was particularly large in Malta (21.8 p.p.), Italy (20.1 p.p.) and the Netherlands (19.2 p.p.). The situation in Italy is particularly concerning, with the women’s FTE employment rate of 31.4 % being at least 10 p.p. below the EU-27 average, and the lowest in the EU. Gender gaps in FTE employment rates also reflect the fact that a higher proportion of women than of men are employed in non-standard and often precarious, jobs, including part-time jobs.

The low score for the subdomain of segregation and quality of work reflects the fact that progress in meeting a series of gender equality challenges has come to a standstill. For example, women continue to dominate the education, health and social work employment sectors, even in countries traditionally achieving higher employment participation rates for women. For example, the gender difference in these sectors amounts to 30.4 p.p. in Finland, to 30 p.p. in Denmark, to 29.8 p.p. in Sweden, to 28.4 p.p. in Belgium and to 26.5 p.p. in the Netherlands.

With tentative overall progress in the domain of work, country-level developments are especially important (Figure 5). They indicate both sustained challenges and signs of progress. In 2019, negative score changes in this domain were recorded in five countries: Poland, Romania and Slovenia saw a decrease of – 0.1 points, with greater declines in Cyprus (– 0.2 points) and Denmark (– 0.3 points). The case of Denmark reflects the fragility of gains made in previous years; the decline recorded in 2019 was the greatest contributor to an overall decline of 0.4 points since 2010. Romania is the only other country to have scored negatively over the same period, and by the same amount (– 0.4 points).

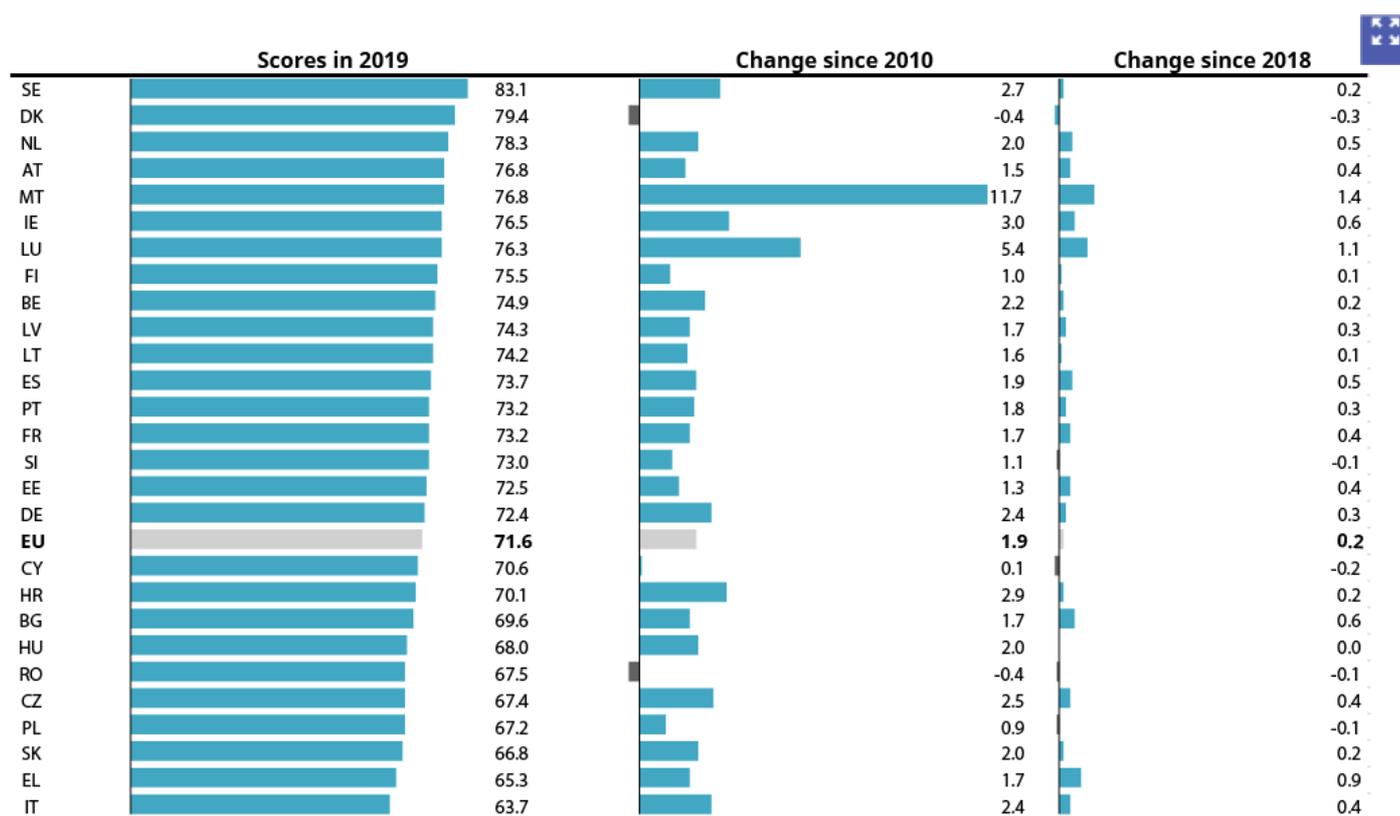


Figure 5. Scores for the domain of work (2019) and changes since 2010 and 2018, by EU Member State

The news is more positive elsewhere. Rapid gains in the domain of work continue in Malta, which recorded a 1.4 point increase in 2019, the largest of any EU country. Nevertheless, the annual change was lower than in 2018, when there was a gain of 2.1 points, indicating that Malta's progress is flattening. Other countries recording notable positive change in the Index score include Greece (+ 0.9 points), Bulgaria and Ireland (+ 0.6 points), and the Netherlands and Spain (+ 0.5 points points). Overall, Sweden remains on top, with a score of 83.1 points, followed by Denmark (79.4 points) and the Netherlands (78.3 points). The lowest scores in this domain are for Italy (63.7 points), Greece (65.3 points) and Slovakia (66.8 points), despite all making progress in 2019.

Footnotes

[1] The domain of work measures the extent to which women and men can benefit from equal access to employment and good working conditions. The subdomain of participation combines two indicators: the rate of FTE employment and the duration of working life. Gender segregation and quality of work are included in the second subdomain. Sectoral segregation is measured through women's and men's participation in the education, human health and social work sectors. Quality of work is measured by flexible working-time arrangements and Eurofound's Career Prospects Index.