

EIGE-2021 Gender Equality Index 2021 Report: Health

Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis may have started a year and a half ago, but it is far from over. It has reversed years of progress on women's rights and gender equality – and exposed serious challenges. We are living not just a public health crisis, but also an economic and social crisis. Employment and working conditions have undergone seismic changes, with different impacts on women and men. Growing evidence shows that women bear the brunt of upheaval, suffering more acute socioeconomic consequences of the crisis.

Action is critical. In 2020, the European Commission presented its 2020–2025 gender equality strategy. Although developed before the pandemic, it sets out key actions in heavily affected crisis areas and commits to the inclusion of a gender equality perspective in all EU policy areas. The recovery and resilience facility, which came into force in February 2021, aims to mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic and make European economies and societies more sustainable and resilient. Acknowledging that women have been particularly affected by the pandemic, it requests that Member States set out how national plans will contribute to gender equality and equal opportunities for all. As countries struggle to tackle COVID-19, strategies addressing gender inequalities will be key. For these strategies to be effective, women – often on the frontline of local and national responses – should be heard.

Since 2013, the Gender Equality Index has been recognised by EU institutions and Member States as a key benchmark for gender equality in the EU. The 6th edition of the Index covers a range of indicators in the domains of society and life most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Although Index scores are mostly based on 2019 data, and therefore cannot capture the full impact of the crisis on gender equality, the report provides ample evidence of the pandemic's negative repercussions on women in the domains of work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. It also addresses the spike in violence against women and how the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups of women and men in society have borne the brunt of the impact.

Health, the thematic focus of this report, explores an additional three dimensions – health status (including mental health), health behaviours and access to health services. It also provides a gender and intersectional analysis of SRH and the COVID-19 pandemic.