

Opening speech of the Gender Equality Index 2020 conference

EIGE's Director Carlien Scheele delivered this speech at the opening of EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2020 conference on 29 October 2020.

For the first time, we find ourselves presenting the results of the Gender Equality Index in a completely virtual set-up, with hundreds of people joining us online from all over Europe and beyond. I am so glad, that despite these challenging times, we are still able to bring you this important gender equality update today.

The Covid-19 pandemic has turned life upside down for all of us, but it's been harder for some than for others. Healthcare workers, lone parents, older people, migrant workers, delivery drivers, artists, tour operators and students have all experienced the fallout from the pandemic in different ways.

The pandemic has brought some serious gender equality challenges to the spotlight. The importance of care work, whether paid or unpaid, and its unequal distribution between women and men is one of them. This needs to be put at the centre of Covid-19 response strategies.

Only time will show the full effect of the pandemic on gender equality, but we have already seen some gravely concerning situations, such as rising rates of domestic violence as people were confined to their homes.

We also know from the previous editions of the Gender Equality Index, that progress on gender equality in the EU is far too slow and mostly driven by just a few countries.

Now, there is a real risk, that the Covid-19 pandemic could slow down progress on gender equality even further and potentially send us backwards.

Another matter of concern is the gender equality backlash and so-called anti-gender campaigns that we've been seeing in some parts of Europe. In a number of Member States, the rise of anti-gender movements has been connected to attempts to reduce the importance of civil society and women's rights organisations, through the use of smear campaigns and restrictive legislative measures. In this climate, it's crucial that we stick together and to our values more than ever before.

EIGE's recent findings from the 25-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action tells us what happened in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. Policies that were developed in attempts to stem the negative effects of the crisis, had a serious impact on gender equality. Austerity fell particularly heavily on women, who tend to be poorer and rely more on public services, including childcare. We need to learn from these mistakes and not repeat history.

This time, we must ensure that gender equality is put at the centre of recovery measures. The gender perspective needs to be mainstreamed into recovery plans. This is the value of gender budgeting which equates to good governance, if implemented correctly. This approach can help ensure that gender inequalities are not further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

How can EIGE's Gender Equality Index support this process?

Gender statistics are crucial to understand the effects of the pandemic on women and men in the various policy areas. Our Index will play a crucial role in monitoring these consequences, over the short and long-term. While this year's Index does not yet capture the effects of the ongoing pandemic, we will be watching this space very closely in the years to come. Next year, our Index will take an in-depth look at health and gender equality, and in particular, the different health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and men.

The strength of EIGE's Index is that it assesses gender equality progress across our society and over time. This tool will give policymakers crucial data and evidence to ensure that Covid-19 recovery measures do not worsen inequalities between women and men. Instead, we should use the recovery measures to strengthen gender equality.

I am very proud about EIGE's Gender Equality Index and the solid data it provides. It is increasingly used by policymakers at EU and national levels and was recently acknowledged as a reliable measurement tool for gender equality in the European Union, in an audit carried out by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre.

I am also pleased to see that our Index methodology has already been used by four EU candidate countries and potential candidates, who have each developed their own national Gender Equality Index. I am looking forward to seeing more of these countries develop their own Gender Equality Index in the future.

This year, the thematic focus of the Gender Equality Index is on digitalisation, the future of work and most importantly, the consequences for gender equality. The focus on digital technologies is very timely, especially in our current environment, where we have come to rely on them so much.

Digital technologies and solutions have helped to make many things in our lives faster and easier. They are certainly helping a lot during this pandemic - to keep in touch with our loved ones, order groceries online, keep school lessons going and continue working from home. And to organise this conference today.

But should we be worried about our increasingly digital lives?

Our Gender Equality Index shows us that as our private and professional lives go increasingly digital, we must ensure that the gender perspective is not overlooked when it comes to important developments in this sector. The emergence of new types of jobs organised through online platforms, Artificial Intelligence algorithms and e-caring devices are all part of this digital transformation that have consequences for gender equality and need to be closely examined.

I invite policymakers across Europe to use our Index findings when planning future policy measures, to design more inclusive societies that promote gender equality and best serve the different needs of women and men, as we navigate our way out of this global pandemic. The future of Europe depends on it.

Metadata

TYPE: Director's Speech