

Study and work in the EU: set apart by gender



The EU's economy has a major weakness: the uneven concentration of women and men in studies and at work. This makes the labour market less competitive and companies struggle to find qualified professionals in growing sectors, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and health or personal care. Gender segregation poses challenges for these industries and leads to a reduced talent pool, untapped potential and unfulfilled career aspirations.

Women make up less than 20 % of ICT graduates in the EU, a figure that has been declining in recent years. Despite labour shortages in the sector, women will keep missing out on these job opportunities because of gender segregation that shapes their choices from an early age. These are some of the findings from a forthcoming report prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) at the request of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

“We cannot ignore gender segregation anymore. This is an EU-wide problem, which reinforces the undervaluation of women’s work and leads to their higher poverty and lower economic independence. The fact that employment growth stems from the creation of quality jobs for men but not so much for women needs to be recognised and dealt with by a much wider circle of stakeholders,” said Virginija Langbakk, Director of EIGE.

Even with recent employment boosts, women and men are still concentrated in jobs typical for their gender. Women often end up in part-time jobs that pay less and have a lower social status. Fewer economic opportunities for women not only mean a lower standard of living for themselves, but also rule out the chances of better living conditions for their entire family.

“Gender stereotypes are the motion force behind segregation, influencing subject choices and career aspirations for girls and boys from a young age. The current situation needs to change. It is up to everyone - parents, peers, teachers and politicians to let young people know that they have both the ability and the possibility to study and work in any field they want, irrespective of their gender”, said Jevgeni Ossinovski, Estonian Minister of Health and Labour.

In the coming years, our ageing society will put more and more pressure on the care sector. There are big gender imbalances and a serious undersupply of men who are willing and able to work in this field. Most men are not interested in taking up jobs in women dominated professions. They make up only one fifth of graduates in health and welfare across the EU.

Narrowing the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education is one way to create fairer economic growth. EIGE’s research shows that this would lead to more jobs (up to 1.2 million by 2050) and increased GDP over the long-term (up to 820 billion EUR by 2050). It would also improve the long-term competitiveness of the EU economy, due to more exports and less imports that would contribute to an improved balance of trade.

EIGE’s report ‘Study and work in the EU: set apart by gender’ forms the basis of conclusions adopted by the European Council for Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO). It explores progress in overcoming educational and occupational gender segregation in the EU and looks at ways to address it.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality. It provides specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

For more information, please contact Donata Matuleviciene,
donata.matuleviciene@eige.europa.eu, phone +370 5 2157 449

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