

Gender Equality Index 2019. Work-life balance

Both women and men limit their study fields

In the EU, more women and men graduate from universities than in the past. Between 2005 and 2017, the EU average for tertiary education graduates grew by 7 p.p. to 25 %^[1], with almost all of the growth taking place in the first 10 years. Women strongly outnumbered men as tertiary graduates, with a gender gap in Estonia of 16 p.p., in Latvia of 13 p.p. and in Sweden of 11 p.p. Men were more likely to graduate from universities in four Member States: Germany (with the largest gender gap of 8 p.p.), Austria, Malta and Hungary (showing gaps below 4 p.p.).

An intersectional analysis revealed that though more women than men aged 15-49 gained tertiary education, a reverse trend was evident in the 50+ age group. Meanwhile, an intersection of gender and disability discovered an EU-28 gender gap advantageous to men (2 p.p.) among people with disabilities. Among people without disabilities, this gap is reversed and stands at 1 p.p.^[2].

Educational attainment can be challenging for people from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds given that students' socioeconomic status impacts strongly on their educational participation and outcomes (OECD, 2018a). While poor school performance does not necessarily stem from poverty, schools often reproduce existing patterns of socioeconomic (dis)advantage rather than creating a more balanced distribution of learning opportunities and outcomes for students (OECD, 2018a). This tendency can be traced in the situation of groups from marginalised communities, such as Roma. On average, 63 % of Roma aged 16-24 years were not employed, nor in education or training in the EU in 2016. Among young Roma women, that figure rose to 72 % (FRA, 2016).

Although a higher proportion of working-age women are better educated than men, this does not translate into more favourable labour-market outcomes. Women work more often in part-time positions, face precarious conditions at work or receive lower pay: women's gross hourly pay is 16 % lower than that of men^[3]. The addition of the 'glass ceiling' or the 'sticky floor' phenomena that predominantly affect women also harms their career progression.

In measuring gender division in the tertiary fields of education, health and welfare, humanities and arts to identify gender inequality through levels of educational segregation, the Gender Equality Index found that, in 2017, 43 % of all women at university were studying in these fields, with the gender gap in the EU as a whole at 22 p.p., remaining unchanged since 2005. The level of gender segregation varied significantly among Member States (Figure 19).

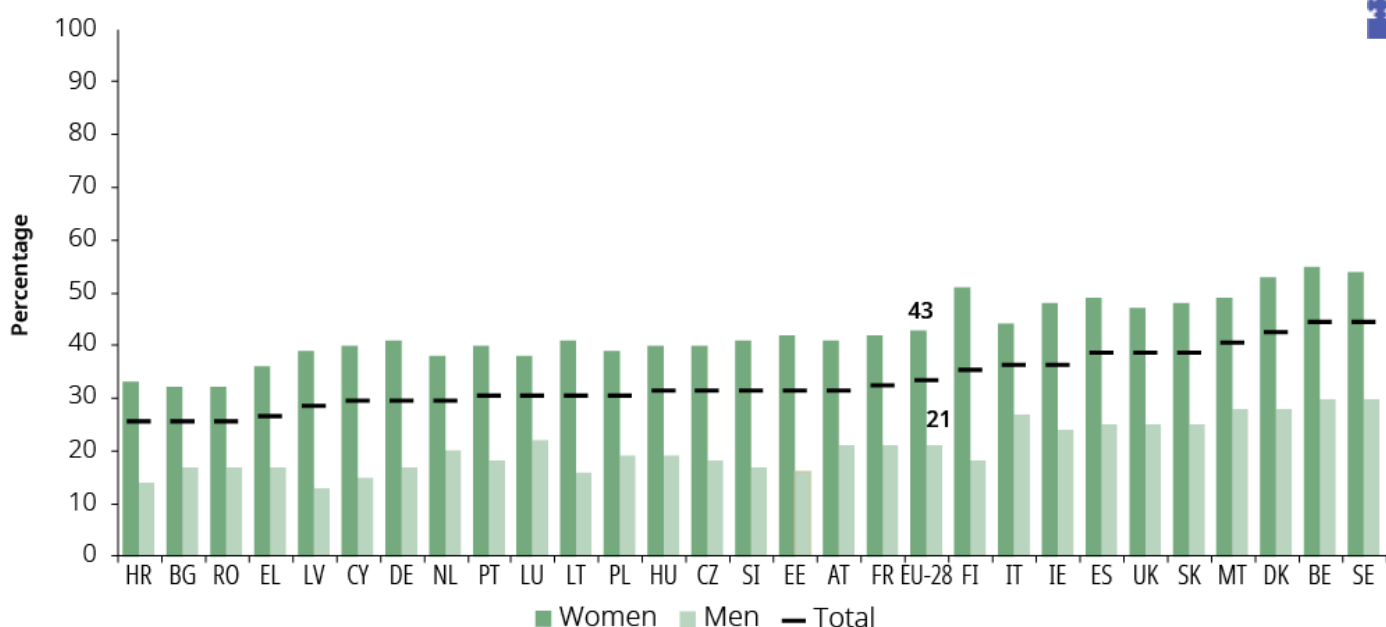


Figure 19: Percentage of women and men in tertiary education studying in the education, health and welfare, humanities and arts fields by EU Member State, 2017

The highest gender gap in enrolment in the above fields was registered in Finland at 33 p.p. In another four Member States, it was above 25 p.p. (DK, EE, LV, LT). In contrast, Bulgaria and Romania (15 p.p.) had the lowest gender gaps. Several EU Member States saw substantial changes on this issue in the 12 years following 2005. While the gap was cut by 11 p.p. in the Netherlands and by more than 5 p.p. in Denmark, Germany and Italy, there was a 6 p.p. increase in Hungary, with another five Member States witnessing a spike of more than 4 p.p. (BG, MT, PL, RO, SI).

Gender segregation is particularly persistent in STEM subjects with women constituting about 33 % of graduates in STEM tertiary education and only 13 % of graduates in STEM vocational education (EIGE, 2018c). However, certain STEM subfields such as natural sciences, mathematics and statistics are gender balanced or even dominated by women. Reducing segregation in education and simultaneously involving more women in the STEM study fields would have significant benefits for the economy. The European Commission estimates that by 2020 there will be a shortage about 500 000 ICT specialists in the EU (European Commission, 2017d).

Footnotes

[1] EIGE's calculation, EU LFS, 2017.

[2] EIGE's calculation, EU LFS, 2017.

[3] Eurostat, Gender pay gap in unadjusted form by NACE Rev. 2 activity – structure of earnings survey methodology (earn_gr_gpgr2).