

Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

2. Domain of work

EIGE's 2020 research assessing progress towards gender equality 25 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action suggests that the world of work in the EU remains characterised by a number of important gender inequalities (EIGE, 2020a). The employment rate of women is still significantly below that of men^[1]. The labour market remains heavily gender segregated, and women tend to be found more often in temporary, part-time or precarious employment. This contributes to significant gender gaps in pay and pensions (see Chapter 3, 'Domain of money').

Such inequalities have particularly dire consequences for vulnerable groups of women, including younger and older cohorts, lone mothers with dependent children, and those from migrant communities or other minority groups. Closing these gender gaps could generate considerable long-term gains for the EU economy, amounting to as much as 10% of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050 (EIGE, 2017c).

Inequalities are often rooted in the unequal distribution of care and other responsibilities within the household (EIGE, 2020a). A disproportionate amount of caring activities falls on women, which limits their participation in paid employment (see Chapter 5, 'Domain of time'). The design of tax and benefit systems may also undermine the incentives for second earners^[2] to participate in the labour market.

This report highlights the potential impacts of two other important factors on the prospects for women's participation in the world of work. Firstly, as digitalisation continues to transform the EU labour market, it presents both challenges and opportunities for gender equality (see Chapter 9). Secondly, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to have huge employment impacts for both women and men (see below).

The Europe 2020 strategy has provided a broad plan for the EU economy since 2010, with the European Semester being a key process for coordinating the economic and social policies of Member States. While the strategy has a headline target of 75% of people aged 20–64 in work by 2020, there are no separate targets for women and men.

The gender perspective is more prominent in the European Pillar of Social Rights, introduced in 2017, the key principles of which include equal opportunities for women and men in all areas, including labour market participation, terms and conditions of employment, and career progression. The Pillar is accompanied by the Social Scoreboard, which includes indicators dedicated to monitoring gender equality in the labour market (the gender gap in employment, the gender gap in part-time employment and the gender pay gap).

The EU is also strongly committed to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, including to monitoring three indicators related to gender equality (SDG 5) within the area of employment: the gender employment gap, the gender pay gap and the inactive population due to caring responsibilities.

Key EU policy priorities and actions relating to gender equality in the labour market are outlined in the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025. The most relevant measures from the perspective of employment include

- a focus on appropriate transposition and implementation of the Work–Life Balance Directive^[3]

- supporting provision of quality childcare and long-term care using EU funding

- a proposal to revise the targets set by the European Council in Barcelona in 2002 to ensure further upwards convergence on childcare across Member States

- addressing the priorities set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights and monitoring their progress through the European Semester, notably through indicators from the Social Scoreboard

- developing guidance for Member States on how national tax and benefits systems affect incentives for second earners to work

- introducing targeted measures to promote the participation of women in innovation, including a pilot project to promote women-led start-ups

- and tackling gender segregation in the context of the digital transformation of the labour

market (see Chapter 9).

Footnotes

[1] Based on Eurostat table t2020_10 (available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/t2020_10&lang=en).

[2] Second earners are employed individuals who earn less than their partners.

[3] European Parliament and Council of the European Union (2019).