

Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

4. Domain of knowledge

Equal access to education, as well as fair and high-quality educational processes, are essential for gender equality and for Europe's future economic prosperity. The Index looks at gender segregation in higher education, graduates of tertiary education and participation in adult learning – the issues high on the EU policy agenda. Targets for tertiary education attainment levels and adult lifelong learning are included in the EU framework for education and training 2020 and are among the SDG targets.

The European Pillar of Social Rights also emphasises the importance of education and training and lifelong learning to ensure that women and men acquire and maintain the skills they need to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labour market. The Council recommendation on key competencies for lifelong learning specifically encourages Member States to foster efforts to involve more women and men in lifelong learning activities, while the Commission's recommendation 'Upskilling pathways: new opportunities for adults' calls for improvements to adult learning provision, with a specific focus on the needs of low-skilled adults.

Horizontal segregation in education is emphasised in the new EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025, which highlights the need to address gendered choices in study subjects and subsequent careers. Promoting 'equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship' is also reflected among the priorities set out in the EU framework for education and training 2020, although gender equality is not one of its primary objective.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on learning activities at all levels of education. Universities and schools in many Member States shifted their learning processes to the digital environment, highlighting challenges in accessing personal computers and broadband connection, especially for families in difficult socioeconomic conditions.

At the same time, the temporary closure of childcare services and schools in nearly all Member States saw lone parents and couples with children facing increased difficulties in combining their work and care responsibilities. With many women and men out of work because of the pandemic, adult education will play a major role in reintegrating them into the labour market.

Digitalisation has had a significantly impact on the world of education and training, bringing new opportunities and challenges for gender equality (see Chapter 9 for a detailed discussion). Digital skills and competencies are increasingly necessary for the full participation of women and men in social and working life, yet significant gender differences exist in the levels and types of digital skills that women and men acquire.

The lack of gender diversity among researchers inventing, designing and developing digital services and goods remains strikingly high, limiting the overall potential of research and development activities.