

Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

Gender, age and education affect workers' access to social activities

With an EU score of 61.6 points, social activities is the subdomain with the lower score in the time domain, pointing to persistent gender inequalities. This is important from both a gender equality and a well-being perspective (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011. Access to leisure time and activities, while an essential aspect of quality of life, is largely determined by time pressures from both paid and unpaid work (European Parliament, 2016).

Research shows that for workers, overall time dedicated to paid work has increased, reducing the time and energy available for other activities (Haworth and Lewis, 2005). In addition, the diminishing boundaries between professional and personal time brought about by digitalisation sees paid work increasingly encroaching on leisure time (European Parliament, 2016; Wajcman, 2015). This is particularly true for people in precarious employment, such as platform workers (see Chapter 9).

Looking at the specific indicator for sporting, cultural and leisure activities carried out outside the home, the participation of working women and men is extremely low in some countries and varies significantly between countries. In nine countries^[1], fewer than one in five workers engaged in any sporting, cultural or leisure activities outside the home at least every other day. The rates in another 11 countries^[2] ranged from 19 % in Poland to 36 % in Belgium and Estonia.

As seen in Figure 17, workers' involvement in social activities^[3] reveals important inequalities in how women and men in the EU combine work with other aspects of their lives. While the overall gender gap in participation in sporting, cultural and leisure activities is rather modest (4 p.p.) it reaches 13 p.p. among lone parents and 17 p.p. among young workers (aged 15–24). This significant gender gap in social activities among young workers mirrors the gap in physical activity between young women and men (19 p.p.), covered by the domain of health^[4].

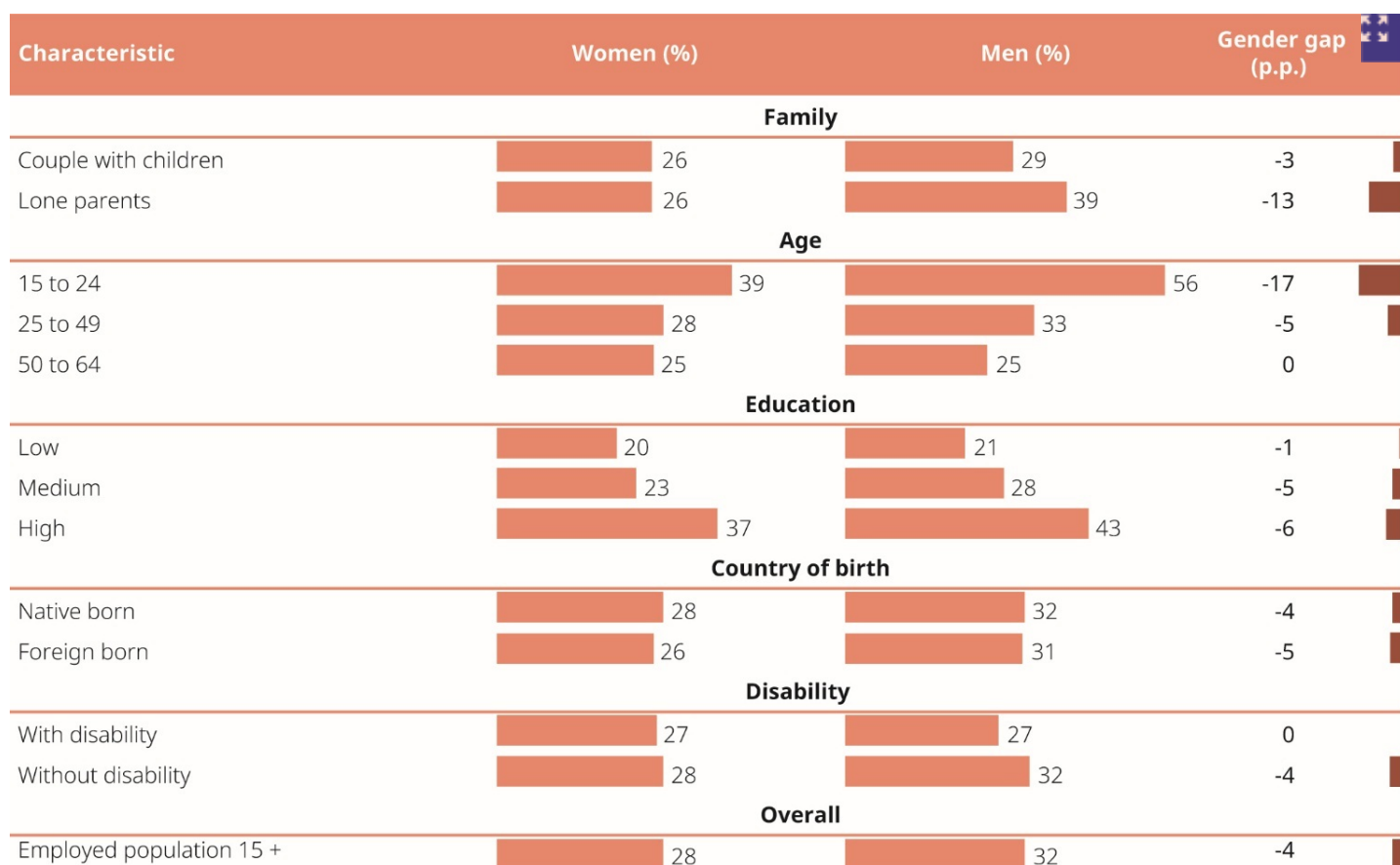


Figure 17. Shares of workers engaging in social activities by sex, family composition, age, education level, country of birth and disability, EU, 2015

Physical activity habits among adults are often established in youth. Analysis of data from the international Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey highlights that the overall activity levels of children in Europe tend to decline between the ages of 11 and 15, especially among girls (WHO, 2016, 2017), with parental income levels a key determinant of access to sports for children (Richter et al., 2009).

When it comes to leisure activities outside the home in general, the gendered division of labour (which sees most childcare responsibilities assigned to women), women's lower income and gender norms surrounding motherhood all contribute to women with children, especially lone mothers, engaging less in leisure activities (Brajša-Žganec et al., 2011; Długonski and Motl, 2013; European Parliament, 2016; McIntyre and Rhodes, 2009).

For all workers, involvement in social activities declines with age and increases with education, pointing to the ways in which gender and class differences shape access to cultural and recreational resources.

Footnotes

[1] Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia.

[2] Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, France, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Poland and the United Kingdom.

[3] The indicator focuses on workers and is thus limited to certain age groups, including 15–24 and 50–64. Nor does it reflect the situations of those excluded from the labour market, for example owing to care responsibilities.

[4] EIGE, 'Health in European Union for 2019' (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/domain/health/age>).