

Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work

Introduction

In March 2020, the European Commission presented the new EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025. The strategy builds on the promise of the newly appointed Commission President to strive for a Union of equality, where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, with equal opportunities to thrive and to participate in and lead European society (European Commission, 2020c).

The EU has made some improvements in gender equality in recent decades. However, given that the EU is considered a global leader in gender equality, this progress is taking place at a snail's pace. Gender equality is not yet a reality for millions of Europeans.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has infected millions, ended thousands of lives, and affected the lives of all women and men, girls and boys. Statistics on the COVID-19 outbreak show important sex differences in mortality and vulnerability to the disease (Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia Emergency Response Epidemiology Team, 2020). However, the impact of COVID-19 and the resulting policy responses go far beyond the disease itself, reaching into all domains of society and life, including the economy and employment, education, time use and work–life balance.

There is also worrying evidence of growing gender-based violence. Persistent and prevailing gender inequalities mean that women and men experience the COVID-19 crisis – and its repercussions – differently. Crucially, the pandemic poses a serious threat to the fragile achievements in gender equality made over the past decade.

This report presents the fifth edition of the Gender Equality Index. In view of the post-Europe 2020 discussions about the future of Europe and the commitments presented in the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025, it is important to sustain effective monitoring of gender equality in the EU and thus ensure evidence-based policymaking.

The Gender Equality Index has been widely recognised for its contribution to monitoring progress on gender equality in the EU. The new EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025 acknowledges the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) Index as a key benchmark for gender equality and sets out its intention to introduce annual monitoring of gender equality building on the Gender Equality Index (European Commission, 2020c).

The Index covers a range of indicators in the domains of work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. It also integrates two additional domains: violence and intersecting inequalities. The indicators are closely linked to EU targets and international commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This edition tracks gender equality progress in the EU since 2010^[1]. More detailed statistical analyses of Index results for every EU Member State and the United Kingdom will be provided separately.

This year's thematic focus of the Index explores how digitalisation is shaping the future of work for women and men. Recent decades have seen digital technologies radically transform the world of work, with profound consequences for workers, businesses, regulators and society. Digitalisation has led to automation and reorganisation of vast numbers of jobs, the emergence of new flexible working practices and forms of work (e.g. platform work), and the creation of new ICT occupations and strands of research.

This has sparked debates on how to harness the potential of this transformation to increase the productivity, competitiveness and growth of the EU economy. However, such debates often neglect the broader transformative potential of digitalisation, notably its central role in transforming gender relations in both positive and negative ways.

The thematic focus takes stock of recent research to assess the opportunities, risks and challenges for gender equality in the world of work brought about by digitalisation. It shows the profound implications of new technologies for future progress towards gender equality across all Index domains, most notably for work, money and knowledge. While it highlights some well-known challenges – such as the gender segregation of ICT education, employment and research – it chiefly aims to shed light on less well-known aspects of digitalisation.

These include, for example, the different effects of precarious working conditions on women and men in certain forms of platform work, and the ways in which digital technologies can enable new forms of harassment at work. The thematic focus therefore provides some fresh insights on monitoring gender equality not only in the broader context of the European Pillar of Social Rights but also in the context of specific strategies linked to digitalisation, such as the EU digital strategy 'Shaping Europe's digital future'.

Footnotes

[1] The 2020 edition of the Index covers data available up to and including January 2020. The newest data available by this point covers developments until 2018. As this is a reference period during which the United Kingdom still was a Member State, the EU aggregate used here refers to the 28 EU Member States (EU-28), including the United Kingdom.
