European Institute for Gender Equality

Gender Equality Index 2026

European Union

64.5

The Gender Equality Index 2026 records 64.5 out of 100 points. Gender equality in the EU has advanced by 0.9 points over the previous year and by 5.6 points since 2020.

This year's Index also marks a historic shift, with France moving to the top, ahead of Sweden – a long-standing leader in gender equality.

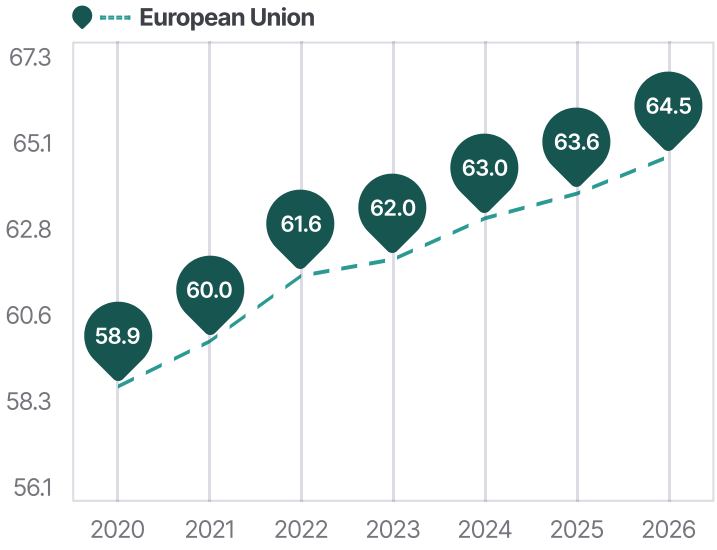
Progress has been driven overwhelmingly by improvements in gender balance in decision-making, making it the engine of the Index's recent gains. Yet this success also exposes a growing imbalance: advances in other domains remain sluggish, with annual gains of less than one point over the previous year.

The increase is mainly due to the improvement in the domain of power (+ 2.4 points), work (+ 0.8 points) and money (+ 0.6 points). The domain of health is scoring the highest among domains (86.4 points), followed by the domain of money (75.2 points), and the domain of work (70.7 points). The domain of power is scoring the lowest among domains (42.9 points). Time stands as one of the least equally shared resources. With a score of 65.0, the time domain reveals enduring inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care and time for self-care.

Scores (0-100)

Index	64.5
Work	70.7
Money	75.2
Knowledge	57.3
Time	65.0
Power	42.9
Health	86.4

Trend (2020 - 2026)



Compare countries



1. The Gender Equality Index has been reviewed in 2025 (see About the Index). For the Index 2026, data corrections and updates to the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) microdata carried out by several National Statistical Institutes affected a number of indicators included in the Index. As a result, the previous editions of the Gender Equality Index have been recalculated, and scores might be slightly different compared to the scores presented in the Index 2025. The Index is calculated every year by using N-1 data, for the overall time series. The Index 2026 is mostly based on 2025 data and traces progress from a short-term (2024–2025) and longer-term (2019–2025) perspective. The domain of time is calculated with the 2024 EIGE CARE survey. Lithuania/Latvia, and Croatia/Bulgaria have the same scores. Their position in the ranking is determined statistically based on the second decimal place of the Index score.

Progress in gender equality

Best performance

Health remains the top-performing domain in the Index, with a score of 86.4 points. This is mainly due to the subdomain of health status, at 90.7 points, reflecting generally favourable self-perceived health and long healthy life expectancy across the EU.

Most room for improvement

Gender inequalities are most pronounced in the domain of power, where the average EU score is 42.9 points. The most pronounced inequalities could be found in social power, at 33.5 points. This shows how far most Member States still are from gender-balanced representation, such as in bodies of national Olympic sport organisations. Moreover, the score in political power has decreased for the first time since the previous year, reflecting a continuous issue for women's presence among ministers, members of parliament and regional assemblies.

Biggest improvement

The domain of power also recorded the EU's **biggest improvement** since 2025, gaining 2.4 points. The subdomain of social power rose by 5.1 points and the subdomain of economic power by 2.3 points. However, political power fell by 1.8 points. These gains reflect a rise in the share of women on the boards of the largest listed companies and in the top decision-making bodies of national Olympic sport organisations.

The domain of work has also improved by 0.8 points. This was mainly due to segregation and quality of work (+ 1.0 point). This reflects a rise in the share of women among managers and a fall in the share of low-paid women.

A step backwards

The domain of knowledge took a small **step backwards** since 2025, losing 0.1 points. Both subdomains fell by the same amount. This reflects limited progress in IVET (initial vocational education and training) and continued gender segregation in education. Women still dominate humanities, while men dominate scientific fields.

Convergence

Over the last decade, the European Union has moved closer to gender equality, but Member States have not followed a single path. While some countries have combined sustained improvements with a gradual narrowing of the distance to the EU average, others have increased their scores without strengthening their relative position. These contrasting trajectories illustrate that progress in gender equality is not only about moving forward, but also about how countries evolve in relation to one another.

Between 2016 and 2026, average Index scores increased steadily and differences between Member States became smaller, resulting in an overall annual convergence rate of 16 %.

Beneath this positive EU-wide trend, however, national experiences differ substantially. Member States can be grouped into two broad patterns according to the relationship between their progress and their distance from the EU average.

Comparing each Member State's trajectory with the evolution of the EU average identifies two broad patterns, each including countries that are both above and below the EU average:

- **Upward convergence**: Austria, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Sweden have improved their Gender Equality Index scores while simultaneously narrowing the gap with the EU average.
- **Upward divergence**: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Spain, France, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia have also improved their scores, but at a pace that has widened their distance from the EU average.

Overall, the findings point to a more nuanced picture than the EU average alone might suggest. Progress towards gender equality is widespread across the Union, yet Member States are advancing at different speeds and from different starting points.

Explore European Union's Index results

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Change since 2020	Change since 2025
Index	**58.9**	**60.0**	**61.6**	**62.0**	**63.0**	**63.6**	**64.5**	**5.6**	**0.9**
Work	**67.2**	**68.1**	**69.1**	**69.4**	**69.8**	**69.9**	**70.7**	**3.5**	**0.8**
Participation	79.6	79.9	80.5	81.2	81.8	82.1	82.6	3.0	0.5
Segregation and quality of work	56.7	58.0	59.3	59.3	59.5	59.5	60.5	3.8	1.0
Money	**70.7**	**72.0**	**73.3**	**73.8**	**74.2**	**74.6**	**75.2**	**4.5**	**0.6**
Financial resources	72.5	74.2	75.8	76.3	76.7	77.1	77.8	5.3	0.7
Economic situation	68.9	69.9	71.0	71.3	71.8	72.2	72.6	3.7	0.4
Knowledge	**55.6**	**56.8**	**56.8**	**56.8**	**57.1**	**57.4**	**57.3**	**1.7**	**-0.1**
Attainment and participation	78.3	78.5	78.1	77.8	78.2	78.7	78.6	0.3	-0.1
Segregation	39.4	41.1	41.3	41.5	41.8	41.8	41.7	2.3	-0.1
Time	**65.0**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**65.0**	**0.0**	**0.0**
Care activities	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.1	57.1	0.0	0.0
Social activities	74.1	74.1	74.1	74.1	74.1	74.1	74.1	0.0	0.0
Power	**29.8**	**31.5**	**34.9**	**36.1**	**38.8**	**40.5**	**42.9**	**13.1**	**2.4**
Political	40.9	42.4	44.3	45.0	46.2	47.3	45.5	4.6	-1.8
Economic	36.1	38.4	40.8	44.0	47.3	49.4	51.7	15.6	2.3
Social	17.9	19.2	23.6	23.8	26.8	28.4	33.5	15.6	5.1
Health	**85.6**	**86.0**	**86.3**	**86.1**	**85.9**	**86.2**	**86.4**	**0.8**	**0.2**
Status	89.0	89.8	90.4	89.9	89.7	90.2	90.7	1.7	0.5
Behaviour	82.4	82.4	82.4	82.4	82.4	82.4	82.4	0.0	0.0

Explore European Union's performance by indicator

		European Union Women	Men
Work			
Participation	Full-time equivalent employment rate (%, 15-89, 2024)[2]	44	59
	Duration of working life (years, 15+ population, 2025)	35	40
Segregation and quality of work	ICT specialists (%, 15-74, 2025)	20	81
	Managerial positions (%, 15-74, 2025)	36	64
	Low paid workers (%, 16+, 2025)	37	29
Money			
Financial resources	Median earnings (PPS, 18-64 employed population, 2025)	25525	32079
	Gender pension gap (65+, %, 2025)	24	
Economic situation	Median partner earnings ratio (18-64,%, 2025)[3]	73	147
	In-work poverty of adults in single or single-parent households (%, 16+ employed population, 2025)	16	13
Knowledge			
Attainment and participation	Graduates of tertiary education (%, 30-34, 2025)	51	40
	Graduates in IVET (Initial vocational education and training) (%, 25-34, 2025)	27	34
Segregation	Graduated in tertiary education in EHW (Education, Health and Welfare, Humanities and Art (tertiary students) (%, 2024)	75	25
	Graduated in tertiary education in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) (%, 2024)	34	66
Time			
Care activities	Informal childcare (0-11) for more than 35 weekly hours (%, 16-74, 2024)	41	20
	Informal long-term care for more than 20 hours per week (%, 45-64, 2019)	20	13
	Housework chores every day (%, 16-74, 2024)	59	33
Social activities	Hours spent on leisure activities per week (%, 16-74, 2024)	30	43
	Voluntary, charitable or political activities at least once per week (%, 16-74, 2024)	13	17
Power			
Political	Share of ministers (%, 2025)	32	68
	Share of members of parliament (%, 2025)	33	67
	Share of members of regional assemblies/local municipalities (%, 2025)[4]	32	68
Economic	Share of members of boards in largest quoted companies (%, 2025)	35	65
Social	Share of members of highest decision making body of the national Olympic most popular sport organisations (%, 2025)	26	74
Health			
Status	Self-perceived health, good or very good (%, 16+, 2025)	65	71
	Healthy life years at 65 in percentage of the total life expectancy (%, 65+, 2024)	48	54
Behaviour	People who don't smoke and are not involved in harmful drinking (%, 16+ population, 2019)	73	56
	People doing physical activities and/or consuming fruits and vegetables (%, 16+ population, 2019)	38	43

Source: EU-LFS, EU-SILC, European Health Interview Survey (EHIS), Eurostat health statistics, EIGE's CARE survey, EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, WMID.

2. FTE employment rate measures employed persons in a comparable way, even though they may work a different number of hours per week
3. Median of the annual earnings expressed as a percentage of a partner's earnings for coupled women and men in employment and in working age
4. Share of members in local municipalities for BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT, SI

Key highlights

A persistent employment gap separates women and men across the EU

The full-time equivalent (FTE) employment rate[5] is 44 % for women and 59 % for men across the EU. The gender gap has not changed since the previous year. The gender gap is especially wide among couples with children (24 pp) and people born outside the EU (20 pp). It is also wide among people with low-level education (20 pp), narrowing as education levels rise.

Women have a shorter working life than men

Over a working life, women are expected to spend 35 years in employment, five years fewer than men. The gender gap has widened since the previous year, as the figure for men has increased by one year.

Women's representation in management is growing slightly, while ICT remains male-dominated

Women account for 20 % of ICT (information and communications technology) specialists. This field therefore remains strongly male-dominated. By contrast, women account for 36 % of managers, up 1 pp since the previous year.

The gender pension gap is narrowing

The EU gender pension gap is 24 %, down by 1 pp since the previous year. Overall, it has narrowed by 5 pp since 2020.

The gender difference in earnings among couples is declining

Women in couples earn on average 73 % of their partner's earnings, while men earn 47 % more than their partner. The gender difference has narrowed since the previous year: the figure for women has increased by 2 pp, while the figure for men has fallen by 3 pp.

In-work poverty remains higher for single women and mothers than for single men and fathers

Across the EU, 16 % of employed women and 13 % of employed men living in single-adult or single-parent households are at risk of poverty. These figures have not changed over the previous year. The highest rates and the widest gender gap occur among people aged 16–24, followed by people born outside the EU.

5. The FTE employment rate measures working hours comparatively, even though people may work different numbers of hours per week.

Tertiary graduation is rising, while vocational training is stagnating

Tertiary education completion across the EU reached 51 % for women and 40 % for men aged 30–34, both up by 1 pp since the previous year. The level of IVET (initial vocational education and training) graduates held broadly steady, at 27 % for women and 34 % for men, aged 25–34.

Gender segregation across fields of study remains deeply entrenched

Women make up 75 % of EHW (education, health and welfare, humanities and the arts) graduates and 34 % of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) graduates across the EU. Both figures have not changed since the previous year.

Care responsibilities across the EU still fall disproportionately on women

Across the EU, 41 % of women and 20 % of men care for children aged 0–11 for more than 35 hours a week. The gender gap is wide among people aged 25–49 (23 pp). The difference also varies by type of couple. Among women, 45 % of those in heterosexual couples with children spend more than 35 hours a week, compared with 17 % of those in same-sex couples with children. Among men, the figures are closer: 20 % in heterosexual couples and 16 % in same-sex couples. As a result, the gender gap is 25 pp among people in heterosexual couples, compared with just 1 pp among those in same-sex couples[6].

Gender differences are smaller in long-term care. Across the EU, 20 % of women and 13 % of men spend more than 20 hours a week providing long-term care.

The gender gap is wider again in daily housework, such as cooking, cleaning and doing laundry. Daily housework chores are done by 59 % of women and 33 % of men.

6. EIGE's estimation based on the variable gender identity. The sample size allowed reliable estimations only for a few countries and the EU.

Women report less leisure time and voluntary work than men

Across the EU, 30 % of women and 43 % of men spend more than eight hours a week on leisure activities. Voluntary and charitable participation is lower overall, at 13 % for women and 17 % for men.

Women's presence among ministers is decreasing

Women account for 32 % of ministers across the EU, down by 3 pp since the previous year. The lowest share of women in government is recorded in Hungary, where women do not hold any ministerial positions; the highest share is in Finland (62 %). There are 14 Member States with a higher portion of women in government than the EU average[7].

> Eleven Member States have quotas for elections to national parliaments and some also apply quotas for European Parliament elections: Belgium and France (both 50 %); Greece, Spain, Croatia, Luxembourg and Portugal (all 40 %); Poland (35 %); Ireland (40 % for national elections, none for European elections); Italy (40 % for national elections, 50 % for European elections); Slovenia (35 % for national elections, 40 % for European elections).

In national parliaments women compose 33 % of the seats, with no changes over the previous year. Cyprus has the lowest proportion of women in parliament (14 %), while Finland has the biggest (46 %). There are 13 Member States with a higher portion of women in parliament than the EU average[8].

In regional and local assemblies, women account for 32 % of members, the same as the previous year. Hungary records the lowest level (16 %), and France has the highest (49 %). There are 12 Member States with a bigger share of women in regional assemblies or local municipalities than the EU average[9].

7. FI, BE, FR, DE, SE, AT, ES, NL, LT, EE, LV, SI, PT, BG.
8. FI, SE, DK, ES, BE, AT, NL, FR, DE, PT, LU, HR, IT.
9. FR, DK, SE, FI, ES, BE, NL, AT, PT, SI, DE, LT.

Women's presence on company boards and in sports governance is edging up

Women hold 35 % of board seats among the largest listed companies across the EU, up 1 pp since the previous year. The lowest shares are found in Cyprus, where women make up 10 % of board members; on the other hand, France leads with 47 %. In total, 12 Member States record a higher share of women on quoted company boards than the EU average[10].

> As of December 2025, 20 of the 27 Member States have notified complete transposition of the (EU) 2022/2381 (Gender Balance on Boards Directive) into national law. Legislation remains in draft form in 6 Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Cyprus, Latvia and Luxembourg), while Hungary has not reported any forthcoming measures.

In the highest decision-making bodies of national Olympic sport organisations, women's representation rose to 26 %, up by 3 pp. The lowest share is found in Croatia at 7 %, while Sweden has the highest level with 51 %. In total, 11 Member States record a higher share of women in these organisations than the EU average[11].

Self-perceived health decreases slightly for women, while healthy life years at 65 increases

Across the EU, 65 % of women and 71 % of men rate their health as 'good' or 'very good'. Women's level has declined by 1 pp since the previous year. The gender gap is particularly wide among people in single-adult households, at the disadvantage of women (14 pp). Self-perceived health is much lower among people with disabilities: only 16 % of women and 18 % of men with disabilities report good or very good health.

Women aged 65 and over can expect to spend 48 % of their remaining life in good health, against 54 % for men. Both figures have increased by 4 pp since the previous year.

Women in the EU are less likely than men to smoke or drink heavily, but are also less physically active

Across the EU, 73 % of women and 56 % of men do not smoke and are not involved in heavy episodic drinking. Physical activity and healthy eating habits run the other way: 38 % of women and 43 % of men are physically active for at least 150 minutes a week or consume at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

10. FR, IT, DK, NL, ES, IE, DE, FI, BE, SE, PT, AT.
11. SE, FR, ES, IE, NL, FI, BE, DK, IT, LU, EL.

Explore intersecting inequalities

Full-time equivalent employment rate (%, 15-89, 2024)[12]		Women	Men	Gender gap	Gender gap in 2019	Gap change
Household composition	Couple without children	38	43	-5	-6	🟢
	Couple with children	68	92	-24	-29	🟢
Level of education	Low educated	18	38	-20	-20	🟠
	Medium educated	46	62	-16	-18	🟢
	High educated	68	74	-6	-6	🟠
Country of birth	Native born	44	58	-14	-15	🟢
	Foreign born	44	64	-20	-22	🟢
In-work poverty of adults in single or single-parent households (%, 16+ employed population, 2025)						
Household composition	Single-adult household	14	12	2	1	🔴
	Single-parent household	22	19	3	8	🟢
Age groups	15/16-24	36	27	9	5	🔴
	25-49	15	12	3	4	🟢
	50-64	15	12	3	3	🟠
	65+	16	13	3	5	🟢
Country of birth	Native born	14	11	3	3	🟠
	Foreign born	27	19	8	6	🔴
Graduates in IVET (Initial vocational education and training) (%, 25-34, 2024)						
Country of birth	Native born	30	37	-7	-9	🟢
	Foreign born	16	20	-4	-3	🔴
Disability	With disabilities	28	29	-1	-5	🟢
	Without disabilities	21	26	-5	-6	🟢
Informal childcare (0-11) for more than 35 weekly hours (%, 16-74, 2024)						
Household composition	Single-parent household	51	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Couple with children	45	21	24	n/a	n/a
Age groups	15/16-24	26	15	11	n/a	n/a
	25-49	44	21	23	n/a	n/a
	50-64	19	19	0	n/a	n/a
Self-perceived health, good or very good (%, 16+, 2025)						
Household composition	Single-adult household	48	62	-14	-11	🔴
	Single-parent household	68	74	-6	-4	🔴
	Couple without children	59	58	1	0	🔴
	Couple with children	82	83	-1	0	🔴
Age groups	15/16-24	90	93	-3	-1	🔴
	25-49	81	84	-3	-2	🔴
	50-64	63	66	-3	-2	🔴
	65+	38	42	-4	-6	🟢
Disability	With disabilities	16	18	-2	-2	🟠
	Without disabilities	83	85	-2	-2	🟠

Source: Eurostat (European Union Labour Force Survey, European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions), EIGE CARE survey.

🟢 gender gap decreased (<= -1 p.p.) 🟠 no change (gender gap increases/decreases between -1 and 1 p.p.) 🔴 gender gap increased (>= 1 p.p.)

12. FTE employment rate measures employed persons in a comparable way, even though they may work a different number of hours per week. Family type is based on the relationships between the members of households. Children are only those economically dependent household members (i.e. aged below 18).

Violence against women

Violence against women is one of the additional domains of the Gender Equality Index. The composite indicator on violence against women was calculated on the basis of the EU-GBV survey on violence against women[13].

Due to data limitations, the composite measure of violence could be calculated for 12 EU Member States only[14] but data can be found at indicator level, when available, for all 27 EU Member States[15].

The EU-12 score for the domain of violence is 31.9 points. The score for the subdomain of prevalence is 18.2 points, for the subdomain of severity it is 44.0 points and for the subdomain of disclosure it is 33.5 points.

- In the EU-27, 31 % of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator since the age of 15.
- Some 57 % of women have experienced health consequences of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.
- Around 31 % of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence by any perpetrator in the past 12 months have not told anyone.
- In 2024, 0.40 women out of 100 000 inhabitants were victims of intentional homicide by family member[16].
- Girls report cyberbullying more often than boys across the EU. Among 13-year-olds, 19 % of girls reported cyberbullying, compared with 16 % of boys. At age 15, the figures narrowed, 15 % for girls and 14 % for boys[17].
- Across the EU, 7 % of women who have ever worked have experienced sexual harassment at work via social networks or messaging apps[18].

The **Istanbul Convention** is the most comprehensive international human rights treaty on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence.

In 2017, the EU signed the Istanbul Convention. After six years of discussions, the EU formally acceded to the Istanbul Convention in June 2023. The EU's accession is a strong symbolic commitment and paves the way to improve the legal situation for victims of violence.

The European Council approved the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention on 1 June 2023.

13. The calculations of the composite measure in 2024 differ in several ways from the calculations carried out in 2017 due to slight differences in methodologies between the FRA EU wide survey on violence against women of 2012 and the EU-GBV survey (wave 2021). For more details, see EIGE (2025). Gender Equality Index 2024: Tackling violence against women, tackling gender inequalities. Publications Office.
14. BE, BG, DE, EE, EL, ES, LV, HU, AT, RO, FI, SE.
15. More information can be found in the report 'Gender Equality Index 2024. Tackling violence against women, tackling gender inequalities'.
16. EU aggregates: data not available for BE, BG, CY, DK, EE, LU, PL and PT.
17. Based on HBSC study data browser (findings from the 2021–2022 HBSC Survey)
18. Based on EU-GBV Survey (2021 wave)

Violence against women

Physical and/or sexual violence	EU Women
Women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator since age 15 (%, 18-74, 2021)	**31 e**
18-29	35 e
30-44	35 e
45-64	31 e
65-74	24 e
severe limitations	46 e
limited but not severely or not limited at all	30 e
some	40 e
some or severe	41 e
no limitations	28 e
intimate partner violence	18 e
non-partner violence	20 e
Women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by any perpetrator in the past 12 months (%, 18-74, 2021)	**3 e**

Femicide	EU Women
Women victims of intentional homicide by current or former partner or family member, rate per 100 000 inhabitants (2024) [19]	**0.4**
family member	0.4
current or former partner	:

Health consequences of violence and multiple victimisation	EU Women
Women having experienced health consequences of physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15 (%, 18-74, 2021)	**57 e**
intimate partner violence	72 e
non-partner violence	37 e
Women having experienced health consequences of physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months (%, 18-74, 2021)	**37 e**
Women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence from one or several types of perpetrators (non-partner, current partner or former partner) (%, 18-74, 2021)	**31 e**

Disclosure of violence to institutions or to anyone else	EU Women
Women having experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months and have not told anyone (%, 18-74, 2021)	**31 e**
intimate partner violence	31 e
non-partner violence	38 e

19. Data for the EU and for RO not disagregated by perpetrators. Data for Finland from 2023.

Cyberviolence	EU Women	Men
13-year-olds who have been cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months (%, 2022) [20]	19 e	16 e
15-year-olds who have been cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months (%, 2022) [21]	15 e	14 e
	Women	
Ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work via social network and messages (%, 18-74, 2022)	7 e	

Source:
- EU-GBV survey on violence against women (Statistics | Eurostat (europa.eu))
- Italy, the data based on Victimisation survey 2022-2023 (Le molestie: vittime e contesto – Anno 2022-2023 – Istat); women aged 18-70.
- Femicide, Eurostat (crim_hom_vrel)
- HBSC study data browser (findings from the 2021–2022 HBSC Survey)

Legend:
- EU: EIGE's estimation
- u: low reliability (estimate is based on 20 to 49 sample observations or if non-response for the item concerned exceeds 20% and is lower or equal to 50%)
- d: definition differs
- e: estimated
- : not available

20. EU: EIGE estimation, unweighted average of the 27 Member States BE: unweighted average of Flemish Belgium and French Belgium data.
21. EU: EIGE estimation, unweighted average of the 27 Member States BE: unweighted average of Flemish Belgium and French Belgium data.

Parental leave

The Gender Equality Index 2026 focuses on parental leave as a key policy tool for promoting gender equality, supporting families and promoting children's well-being. Well-designed parental leave can help parents reconcile work and family life, support a more equal division of care responsibilities and strengthen participation in the labour market. It also supports children's early development by enabling parents to spend time with them during the first years of life. Although parental leave is available in all EU Member States, rules on access and benefits vary considerably[22].

The analysis looks at who is eligible for parental leave and its related benefits.

Employed women are less likely than employed men to be ineligible for parental leave

While eligibility for parental leave has expanded, gaps remain. Among employed people across the EU, 8 % of women and 11 % of men are not eligible for statutory parental leave. Self-employment is the most common reason, accounting for 71 % of non-eligible women and 76 % of non-eligible men. Unmet employment conditions account for a further 20 % and 16 %, respectively, while 8 % of both women and men are ineligible due to residency requirements. Among the same employed population, exclusion from parental leave benefits is much narrower, at 4 % for both women and men.

Six Member States (Denmark, Spain, Italy, Croatia, Slovenia and Sweden) provide near-universal parental leave coverage for employed people. By contrast, Belgium, Greece, France, Malta, Luxembourg and Hungary have the highest ineligibility rates, with more than 15 % of both women and men in employment not entitled to parental leave.

Eligibility for parental leave does not guarantee access to leave benefits

In the overall EU population, women are more likely than men to be ineligible for parental leave benefits – the income support for parents while caring for a child. Eligibility for benefits is not always the same as eligibility for leave. Some countries apply different rules and make benefits available to people who are not currently employed. Across the overall population, 18 % of women and 13 % of men would receive no parental leave benefits, leaving many parents without the financial support needed to take leave. Several Member States – Estonia, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Sweden – provide universal or near-universal benefit coverage through schemes that are not tied to employment or social insurance contributions. Elsewhere, the pattern is similar to leave entitlement: Belgium, Greece and Luxembourg record the highest ineligibility rates among all potential parents, with Greece standing out at 55 % for women.

22. The analysis uses a static microsimulation to estimate how many potential parents would be eligible for parental leave across the EU. Country-specific eligibility rules are applied to representative survey data. The analysis covers people aged 20–49 and focuses on formal eligibility rather than actual take-up. It distinguishes between eligibility for job-protected parental leave (the statutory right to take time away from work while keeping a job) and eligibility for parental leave benefits (the financial compensation received during that leave). In countries where the eligibility conditions for leave and benefits are identical, the two measures produce the same results. However, where eligibility criteria differ, benefit eligibility is often broader than leave eligibility, as entitlement to financial support may extend to individuals who are not in employment. To reflect these differences, eligibility rates were simulated separately for the employed population (leave entitlement) and for the overall population (benefit entitlement). It uses 2024 data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). For more details, see Gender Equality Index 2026: Making parental leave work (EIGE, 2026).

The early childhood education and care gap undermines equality gains

In the EU, only six Member States (Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden) do not have a gap between well-paid parental leave and publicly subsidised childcare. In most Member States, families face a period with neither wellpaid leave nor guaranteed affordable childcare, and it is mothers who overwhelmingly absorb this gap through extended leave, unpaid leave or labour market exit. Ireland and Italy have some of the biggest gaps in the EU, often lasting around six years. They are followed by Croatia and Malta (5-year gaps), then by Greece, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Austria (4-year gaps).

Parental leave

Parental leave	EU Women	Men
1. Employed women and men not eligible for statutory parental leave (%, 20-49, 2024) [23]	**8**	**11**
2. Employed women and men not eligible for statutory parental leave by reason for ineligibility (%, 20-49, 2024)		
Self-employment	71	76
Unmet employment conditions	20	16
Unmet residency requirement	8	8
3. Employed women and men not eligible for statutory parental leave benefits (%, 20-49, 2024)	**4**	**4**
4. Women and men not eligible for statutory parental leave benefits (%, 20-49, 2024) [24]	**18**	**13**
5. Women and men not eligible for statutory parental leave benefits by reason for ineligibility, (%, 20-49, 2024) [25]		
Unemployement or inactivity	:	:
Self-employment	:	:
Unmet employment conditions	:	:
Unmet residency requirement	:	:
6. Recipients/users of publicly-administered parental leave benefits or publicly-administered paid parental leave (%, 2023) [26]	**:**	**:**
	Gap	
7. Gap between well-paid childcare leave and ECEC place guarantee (years, 2024/2025) [27]	**:**	

Source: • EU-LFS, EU-SILC • OECD Family Database • Eurydice

Legend:
- Indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: the analysis uses a static microsimulation to estimate how many potential parents would be eligible for job-protected parental leave (the statutory right to take time away from work while keeping one's job) and eligibility for parental leave benefits (the financial compensation received during that leave).
- Indicators 2, 5, 6: figures rounded to whole numbers, sum may not add up to 100 %
- : not available

23. Sweden applies a one-year residency requirement for EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA nationals, which was simulated but resulted in extremely small numbers, rounded to zero (0).

24. Sweden applies a one-year residency requirement for EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA nationals, which was simulated but resulted in extremely small numbers, rounded to zero (0).

25. 'EU-27' average excluded due to the results being unrepresentative as the figure covers only the subset of Member States with a non-negligible ineligible population to decompose by reason, excluding countries with near-full eligibility and unmet employment conditions and unmet residency requirements will be conflated.

26. DK, SE and PT do not make a distinction between the different leaves, therefore their numbers also include users of maternity and paternity leave. For BE and CZ, data is an average of users/recipients in each month of the given year. For LU, data refer to recipients of the first (right after birth) and second parental leave (before 6th birthday). For EE, data refer to recipients of shared parental benefits (jagatav vanemahüvitis). For FI, data refer to recipients of the sharable parental allowance plus the paternity allowance after the parental allowance period. For DE, data include both recipients of 'Elterngeld' and 'ElterngeldPlus'. PL and FI latest data for 2021; DK latest data for 2022. Data is not available for other countries.

27. Well-paid leave' is defined as leave compensated with an earnings-related payment equivalent to 66 % of earnings or above. The measure combines maternity, paternity, and parental leave, and reflects the continuous well-paid period achievable from birth if leave is taken full-time, in one uninterrupted period, by one or both parents in sequence.

About the Index

The Gender Equality Index, first launched in 2013, has become a cornerstone of gender monitoring in the European Union. In 2025, the Index underwent a comprehensive review to strengthen its alignment with current EU policy priorities, integrate new data and update its methodology.

The Gender Equality Index measures gender gaps between women and men in six core domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health – and is composed of 27 indicators. Scores range from 0 to 100, where 0 reflects complete gender inequality and 100 represents full equality.

Two additional domains are included in the Index, but do not impact a country's final score. The domain of intersecting inequalities highlights how gender inequalities manifest in combination with age, disability, education, family type and migrant background (based on the country of birth). The domain of violence against women measures, monitors and analyses the most common and widely criminalised forms of violence against women across the EU.

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The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

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