

Achieving gender equality in the face of the pandemic and existing challenges

In March 2020, the European Commission released its new European Union (EU) Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025, setting out measures to tackle persistent gender inequalities and bring a gender perspective to future priorities such as the digital and green transitions. Since the Strategy's release, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed and exacerbated gender inequalities, creating further challenges. Reports on the EU Gender Equality Strategy, women's participation in the digital economy and the gender impacts of the pandemic are due to be put before the European Parliament during its plenary session in January.

Gender equality in the EU – State of play

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) monitors progress towards gender equality in the European Union through its composite [Gender Equality Index](#) (GEI). The latest results (see Figure 1) illustrate that, over the past decade, measures taken at EU and national level have led to advances. The EU is just over half way to achieving gender equality, with an overall score of 67.5 out of a possible 100. However, progress has been slow, there are considerable differences between [Member States](#), and gender gaps remain widespread across the six core areas: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health.

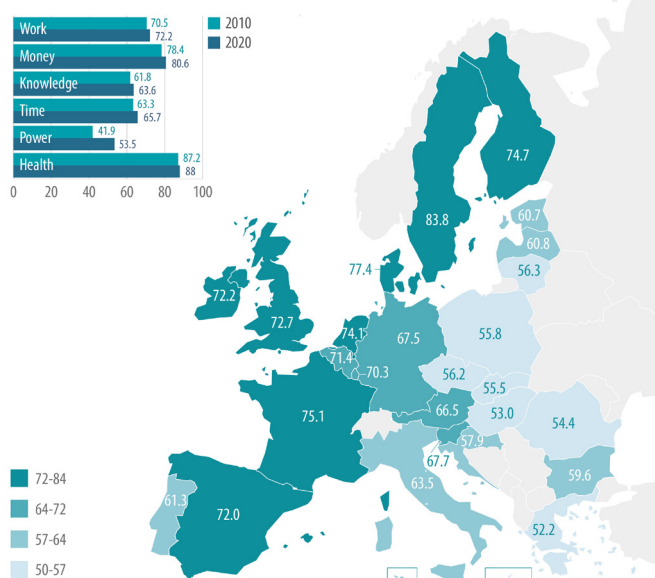
Persisting gender inequalities

The areas with the widest gender gaps include '[power](#)' and '[time](#)'. Women remain under-represented in decision-making and continue to do a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. The [gender divide](#) in unpaid work contributes to women's lower [labour market participation](#) and to the persistent [gender pay gap](#). These, in turn, have negative impacts on women's [financial situation](#), including a higher [risk of poverty](#), as well as being associated with [inequalities in health](#). Additional GEI data reveal the impacts of [intersecting inequalities](#) and show that women's pervasive experiences of [violence](#) are a major impediment to full equality. Research demonstrates the [costs](#) of these gender inequalities and the potential benefits of gender equality for society and the [economy](#), as well as for individuals.

Emerging challenges: Climate change and digitalisation

To design fair and effective policy, the gender dimension of new challenges such as [climate change](#) and [digitalisation](#) will also need systematic consideration. The 2020 GEI [report](#) takes an in-depth look at the issue of digitalisation and the future of work. It finds that digital transformation has the potential to improve gender equality in the labour market, but there is also a risk of gender gaps being replicated in emerging

Figure 1 – Gender Equality Index Scores by core area and EU Member State (plus the United Kingdom)



Data source: EIGE, [GEI 2020](#) (most data from 2018) and [GEI 2013](#) (most data from 2010, excluding Croatia).

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sectors. EIGE concludes that it will be particularly important to tackle the gender divide in digital skills and the use and creation of technologies, including [artificial intelligence](#), and the gender stereotypes and biases that underlie them. The fact that the pandemic has hastened the shift to digital ways of working makes it even more important to examine these developments in the context of gender equality.

Gendered impacts of the coronavirus pandemic

[EIGE](#) and [Eurofound](#) have flagged that the ongoing health, social and economic crisis is having different impacts on women and men, and that there is an urgent need to understand this gender dimension and factor it into policy responses. Without a gender-sensitive approach, the pandemic could have far-reaching implications, including a real risk of exacerbating gender inequalities and sending progress into reverse. [Evidence](#) is emerging that women have been more likely to suffer cuts in working hours, lose their jobs, or drop out of the labour market, because they are over-represented in badly hit sectors, have fewer employment-related entitlements and are experiencing more work-life conflict during lockdowns. If this pattern persists, it could have long-term impacts on women's employment and pay. Lockdowns have also led to an increase in [domestic violence](#). The pandemic has revealed the [inadequacy](#) of support systems for victims of gender-based violence. It has also shone a spotlight on the under-valuing of [care work](#) and under-investment in [care infrastructure](#). These are all areas where targeted policy responses could make a significant difference to outcomes, and where the EU and the Member States could further develop [capacities](#). These include [gender impact assessment](#), [gender budgeting](#) and collection of the kinds of disaggregated data that have been crucial to identifying who is [most at risk](#) from Covid-19. The Member States holding the [presidency](#) of the Council during the pandemic, the [European Economic and Social Committee](#), the [European Committee of the Regions](#), and the [European Women's Lobby](#) have all called for gender equality to be a core part of social and economic recovery plans and EU funding. They are also calling for swift implementation of the new EU Gender Equality Strategy.

The EU Gender-Equality Strategy 2020-2025

Gender equality is a [fundamental EU value and principle](#), enshrined in the Treaties. Non-legislative measures for advancing gender equality and proposals for legislation are set out in comprehensive [multiannual policy programmes](#). The current European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, identified gender equality as a major objective of her Commission (2019-2024) and promised a new EU gender equality strategy to underpin this political commitment. The priorities of the [strategy](#), adopted as a Commission communication in March 2020, are: combating gender-based violence and gender stereotypes, closing the gender employment gap, achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy, addressing the gender pay and pension gaps, closing the gender care gap and achieving gender balance in decision-making. The strategy combines targeted measures to tackle gender and intersectional inequalities with [gender mainstreaming](#) across all EU policies and major initiatives, including the green and digital transitions. It includes proposals for new EU legislation on [pay transparency](#) and [combating violence against women](#).

European Parliament position

The European Parliament has consistently called for strong action on gender equality, including [ambitious](#) EU gender equality strategies. An own-initiative [report](#) by its Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) due to be put to plenary welcomes the new strategy, particularly in the light of the recent backlash in this area and the gendered impacts of the pandemic, while also asking the Commission to adopt a roadmap with clear timescales, a monitoring mechanism, and indicators of success. Parliament has previously called for a gendered approach to the [pandemic](#) and [digitalisation](#). Two further FEMM own-initiative reports set out further recommendations for responding to the [Covid-19 crisis](#) in the immediate and longer term and for promoting women's and girl's participation in the [digital economy](#).

Own-initiative reports: the EU Strategy for Gender Equality ([2019/2169 \(INI\)](#)); the gender perspective in the Covid-19 crisis and post-crisis period ([2020/2121\(INI\)](#)); closing the digital gender gap: women's participation in the digital economy ([2019/2168\(INI\)](#)); Rapporteurs: Maria Noichl (Germany, S&D); Frances Fitzgerald (Ireland, EPP); Maria da Graça Carvalho (Portugal, EPP).

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