

# EU: Coronavirus puts women in the frontline

EIGE (25.03.2020) – <https://bit.ly/2R0DBUz> – In Europe, we are all adjusting to new ways of living because of the effects of the coronavirus. We are learning what it means to self-quarantine, work from home, home-school children, lose a job or even a loved one. Each person's situation is different, but for sure, the coronavirus will reveal the different realities of women and men.

At the frontline of this coronavirus pandemic are the healthcare workers who are working around the clock and putting themselves at risk to care for patients. Most of the nurses and healthcare workers in the EU are women. Their workload is very demanding, often taking an emotional toll. Yet their profession is one of the most undervalued, and under-paid jobs in the EU.

## ***Men's mortality rate is higher***

Preliminary figures show that women and men are being infected by the coronavirus in about equal numbers, but the mortality rate is higher for men than for women [1]. The World Health Organization recommends to keep up healthy food and exercise habits to boost the immune system and avoid unhealthy ones such as smoking and consuming excessive alcohol. More men smoke than women and are therefore more likely to be at risk of developing a serious disease if infected with the virus.

## ***Extra challenges for public transport users***

Our Gender Equality Index findings show that women rely much more on public transportation than men. This puts women at greater risk of coming into contact with the virus, when they have to either get to work, visit a doctor or do the grocery shopping. This is especially the case with single parents, who are less likely to have a car due to financial reasons. 18 % of them say that public transport is the only method of transport available to them. In countries where restrictions on movement have tightened, public transport has been reduced or even shut down. This makes life more difficult for people who rely on these services and still need to get to work, visit a doctor or do the grocery shopping

## ***Concern for severe job losses in women-dominated professions***

The closure or near-closure of many businesses could have a severe effect on many women-dominated professions. Flight attendants, tour operators, sales assistants, hotel cleaners and hairdressers are often already in precarious jobs and will probably not be paid nor entitled to paid sick leave. These people are likely to have difficulty paying for basic necessities such as groceries, rent and bills in the coming days and months. EIGE's research shows that a quarter of women employees across the EU are in a precarious job. For migrants, the situation is even worse. Nearly one in three non-EU born women (35 %) and one in four men (24 %) work in precarious jobs.

## ***Unpaid care work will increase***

Even without a crisis, caring responsibilities usually fall heavily on women. Now with the closure of schools and workplaces, their unpaid workload is likely to further increase. If older relatives get sick, they will also need looking after. The situation for single parents can be even more difficult, especially when options for informal childcare are unavailable.

### ***Physical distancing is not an option for everyone***

In the EU, nearly a quarter of households depend on informal care from relatives or friends. As physical distancing and confinement measures become the norm, it will become harder for family, friends and neighbours to provide or receive such care.

There are also many people in our society, for whom physical distancing is not an option. We have 61 million women and 47 million men with disabilities in the EU. Many of them depend on help from others to eat, dress or shower, which makes physical distancing almost impossible. Across the EU, most of the professional carers working with people with disabilities or older people are women (83 %).

### ***Domestic abuse increases in times of crisis***

These times of social isolation increase the risk of domestic abuse. Women in violent relationships are stuck at home and

exposed to their abuser for longer periods of time. This makes it very difficult for them to call helplines as the perpetrator is always around. It can also be harder for women to leave their abuser once the crisis is over, due to the financial insecurity that might follow.

Neighbours or relatives can have an important role in contacting the police if they suspect that violence is occurring, especially when the victim is not able to call for help.

### ***Where are women decision-makers?***

While nurses are working non-stop behind the scenes in hospitals to look after patients, we mostly see men out in the public domain, making the news headlines. They are the ones who hold most of the positions of power in our society. In this crisis, it is usually men who are making all the important decisions, which affect the everyday lives of citizens. This imbalance of decision-making power means that women are left out from shaping the decisions that affect their own lives.

### ***Policy measures must consider the different needs of women and men***

The response from policymakers must consider the different experiences faced by women and men during a pandemic to ensure that everyone gets the help they most need. There is a big need for sex-disaggregated data to fully understand how women

and men are affected by the virus. Not only for infection rates, but also the economic impacts, the distribution of care work and the extent of domestic violence. It is also time for leaders to recognise and give more value to the important work done by those who are in the frontlines of a health crisis, such as healthcare workers, home carers and domestic workers.

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## **EU: Gender Equality Index 2019: Still far from the finish line**

EIGE (15.10.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2oItDfG> – The EU continues its snail's pace when it comes to gender equality progress. The latest Gender Equality Index from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that the EU's score for gender equality is up just one point to 67.4, since the 2017 edition. Sweden continues to top the EU scoreboard, with 83.6 points, followed by Denmark with 77.5. Greece and Hungary have the most ground to make up, with both scoring less than 52. The biggest improver is Portugal, with an increase of 3.9 points, followed closely by Estonia with 3.1 points.

“We are moving in the right direction but we are still far from the finish line. Our Index, which sets a benchmark for gender equality in the EU, shows that almost half of all Member States fall below the 60 point mark. As the new EU Parliament and Commission shape and renew EU priorities for the next strategic framework, it is crucial that gender equality gathers speed,” said Virginija Langbakk, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

The lowest scoring domain is power, which looks at equality in decision-making. Yet, it is the area with the biggest progress. This has been mainly driven by the rise of women on company boards, although in just a few Member States. France is the only one to have at least 40 % of each gender on the boards of publicly listed companies.

“Gender inequality is holding Europe back from reaching its full potential. I am proud of what we have achieved, however now our actions need to make a difference on the ground. Our Work-Life Balance Directive adopted this year will be a game-changer for women and men across Europe. The rules will support more equal sharing of caring responsibilities, which will allow women to stay on the labour market and take on challenging roles or management positions,” said Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.

### **Focus on work-life balance**

Work-life balance and its connection to gender equality is a special focus of this year's Index. Parental leave is one of the important policy measures to support parents who balance caring duties with work but it is not available to all. In the EU, 28 % of women and 20 % of men are ineligible for parental leave.

Access to affordable and good quality childcare services is important for work-life balance, but it is not only children who need looking after. Ageing and disability rates are rising

in the EU, which pushes up demand for long-term care services for older people and people with disabilities. Women of pre-retirement age do the bulk of informal long-term caring in the EU. The difference is remarkable in the 50-64 age group: 21 % of women and 11 % of men care for older people and/or people with disabilities at least several days a week.

As part of the work-life balance analysis, the Index also examined whether women and men have the same opportunities to work flexibly, to attend training courses, to use transport and commute. An important pillar of work-life balance is flexible working arrangements. EIGE's work-life balance scoreboard presents the different options people have to balance their work and personal life. It shows whether these options are equally available to women and men and it gives new ideas for monitoring the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Work-Life Balance Initiative.

The Gender Equality Index 2019 is out today.

The Gender Equality Index is a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Index has six core domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health – and two additional domains: violence against women and intersecting inequalities. It gives more visibility to areas that need improvement and ultimately supports policy makers to design more effective gender equality measures.

The Index also shows the diverse realities that different groups of women and men face. It examines how factors such as

disability, age, level of education, country of birth and family type, intersect with gender to create different pathways in people's lives. For the first time, the Index highlights the situation of LGBTQI+ people and Roma and Muslim women in areas where statistics are available.

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# **EU: New EU gender equality index for 2017**

By Mia Haas-Goldberg

HRWF (11.10.2017) – Today, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) released its 2017 Gender Equality Index. At its core, the Index serves as a comprehensive measure for assessing and monitoring progress in gender equality across EU member states. The Index has been recognized for its critical contribution to policy-making and increased awareness at EU and national levels.

This third edition includes a new intersectional approach to data collection for men and women, as well as information on social power and health behaviors. For the first time, the Index also measures gender gaps in decision-making in research, media, and sports in an attempt to strengthen public discourse and policy within these respective spheres.

According to the 2017 Index, there is a definite increase in the share of women engaged in political and economic decision-making since 2010, while gender inequalities in the domain of time use for care and social activities are “persistent and growing.” Overall, the Index points to slow growth in gender equality across all member states and domains over the past ten years.



See the full Gender Equality Index here.

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