

EU moving at a snail's pace on gender equality

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News

A Gender Equality Index says that the EU's 'score' for gender equality is up just one point to 67.4, since 2017.

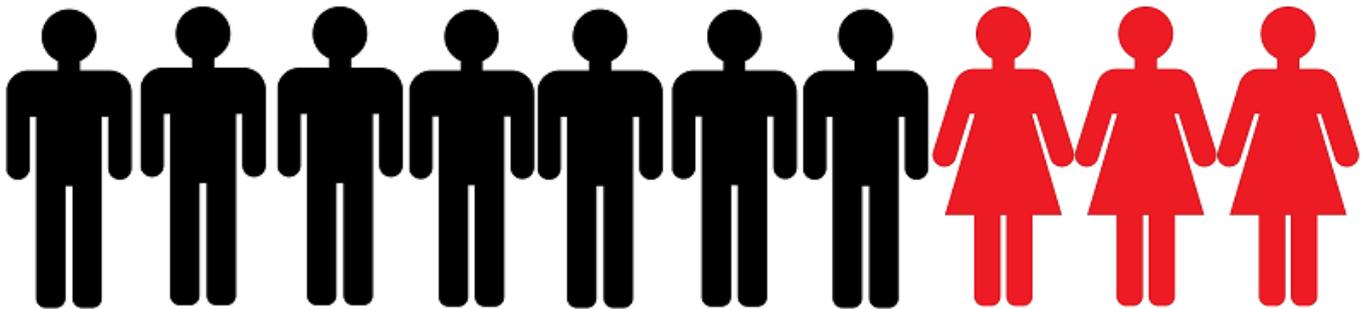


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The index, compiled by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), showed Sweden continuing to top the EU scoreboard, with 83.6 points, followed by Denmark with 77.5.

Greece and Hungary have the most ground to make up, with both scoring less than 52. The biggest improvement has been seen in Portugal, with an increase of 3.9 points, followed closely by Estonia with 3.1 points.

The index scores Member States and the EU as a whole on a scale of 1 to 100, where one is for total inequality and 100 is for total equality.

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The scores are based on the gaps between women and men and levels of achievement in what the EIGE calls “six core domains”: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health.

The EIGE says its index is “a comprehensive measure” for monitoring progress in gender equality across the EU.

The lowest scoring domain, or policy area, is ‘power’, deemed to be equality in decision-making.

Even so, the Institute says this is also the area where the biggest progress has been seen since the last analysis two years ago.

“As the new European Parliament and Commission shape and renew EU priorities for the next strategic framework, it is crucial that gender equality gathers speed” **Virginija Langbakk, EIGE director**

“This has been mainly driven by the rise of women on company boards, although in just a few Member States,” says the EIGE.

France is the only one to have at least 40 percent of each gender on the boards of publicly-listed companies.

The index has been released against a backdrop of increasing focus on gender equality, with European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen making it a cornerstone of her policies and insisting that a minimum number of EU commissioners are female.

Work-life balance and its connection to gender equality is a special focus of this year’s index.

Parental leave is, says the EIGE, 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 percent of women and 20 percent of men are ineligible for parental leave, it says.

The Institute adds, “Access to affordable and good-quality childcare services is important for work-life balance but it is not only children who need looking after.”

“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” **Věra Jourová, European Commission Vice-President-designate**

Women of pre-retirement age do the bulk of informal long-term caring in the EU but, according to the EIGE, the difference is “remarkable” in the 50-64 age group, with 21 percent of women and 11 percent of men caring for older people and/or people with disabilities at least several days a week.

Commenting on the findings, EIGE Director Virginija Langbakk, told this website, “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 European Parliament and Commission shape and renew EU priorities for the next strategic framework, it is crucial that gender equality gathers speed.”

Further comment came from Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, who noted, “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.”

She added, “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.”

Further reaction to the findings came from Molly Scott Cato, a Green MEP for South West England and Gibraltar, who told this website, “As a female economist I understand how the bastions of power in our European societies are controlled by men.”

“We need to ensure that women are equally represented throughout our political and economic fora and that women are always given equal access to airtime and positions of authority as men.”

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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