

The Gender Equality Index 2021

“Europe has made fragile gains in gender equality. But big losses are emerging as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic fallout is lasting longer for women, while life expectancy for men has dropped,” stated Carlien Scheele, the Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), when releasing the Gender Equality Index 2021.

The Gender Equality Index (GEI) measures the progress of gender equality in the EU over time with a score from 1 to 100, where 1 is for total inequality between women and men and 100 is for full equality between women and men. The six domains measured by the GEI are work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health, alongside two additional domains: violence against women and intersecting inequalities. This GEI edition also has a thematic focus on health, analysing sexual and reproductive health, mental health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, the EU scored 68 points out of 100, an increase of just 0.6 points since the previous edition. Sweden maintained the first rank with 83.9 points, while Malta increased its score to 65 points from 63.4 in comparison to the GEI 2020 edition and improved its ranking to 13th place from 14th. Malta also registered the second highest progress on gender equality (+ 10.6 points) since 2010 following Luxembourg (+ 11.2 points).

In the EU Member States, every domain of the index is characterised by developments and challenges in achieving gender equality. In fact, gender inequalities in the domain of work, progress in the participation in the labour market slowed and strong gender segregation continues. The adverse effects of the COVID-19 on the employment prospects are greater for women, and likely to be more prolonged, due to gender segregation and the unequal distribution of unpaid care duties. Malta registered the highest gain in this domain (+ 1.4 points), albeit small and lower than the progress registered in the previous year (+ 2.1 points).

The domain of money (82.4 points) has slightly improved from the previous edition. Poverty and social exclusion risks were higher for women across the EU before the pandemic. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the income gap between women and men since more women in the EU have lost income to assume care duties, including home schooling. Malta’s score in this domain reached 84.2, 1.8 points higher than that of the EU average.

The EU score for the domain of knowledge has remained unchanged (62.7 points) since the previous edition, improving only by 2.9 points since 2010. Although educational attainment is increasing among young women and men, gender segregation in education and low participation in lifelong

learning curb progress. Malta's score decreased by 1.9 points due to a lower score in relation to gender segregation.

EIGE could not revise the score in the domain of time due to data gaps and relied on 2016 data. Besides childcare and long-term care for older persons and persons with disabilities and chronic illness, housework is the most unequally shared form of unpaid care. About 78% of women in the EU spend at least an hour a day on housework compared with 32% of men. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has hugely impacted people with care responsibilities, especially women with children. In most EU countries, scores in this domain increased since 2010, with Malta seeing the largest increase (+9.9 points).

With the lowest score of 55 points, the domain of power registered the highest progress since 2010. Yet women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions and progress in this area was largely driven by a few countries that took legislative measures and other actions on the representation of women in the largest listed companies. Malta's score in this area increased to 37.5 points due to greater gender balance on the board of the national central bank and the Malta Council of Science and Technology. Nonetheless, the underrepresentation of women in parliament and on boards of listed companies in Malta is among the highest across the EU.

The score for the health domain remains unchanged from the previous edition (87.8 points) with gender disparities in life expectancy and self-assessed health status. Malta is the second top-performing country in this area (92.3 points), excelling mainly in the sub-domain on the access to healthcare services.

In relation to violence against women, EIGE found that the only regularly updated data is of femicide. In 2018, in 14 Member States more than 600 murders of women by an intimate partner or family member/relative were recorded. Restrictive measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risks of intimate partner violence against women, particularly for groups including older women, women and girls with disabilities, migrant women, homeless women and victims of trafficking.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) notes positively the overall progress made by Malta in achieving gender equality since 2010, as well as the progress in the spheres of health, work, money, and power since the previous GEI edition. On the other hand, NCPE also acknowledges the challenges being faced to move forward in the remaining areas, and is committed to keep on working in order to safeguard equality for the benefit of all women and men.



National Commission for the Promotion of Equality

As highlighted by Scheele, the Gender Equality Index 2021 findings “*can help Europe’s leaders tackle the different effects of the pandemic on women and men and alleviate the unequal short and long-term impact.*”

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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