



International Women's Day 2021: COVID-19 pandemic is a major challenge for gender equality

Brussels, 5 March 2021

Ahead of International Women's Day, the Commission published its [2021 report on gender equality in the EU](#), that shows the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities between women and men in almost all areas of life, both in Europe and beyond, rolling back on the hard-won achievements of past years. At the same time, gender equality has never been so high up on the EU's political agenda, and the Commission has made significant efforts to implement the [Gender Equality Strategy](#), adopted one year ago. To better monitor and track progress in each of the 27 Member States, the Commission is launching today a [Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal](#).

Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra **Jourová**, said today: *"Women are at the frontline at the pandemic and they are more affected by it. We can't afford sliding back; we must continue to push for fairness and equality. This is why EU has put women at the heart of recovery and obliged Member States to include gender equality in investments funded from Recovery and Resilience Facility."*

Commissioner for Equality, Helena **Dalli**, added: *"Despite the disproportionate impact on women's lives due to the COVID-19 crisis, we need to use this situation as an opportunity. We are determined to strengthen our efforts, continue progressing and not allow a backlash on all the gender equality gains made"*.

COVID-19 impact on women

Today's report highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a major challenge for gender equality:

- **Member States recorded a surge in domestic violence:** For example, the number of reports on domestic violence in France increased by 32% during the first week of the lockdown, in Lithuania by 20% in the first three weeks. Ireland saw a five-fold increase in domestic violence orders and Spanish authorities reported an 18% rise in calls during the first fortnight of confinement.
- **Women were at the frontline tackling the pandemic:** 76% of healthcare and social-care workers, 86% of personal care workers in health services are women. With the pandemic, women in these sectors saw an unprecedented rise in workload, health risk and challenges to work-life balance.
- **Women in the labour market were hit hard by the pandemic:** Women are overrepresented in sectors that are worst affected by the crisis (retail, hospitality, care and domestic work), because these jobs cannot be done remotely. Women also had more difficulties re-entering the labour market during the partial recovery last summer 2020 with employment rates rising by 1.4% for men but only by 0.8% for women between the second and the third quarter 2020.
- **Lockdowns have significant impact on unpaid care and work-life balance:** Women spent, on average, 62 hours per week caring for children (compared to 36 hours for men) and 23 hours per week doing housework (15 hours for men).
- **A striking lack of women in COVID-19 decision-making bodies:** A 2020 study found that men greatly outnumber women in the bodies created to respond to the pandemic. Of 115 national dedicated COVID-19 task forces in 87 countries, including 17 EU Member States, 85,2% were made up mainly of men, 11,4% comprised mainly women, and only 3,5% had gender parity. At the political level, only 30% of health ministers in the EU are women. The Commission's task force for the COVID-19 crisis is led by President **von der Leyen** and includes five other Commissioners, three of whom are women.

Despite the challenges arising from the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission made significant efforts to

move forward with the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy over the past year. In order to track progress more effectively across the EU, the Commission launched today the [Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal](#). A joint project developed by the Commission's Joint Research Centre and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the portal will allow to monitor individual EU Member States' performance and compare that performance among the 27 Member States.

Background

The [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#), adopted one year ago, is based on a vision for a Europe where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free from violence and stereotypes and have the opportunity to thrive and to lead. It sets out key actions for the 5-year period and commits to ensure that the Commission will include an equality perspective in all EU policy areas.

In the past year, the Commission has stepped up fight against gender-based violence with the first-ever [EU victims' rights strategy](#) and announced a proposal to combat gender-based violence (public consultation is [open here](#)). The proposal for a Digital Services Act, adopted in December 2020, clarifies platforms' responsibility and contributes to address online violence.

The Commission has taken action to encourage women's participation in the labour market. The [Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights](#) puts gender equality at its core and establishes, amongst others, ambitious targets for women's participation in the labour market and the provision of early childcare. On 4 March, the Commission put forward [pay transparency](#) measures to ensure equal pay for women and men for equal work.

In the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) and [Updated Skills Agenda](#), the Commission announced a range of actions ensuring that girls and young women are equally present in ICT studies and digital skills development.

A gender equality perspective was also included into the next EU budget. Moreover, the new Recovery and Resilience Facility under the NextGenerationEU requires Member States to explain how their national recovery plans will contribute to promoting gender equality, thus helping to ensure a gender-responsive recovery in the EU.

In the past year, the Commission continued to support initiatives tackling gender stereotypes through its funding programmes, including the EU's [Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme](#). The Commission also strengthened gender equality outside of the EU by presenting, in November 2020, the new [Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#) for 2021-2025, an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action.

Today, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published a report on the Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU. Full details can be found in their [press release](#).

For More Information

[2021 report on gender equality in the EU](#)

[Gender Equality Strategy webpage](#)

[EIGE press release](#): Covid-19 derails gender equality gains

[Gender equality](#)

IP/21/1011

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