

### Introduction

Universal, high-quality education and training are fundamental to the future prosperity of the EU and to addressing poverty and social exclusion as outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. The EU has established educational targets under the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) that aim to limit the number of early school leavers and promote lifelong learning and the completion of tertiary education. In general, women and girls do better on these performance metrics than men and boys. However, gender stereotypes in education can limit the educational and occupational choices of both women and men.

Since 2013, the EU has made several commitments to address gender equality issues in education and training. The

Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019 highlighted the need to address gendered choices in study subjects and subsequent careers. In 2015, the EU called for action to tackle gender stereotypes and ensure that teachers are trained to create inclusive, egalitarian and non-discriminatory learning environments. To address gender segregation in education, the Council of the EU called for parallel efforts to encourage men and boys to work and study in female-dominated sectors such as social services and care. In addition to the gender segregation in education, the European Commission has addressed the horizontal and vertical gender segregation among personnel in the education and research sectors.



## Gender segregation and stereotypes in education disadvantage women in the longer term

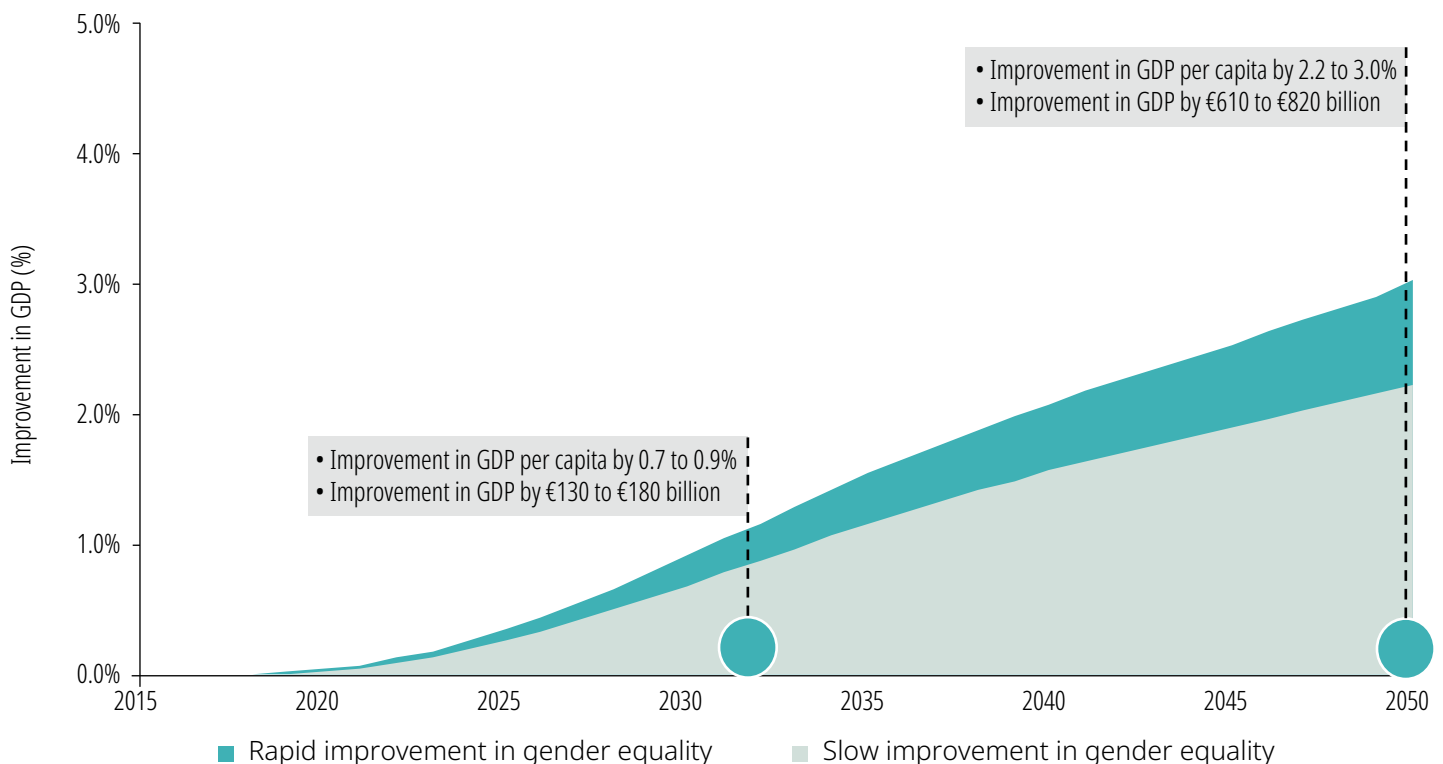
Significant imbalances are visible in certain fields of education: women make up less than one fifth of engineering and information and communications technology (ICT) graduates across the EU but tend to comprise the majority of students in education, health and welfare (EHW) subjects. Notably, only 19 % of all graduates in engineering, manufacturing and construction are women, and this proportion is even lower among ICT graduates (17 %).

The low share of women in ICT and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in higher education is not explained by academic performance, as girls and boys show similar levels of achievement in science and maths in secondary level education. Rather, gender segregation within higher education often stems from social norms and gendered expectations in career choices that may be reinforced through educational content and curricula. This can occur both at home and in wider society, affecting young people's choices and guiding them to choose 'appropriate'

subjects. For example, several studies have found evidence of women being substantially under-represented and/or portrayed in stereotypical roles in educational materials (e.g. as teachers). Such gender stereotypes can also lead to harassment and bullying of girls and boys who do not adhere to these stereotypical choices.

Gender segregation and stereotypes in education ultimately affect labour market outcomes for women and men. Occupational gender segregation is particularly harmful for women, as many of the occupations in which women are over-represented are poorly paid (e.g. social care and teaching). Gender segregation thus reinforces and enables systematic undervaluation of women's work. It is an important obstacle to achieving fairer and more inclusive economic growth — for example, a study by EIGE has shown that increasing the participation of women in STEM subjects could lead to as much as a 3 % increase in EU gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Effect of closing the gender gap in STEM on GDP per capita, EU-28, 2015-2050



## Lower pay and career prospects for women working in education and research

Women in the education and research sectors continue to be disadvantaged by two distinct types of gender segregation. Horizontal segregation sees women and men tending to teach and research different subjects, as well as to be concentrated in different education and research sectors. For example, women are less likely to hold teaching and academic positions in higher education institutions. In 2015, women accounted for more than 8 in 10 staff in primary education, but just 4 in 10 in tertiary education. This disparity contributes to the gender pay gap, as teaching in the lower levels of education tends to be accompanied by lower statutory salaries.

Vertical segregation means that women are more likely to be represented in the lower levels of a hierarchy. For instance, female teachers are less likely than their male peers to be

promoted to school principals. Similar patterns are evident within research institutions. In 2016, women were almost equally represented among junior staff positions (46.4 % of junior research posts, i.e. entry level for newly qualified PhD graduates) but were far less likely to hold a senior position (23.7 % of full professors or equivalent). Overall, women make up only one third of the EU's researchers.

In addition to these segregation patterns, disparities in job quality also contribute to gender inequalities. Data from 2016 show that women are more likely than men to hold part-time research positions — 13 % of women researchers compared with 8 % of men researchers — with 8.1 % of women working under contract arrangements considered precarious employment, compared with only 5.2 % of men.

## Recommendations for action

Although the EU has limited scope and competence to intervene in the area of education and training, it can contribute to addressing the challenges discussed above by mainstreaming gender into its key strategies, such as the post-2020 EU strategy for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Adopting new measures to address broader labour market inequalities (such as strengthening pay transparency or promoting gender balance in decision-making) would also put women working in the education and research sectors in a better position.

At Member State level, revision of education curricula to ensure unbiased coverage of all genders as well as various minority groups would contribute to elimination of gender stereotypes, and it would make education more inclusive. Education ministries and other public agencies are recommended to develop guidance for schools, colleges and other educational settings to assist them in appropriate modern-

isation of their curricula. Including explicit gender-sensitive education in the curricula of educators would be beneficial.

Member States are also recommended to address gender segregation in education, especially to support higher participation of women in STEM studies (and careers) and men in EHW ones. Introducing gender-sensitive career counselling for students would be of significant benefit. Broader Member State efforts to raise awareness of the negative consequences of gender stereotypes in education among students, teachers and school counsellors would serve as a good complement.

Finally, it is important to implement the [Council of Europe Recommendations on Preventing and Combating Sexism \(2019\)](#) at national level, in order to properly define what constitutes sexism within educational settings and challenge gender stereotypes in education.

## Further information

In addition to the developments presented above, the Beijing + 25 review revealed other challenges in the education and training of women in the EU. Although women participate in lifelong learning more often than men, they are less likely to take part in continued vocational training funded by their employers. In addition, women face barriers to participating in education and training due to family responsibilities. Specifically, young girls from migrant families or ethnic minority groups (such as Roma girls) have a higher likelihood

of early school leaving, with young women from a migrant background particularly at risk of not being in employment, education or training.

Further information on EU policy developments and trends in the area of education and training of women can be found in EIGE's Beijing + 25 report. Some other policy briefs based on this report also present challenges closely related to women in education (such as Area F, Women and the economy, and Area L, The girl child).

EIGE regularly produces reports reviewing different areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) or other EU policy priorities, as requested by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union. This factsheet is based on the report *Beijing + 25: The fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, prepared at the request of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Other publications include:

- [Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Not without a better work–life balance](#) (2019)
- [Gender Equality and Youth: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation](#) (2019)
- [Women and Men in ICT: A chance for better work–life balance](#) (2018)
- [Study and Work in the EU: Set apart by gender](#) (2018)

You can explore all of EIGE's previous BPfA reports and publications at <https://eige.europa.eu/beijing-platform-for-action>

### European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.  
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