EUROSHIP

closing gaps in European social citizenship

The effects of intersectionality on citizens` opportunities to exercise social rights and participate in the digital economy

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EUROSHIP Working Papers are scientific outputs from the EUROSHIP project. The series is edited by the project coordinator Professor Rune Halvorsen. The working papers are intended to meet the European Commission's expected impact from the project:

i) to advance the knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of relevant policies in Europe with the aim of exercising the EU social rights as an integral part of EU citizenship and promoting upward convergence, and

ii) to engage with relevant communities, stakeholders and practitioners in the research with a view to supporting social protection policies in Europe. Contributions to a dialogue about these results can be made through the project website (euroship-research.eu), or by following us on Twitter: @EUROSHIP_EU.

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Abbreviations

EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality
GEI Gender Equality Index
DESI Digital Economy and Society Index

Acknowledgements:

Abstract

This deliverable summarises and integrates the findings on intersectional inequalities from WP8 'The digital transformation of work and social services'. It examines how intersectional inequalities affect individuals' potential to exercise social rights and fully participate in the emerging digital economy. This is particularly pertinent as periods of lockdown during the pandemic revealed the depth and variety of digital poverty for different communities in Europe.

The report outlines how EU policies for inclusiveness and equality have developed over time. It summarises and evaluates existing evidence for assessing intersectional inequalities. Drawing on expert interview data from the Euroship partners it compares national perspectives on how different communities are able, or not, to exercise their social citizenship through digital technologies. It focuses on three key dimensions of digital access to welfare, education, and health.

One of the key findings from this comparative assessment is the need for an intersectional sensibility in the construction of policy. However, limited data availability restricts the potential to understand the problem and develop effective policy solutions. The deepening risks of poverty and social exclusion for those already marginalised by digitalisation might well be exacerbated given this lack of attention to the impact of these changes for vulnerable groups across Europe.

Introduction

Identifying intersectional inequalities has become a growing part of the equality agenda in Europe for more than twenty years (Arciprete et al. 2022; Roig et al. 2020; Plantenga et al. 2009; O'Reilly 2006; Plantenga and Hansen, 1999). However, countries have moved at different speeds in collecting this information, despite EU attempts to address these issues in terms of recording data and acting upon it (Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009; Roig et al 2019).

Intersectional inequalities in access to digital technologies became increasingly apparent during the pandemic lockdowns (Faith et al. 2022; Borda et al. 2022). Access to work, welfare and educational resources for particular communities was attributed to a lack of connectivity, a lack of skills or digital equipment (Myers 2020; Digby et al. 2022). But the empirical evidence of the extent and nature of these inequalities across Europe remains very patchy.

This report sets out to understand the how intersectionality affects individuals' potential social rights to fully participate in the digital economy and exercise social citizenship. Digital transformation has become an integral part of work and welfare systems across Europe. Expressions of social citizenship and the right to live according to prevailing standards in society increasingly rely on digital tools. While the extent of digitalisation is varied both within and between countries, we know from popular media about the importance of being online for a range of factors including employability, the ability to manage money, access cheaper utilities, and general wellbeing. Digitalisation can enable a faster and more inclusive management of social provisions, such as twenty-four-hour access to services or benefits.

However, we also know that implementation of digital public services is creating new layers of inequality and that some groups are excluded (Faith et al. 2022). On one hand there is an increased sensitivity to the specific effects of these inequalities. On the other hand, there is a clear association that digital poverty is based in social and economic poverty. This raises generic questions about the basis of the welfare state in relation to universal benefits and the effectiveness of targeted measures (Arciprete et al. 2022). Kantola and Nousiainen (2009) have argued that the EU focus on 'multiple discrimination' rather than intersectionality supports anti-discrimination policy rather than other more substantial measures which would support greater equality.

Earlier deliverables from the EUROSHIP project have explored the reasons why citizens may not be online, demonstrating barriers relating to cost, skill, access and motivation. These divisions cut across intersectional dimensions related to gender, class, age, ethnicity, disability and region. The comparative assessment of digital transformations outlined in Verdin et al. (2023) D8.4 is developed in this paper to understand and critically evaluate the extent of data and intersectionality monitoring within the EUROSHIP country case studies. We take an intersectional analysis of how these divisions are being measured, looking at the work of European Institute for Gender Equality, before going on to examine the intersectional impacts of digitalisation and the monitoring and targeting of gaps in the EUROSHIP country case studies.

We provide an analysis of how the concept is being understood and adopted across the EU in relation to the digitalisation of work and welfare. To help alleviate the digital divide the Good

Things Foundation suggests we should recognise internet access as an essential utility, like electricity (Good Things Foundation, 2020). With that in mind we see how existing inequalities and multiple sources of disadvantage are becoming further embedded or new dimensions catalysed by digitalisation for those who are not connected.

One of the key findings from this comparative assessment is the need for an intersectional sensibility in the construction of policy. Limited data availability restricts the potential to understand the problem and develop effective policy solutions. The deepening risks of poverty and social exclusion for those already marginalised by digitalisation might well be exacerbated given this lack of attention to the impact of these changes for vulnerable groups across Europe.

Intersectionality and the measurement of equality data

Definitions and debates on Intersectionality

Social categories and identities are multi-layered and complex. Forms of disadvantage vary, and intersectionality requires thinking beyond a single axis of discrimination. Multiple social identities are impacted by structural systems of privilege, power, and social justice. As a field of study intersectionality provides an analytic sensibility with which to examine the combined effect of social structures and overlapping identities.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE):
> *'The idea that inequality based on gender and other aspects of power are connected and mutually reinforcing long pre-dates the term "intersectionality". The concept has a long history within black feminism's intellectual and political traditions (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006), as well as in labour-class feminism (Lykke, 2010). It cannot be particularly attributed to North America and Europe, as people in the Global South have used intersectionality as an analytical tool albeit without naming it as such (Collins and Bilge, 2016).'* (EIGE: 6)

The concept of intersectionality has been more recently attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) critical response to the DeGraffenreid v General Motors case: the court refused to accept the unique and combined experience of oppression felt by the plaintiffs as both female and black. While their experiences were no less real before Crenshaw coined the term, naming the problem has enabled a framework to develop helping us examine how identities intersect (Crenshaw, 2015)

According to the Centre for Intersectional Justice, established in 2017, (CIJ 2022: 2)
> *'Intersectionality looks at the ways in which various social categories such as gender, class, race, sexuality, disability, religion and other identity axes are interwoven on multiple and simultaneous levels. The discrimination resulting from these mutually reinforcing identities leads to systemic injustice and social inequality. The concept of intersectionality is grounded in decades of activism that battled the challenges of racism and sexism throughout the 20th century. The concept of intersectionality gives policy makers, lawyers and sociologists the opportunity to not only approach*

discrimination and social inequalities from a systemic and structural perspective, but also to capture discrimination patterns which tend to be invisibilised or overlooked in the current legal and policy frameworks for anti-discrimination. We need to shift the understanding of discrimination from a largely individual to a more structural level, and address racial discrimination at the intersections of different grounds of discrimination, going beyond rigid categories. Only then can the full potential of intersectionality be deployed.'

Distinguishing between different approaches to the study of intersectionality Collins (2015) distinguished how the terms usage has developed as a field of study, as critical praxis, and as an analytical strategy. We adopt the latter approach here to examine the interplay of different dimensions of inequality, the differentiated effects of multiple forms of disadvantage, and the differences both between and within categories (Zuccotti and O'Reilly, 2018). We use this intersectional framework to examine how the digitalisation of social institutions reinforces and reproduces structural inequalities, but also how it may catalyse new dimensions (Collins, 2015). Given EUROSHIP's ambition to strengthen social citizenship, mapping these divisions is central to better understand the differentiated effects of digitalisation and how intersectional characteristics manifest in digital divisions.

Our assessment draws on the work of the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE). Established in 2006 the EIGE promotes gender equality across the EU providing a knowledge centre of data, information and expertise. Equality data is used to assess the effectiveness of legislation, and to monitor and measure progress towards equality goals. By improving the collection and reporting of data they support gender mainstreaming, helping to inform policymaking and drive the gender equality agenda. More recently they have also sought to address the issue of intersectionality (EIGE, 2019) drawing on EU data from 2014 where it was available.

Measuring Intersectionality

As part of this process the EIGE recognise the need to identify how intersectional factors relate to gender equality policies, but also more broadly across EU policy measures. The European Gender Equality Index (EUGEI) is intended to compliment and strengthen their work on the promotion of gender equality. As a data knitting exercise, the index provides a means to assess progress, highlight where policy and budget needs to be focussed, and in so doing raises consciousness and drives improvement.

The EUGEI measures gender equality within member states according to the development of six core domains (work, money, knowledge, power, time and health) and ranks them according to their progress. A further domain of intersectionality provides a means to interrogate each of these dimensions and how they relate to family type, education, nationality, age and disability.[1] The EUGEI provide an [interactive online tool](#) to examine the intersectional inequalities within each member state according to the six core domains. To illustrate, Table 1 shows intersecting inequalities in Hungary, cross referencing the domain of time with country of birth (EUGEI, 2022).

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[1] The calculation of the GEI does not include scoring for intersectionality.

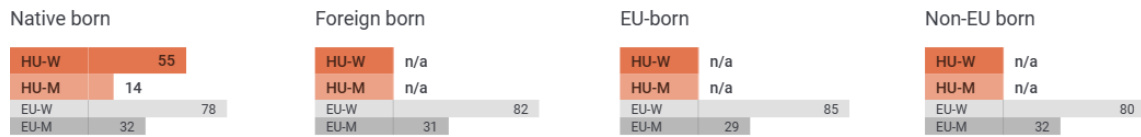*Table 1: EUGEI 2022 Hungary, domain of time and country of birth*

Time /Care activities

People caring for and educating their children or grandchildren, elderly or people with disabilities, every day (%)

	Native born	Foreign born	EU-born	Non-EU born
HU-W	30	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU-M	24	n/a	n/a	n/a
EU-W	36	44	38	48
EU-M	24	29	31	27

Source: EIGE's calculation with microdata, EUROFOUND, EQLS, 2016. n/a: data not available or not published due to reliability problems. Data not updated since 2017

People doing cooking and/or household, every day (%)

	Native born	Foreign born	EU-born	Non-EU born
HU-W	55	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU-M	14	n/a	n/a	n/a
EU-W	78	82	85	80
EU-M	32	31	29	32

Source: EIGE's calculation with microdata, EUROFOUND, EQLS, 2016. n/a: data not available or not published due to reliability problems. Data not updated since 2017

Time /Social activities

Workers doing sporting, cultural or leisure activities outside of their home, at least daily or several times a week (%)

	Native born	Foreign born	EU-born	Non-EU born
HU-W	16	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU-M	13	n/a	n/a	n/a
EU-W	27	28	n/a	n/a
EU-M	32	28	n/a	n/a

Source: EIGE's calculation with microdata, EUROFOUND, EWCS, 2015. n/a: data not available or not published due to reliability problems. Data not updated since 2017

Workers involved in voluntary or charitable activities, at least once a month (%)

	Native born	Foreign born	EU-born	Non-EU born
HU-W	11	n/a	n/a	n/a
HU-M	9	n/a	n/a	n/a
EU-W	12	10	n/a	n/a
EU-M	12	10	n/a	n/a

Source: EIGE's calculation with microdata, EUROFOUND, EWCS, 2015. n/a: data not available or not published due to reliability problems. Data not updated since 2017

EIGE, Gender Equality Index / Hungary / Country of birth / Time / 2022

A review of this analysis reveals the limitations and variability of existing data collection. A lack of effective monitoring impedes full and meaningful scrutiny of legal and policy instruments. This demonstrates the lack of data relating to non-native citizens highlighting the need for a more systematic approach to data collection.

Equality regulation and the evolution of intersectionality

The need for a consistent approach to equality data collection has been recognised at EU level. Despite the importance of data to measure progress and inform evidenced based

policymaking, the inconsistency in intersectional monitoring is further reflected in the evolution of EU policy regarding the protection of different characteristics (see Table 2)

Table 2: Scope of EU anti-discrimination Directives

Ground of discrimination	Employment and vocational training	Workers' and employers' organisations	Social protection including social security	Social protection including healthcare	Social advantage	Education	Public goods and services, including housing
Racial or ethnic origin	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43	Directive 2000/43
Gender	Directive 2006/54, Directive 2010/41 (self-employment)	Directive 2006/54	Directive 79/7 (statutory social security only), Directive 2006/54 (occupational social security only)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Directive 2004/113
Sexual orientation	Directive 2000/78	Directive 2000/78	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Religion or belief	Directive 2000/78	Directive 2000/78	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Disability	Directive 2000/78	Directive 2000/78	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Age	Directive 2000/78	Directive 2000/78	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: (EIGE, 2019)

The need to improve equality data collection has been highlighted in a number of Commission initiatives including: the Gender Equality Strategy, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, the EU Roma Strategic Framework and the Anti-racism Action Plan.

The CIJ (2019) argues that in many European countries, for different historical reasons, there is an evasiveness of talking about race. Some of the reasons for this lie in historical legacies, for example in France around universalism and republican traditions, whereas in Germany and Italy a post-racial discourse is a response to the Holocaust/ Porajmos. [2] In contrast, the UK has developed legal capacity to collect certain equality data, as per the Public Sector Equality Duty, whilst the EU legal framework does not have a comparable mechanism (Abdikeeva, 2014, 6).[3] According to the CIJ (2019)

> *'The United Kingdom stands as quite an exception to much of continental Europe because race-related issues are explicitly discussed and equality data based on race are collected. However, considerable work is still needed to address discrimination against minority communities effectively due to lack of targeted measures.' (CIJ 2019:10)*

Intersectionality may be a general principle in EU strategy and policy making, but, according to Xenidis, (2020, 741) intersectional discrimination remains a 'blindspot in EU law'.

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[2] 'The Romani genocide or the Romani Holocaust – also known as the Porajmos (meaning "the Devouring"), the Pharrajimos ("Cutting up", "Fragmentation", "Destruction"), and the Samudaripen ("Mass killing") – was the effort by Nazi Germany and its World War II allies to commit genocide against Europe's Roma and Sinti people.' CIJ (2019: 36)

[33] The European Commission outlines its approach to Equality data collection here: Equality data collection (europa.eu)

Gaps in data evidence for policy making

As part of the EIGE online gender equality forum in October 2022, contributors evaluated the importance of data and evidence for policy making. This discussion recognised the current limitations of intersectional data collection. Where intersectional analysis is available it does not allow for intersections of more than two categories, comparisons are limited by small sample sizes and an overriding lack of data means it is not consistently monitored. Panellists concluded that intersecting inequalities remain unrecognised and invisible.

Despite numerous Commission initiatives the lack of comparable and reliable data has remained a persistent challenge. As a result, the subgroup on equality data was established in 2018.[4] By mapping intersectional sources of data and undertaking country visits the Subgroup have identified the lack of a standardised methodology, the need to align definitions and increase awareness.

Alongside recognising common challenges, they are also providing practical guidance and encouraging best practice. Guiding principles are being implemented to increase the consistency and use of equality data. A primary focus here concerns the need to improve the focus and align definitions relating to race. To illustrate: commitments have been made to ensure that the collection of data relating to race or ethnic origin is streamlined by 2025; a commission recommendation has been implemented to ensure consistent standards for equality bodies.[5]

Multiple sources of disadvantage intersect and contribute to the digital divide. To give context to the discussion we now outline some of the intersectional impacts of the digital divide. We then go on to examine some of the policy and data collection measures being adopted within the EUROSHIP country case studies to help alleviate these gaps.

Evidence of digital divisions from the EUROSHIP country case studies

The EU has limited competence in terms of legislating against discrimination. While this competence has been used to drive reforms at country level, legal provisions vary between member states, as does the recognition and monitoring of various streams of equality data. Within the context of these broader policy developments, we draw on the relatively limited evidence available to the EUROSHIP researchers to examine the impacts of digitalisation in relation to intersectional inequalities and data collection.

The following examples concerning welfare, education, and health, demonstrate the importance of understanding how digital divisions and factors such as poverty, gender and migrant status intersect and contribute to digital divisions. We turn first to consider how intersectional inequalities relate to welfare and the digital divide. Contributions to this section draws on the work of Euroship partners national reports mentioned in the acknowledgements.

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[4] For details of the Subgroup please see: Subgroup on Equality Data | European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (europa.eu)

[5] The Centre for Intersectional Justice provide a useful summary of the lack of data and consistency in race equality data Factsheet - Race in Germany and Europe (intersectionaljustice.org)

Welfare

Spain

In 2020 the Spanish government introduced a minimum income scheme with a fully digital application process. While its introduction was broadly welcomed, there have been unintended consequences. A lack of awareness of the scheme amongst the target population has resulted in a markedly lower take up. Assessment has revealed barriers for potential claimants in terms of how user centric the scheme is, underlining existing digital divisions. To illustrate: the application process is not mobile friendly; it requires the claimant to have a bank account; residency documents are not accessible for those who are unhoused or informally housed; for those with a digital ID claims have been reported to take up to 4 months longer to process; the application process requires a degree a digital literacy, underlining Spain's digital skill deficits for some communities.

These deficits are generally attributed to structural deficits and unequal access to education across different social groups (e.g., class, gender, age, rural-urban and national origin). The social composition and digital needs of target populations are indispensable elements to consider in policy design. Currently, as the minimum income policy's implementation illustrates, digital gaps are being filled by NGO and social service workers who are better trained to deal with complex digital application processes than the target populations themselves. While this is clearly an issue of policy design, it also begs the question of whether the public sector must take on the role of improving citizen's digital skills more generally.

The UK

A second example relates to the digital transformation of the UK's main social security payment. The introduction of Universal Credit, rolled out since 2013, was accompanied by a policy to make a single benefit payment to the head of the household. This has increased the risk of domestic and financial abuse for some women (House of Lords Committee, 2020, 25). Despite the potential for claimants to request split payments, which are granted in exceptional circumstances, this carries potential risk should the abusive partner find out. While the Scottish Parliament is introducing a more routine implementation of split payments, for the rest of the UK a Work and Pensions committee has found, *'the Department must act urgently to collect the data it needs to ensure that it is supporting abuse survivors effectively'* (Select Committee, 2018). However, despite calls for change from organisations supporting those affected, and parliamentary debate, the process remains unchanged.

Germany

Evidence from Germany has shown how comprehensive digital inclusion in Germany is undermined by comparably high costs for mobile internet in comparison to other EU countries (European Commission 2020) and the affordability of devices. Experts from public administration and social welfare organizations highlight that the support provided by minimum income benefits to enable vulnerable groups to maintain connections is not sufficient. For example, while the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act provides for mobile phone costs, this is not adequate thereby excluding these vulnerable groups.

Education

Age is widely recognised as one of the main predictors of digital exclusion.[6] However, divisions are not just apparent for older age groups as dimensions of social identity intersect with age. While young people may be considered 'digital natives' (Helsper and Eynon, 2010) and self-perceived digital confidence is higher amongst the young (McDonnell et al. 2022), they are not a homogenous group. Factors such as socio-economic status, level of education and 'media richness of the household' are also relevant to understand the risks of digitalisation for younger people. To illustrate the variable impacts of these divisions we now present contrasting experiences of home-schooling during periods of national lockdown in the EUROSHIP country case studies.

Estonia

In Estonia digital systems for online learning were relatively well-established pre-pandemic, reflecting their advanced digital transformation.[7] However, while there is no representative data in Estonia on the availability of digital tools for young people, the differentiated outcomes of digital learning on young people have been reported. Studies note that one third of young people thrive, one third cope, and one third fail (Paabot & Kõiv, 2021). During the pandemic, NGOs responded with initiatives to provide devices for school children, alongside Estonian university students who provided support for students transitioning to home learning.

Norway

Much like Estonia, Norway's digital transformation is relatively advanced. Device poverty was not a reported concern during periods of national lockdown and home-schooling. All upper secondary students were reported to have had access to a device, while most lower secondary school children were given one, if needed, by their school (Fjørtoft, 2020). However, subsequent analysis has since shown that some students did suffer due to the skills required for online learning. (Andersen et al., 2021).

Andersen et al.'s (2021) study of the handling of the pandemic in upper secondary education reports that teachers and school managers were particularly concerned about negative consequences for students with weak language skills and those facing challenging situations at home. In general, there was a widespread assumption that digital home schooling would not benefit those who struggled academically even before lockdown. In many upper secondary schools, home schooling centered on heavier-than-usual loads of theoretical, written work. This consolidated the advantaged position of theoretically strong students while exacerbating the vulnerabilities of persons with language problems or learning difficulties. For the latter it was not always easy to handle the digital tools, follow online classes in a meaningful way and understand when and how to hand in assignments.

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[6] AGE Platform Europe highlights the divisions created by new technologies for older people in Europe Growing old in a digital world | AGE Platform (age-platform.eu)

[7] The Digital Economy and Society Index provides a useful barometer and means to compare digital transformation across Europe, confirming Estonia's position as a frontrunner The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) | Shaping Europe's digital future (europa.eu).

Further, a large survey of youth in Oslo carried out in 2020 showed mixed feelings about the home-schooling experience (Bakken et al. 2020). Almost half of the respondents were very or relatively satisfied with how home schooling had been organised. Nonetheless, 61 per cent felt that learning outcomes had not been as good as when they received traditional school-based teaching. Young people from a privileged socio-economic background dominated among the respondents that associated home schooling with more positive learning outcomes. However, almost eight out of ten had access to an equipped and functioning 'home office', including the possibility to work undisturbed. However, about ten per cent faced working conditions that negatively affected their ability to manage home schooling. This group included youth who did not have an adequate internet connection, lacked a space where they could work without being disturbed and/or lacked access to a computer or tablet. Youth with ethnic minority background and low socio-economic status were overrepresented in this group, evidencing the relevance of intersectional inequalities in shaping digital gaps.

The UK

Analysis of digital divisions in the UK has shown that 4% of children only had access to a smartphone when home-schooling and one in five did not have access to an appropriate device when needed (Ofcom, 2021, 12). Of those without a device at home one in five were eligible for free school meals, underlining the risk of widening the attainment gap (Baker, Hutton, Christie, & Wright, 2020). The current cost-of-living crisis is further amplifying divisions highlighting the intersecting experiences of digitalisation for children living in poverty (Daniel, 2022). The costs of connectivity are prohibitive for some, resulting in an inability to access learning platforms, or the difficulties experienced when the only device available to complete homework is a smartphone.

Germany

Germany's digital transformation is less advanced, and they lag in terms of the digitalisation of schools and the provision of digital skills (DESI 2022; Eickelmann et al. 2019; Engels 2020; Neufiend et al. 2018). The extent of child poverty and digital exclusion became more apparent during the pandemic according to a study from the Bertelsmann Stiftung (2020). 'When it comes to home schooling, children from poor backgrounds are disadvantaged, as they rarely have the necessary technical equipment and sometimes have no retreat areas for undisturbed learning. 24 percent of children receiving basic social security do not have an Internet-enabled PC in the household, and 13 percent do not have a quiet place to study. Almost half of the children live in an apartment where there are not enough rooms available.'

The government had introduced a large investment program "DigitalPakt Schule" before the pandemic. The federal government and the federal states agreed to allocate EUR 5 billion Euro in federal funding to the program between 2019 and 2024 to support the digital transformation of schools and improve digital infrastructure. During the Covid-19 pandemic they concluded supplementary agreements to the existing program in order to provide terminal equipment, and loan equipment to teachers (DESI, 2022). However, there was very little analysis about intersectional inequalities beyond those of social class and welfare dependency status.

Hungary

Hungary is a laggard in terms of its digital transformation. Social inequalities in society are reproduced by the education system and the digital divisions therein. Those belonging to the Roma minority, the materially deprived, those with low education, living in economically poor areas are becoming further disadvantaged. Access to Wi-Fi within schools is limited: 15-20% of schools have no access all; for those that do the bandwidth is often very poor quality and only sufficient for staff not students. These divisions are particularly pronounced in more rural and sparsely populated areas. During national lockdowns these divides became even more critical. While some schools were able to hand out devices to teachers (not students), in others both schools and students lacked the hardware and software to connect, missing several months of education. Digitalisation is catalysing new inequalities for socio-economically and educationally deprived populations. (Kertesi & Kézdi 2014; Hermann & Varga 2016; Fejes & Szűcs 2018).

Health

Digital divisions related to health and wellbeing further reflect the need for an intersectional analytic sensibility. Within the EU 28.4% of people with a disability are at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 17.8% of people without disabilities (Dimitrova, 2022, 10-11). Digitalisation underlines these risks, as disability is a key predictor of digital exclusion. The European Disability Forum also notes how efforts to address digitalisation for those with a disability largely focus on accessibility, while other factors are not considered. The lack of intersectional sensibility is marked, yet the impacts of digital exclusion are varied.

Compounding these divisions there are also associated secondary risks as those without a digital footprint may not be adequately represented in the gathering and usage of data (Stone, 2021, 7, 11; Buolamwini and Gebru, 2018). To access potential benefits driven by healthcare innovations it is critical to address those who are excluded (DIGITAL EUROPE, 2022). The following examples illustrate how divisions related to health and disability are being approached and how they manifest in the EUROSHIP country case studies.

Germany

In Germany, third sector organisations have campaigned to implement and improve digital accessibility standards. The focus on accessibility to improve social participation for socially vulnerable and discriminated groups has resulted in local level testing of services. In addition, political pressure to improve the situation of disabled people from social welfare organizations led to the adoption of the Accessibility Strengthening Act (*Teilhabestärkungsgesetz*) in 2021 that comprises digital health and care services.

In general, most social policy related issues concerning persons with disabilities are regulated in a specific social code (SGB IX) which deals with the general rights towards social services and social inclusion (via employment on the second labour market for instance) for persons with disabilities. The Teilhabestärkungsgesetz now reforms some of the regulations in this social code. Among others these include the expansion of medical rehabilitation services available for persons with disabilities to include digital health applications.

Some interviewees from business, third sector and public administration mentioned that official websites and applications are increasingly being designed in a way that assures

accessibility for persons with disabilities (voice recognition, easy-to-understand language). Furthermore, with the funding guideline "Inclusion through digital media in vocational training" (Inklusion durch digitale Medien in der beruflichen Bildung), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) supports people with disabilities in learning and long-term professional activity. Moreover, several welfare associations (for instance Caritas or Diakonie) and third sector initiatives (Aktion Mensch) try to improve the digital inclusion of persons with disabilities by offering training, counselling or lobbying.

The UK

Evidence from the UK shows that disabled people and those with health conditions are less likely to use the internet (Lloyds, 2022; Helsper and Reisdorf, 2017). Those with an impairment are 2.5 times more likely to lack foundation level digital skills (Lloyds, 2022). The pandemic resulted in increased experiences of isolation and loneliness for those who were not online. Research has shown the importance of addressing digital divisions to help alleviate health inequalities (NHS Digital, 2020). However, there is a risk of exacerbating poor health outcomes, given many disadvantaged groups may not be able to access digital health solutions and interventions (Honeyman, 2020).

For those with disabilities technological barriers to internet access are amplified by issues of cost and access. These barriers are often enhanced by other markers of inequality, such as socio-economic status and level of education. Barriers to equal online access 'threaten to promote societal isolation and instil a sense of disconnect and disempowerment' (Jaeger, 2012: vii).

Intersectional data collection

The examples presented, relating to welfare, education and health highlight several problems with attempting an intersectional analysis on the effects of digitalisation. The inconsistency of comparable data is marked, the variable speed and focus of digital transformation within countries has rendered particular aspects of the digital divide invisible. Without an intersectional understanding of the risks presented by digitalisation these transformations risk deepening existing inequalities.

Digital transformation is marked by an ecosystem of actors driving change alongside inequalities both within and between groups.[8] Understanding how digital exclusion intersects with other markers of inequality is critical for the construction of evidenced based policy making to alleviate these risks. The Centre for Intersectional Justice highlights the importance of intersectional equality data collection to help monitor progress and drive change. The FRA European Union agency for fundamental human rights provides a 'Compendium of Good Practice' for equality data collection, providing a resource of intersectional forms of analysis being adopted across the EU. Examples from this collection are now used to illustrate the different approaches to intersectional data collection within some of the EUROSHIP country case studies.

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[8] The concept of a digital welfare ecosystem is elaborated here in Verdin et al. 2023: EUROSHIP-Working-Paper-No.-23-1.pdf (euroship-research.eu)

The UK

According to a study set up in 2019 from the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) [Subgroup on Equality Data](#) the UK has the most advanced structures and instruments to collect and use equality data. The UK's national statistics office (ONS) has set up a [Centre for Equalities and Inclusion](#) to work with stakeholders to ensure data is available to address questions related to fairness and equality in society. The centre was established in 2020 to improve the UK's evidence base.

The ONS now conducts an [Equalities data audit](#). The audit shows that the top three most prevalent characteristics in data collection are age, sex, then ethnicity. However, a [subsequent report](#) by ONS notes that there is no harmonised principle covering race in the UK. While race is the protected characteristic, as per the Equality Act, ethnicity is the main source of data collection.

Although the EU Equality Subgroup noted UK policy as comparatively advanced, a [report](#) commissioned for the Scottish government found 'little progress' in the application of intersectionality in both Scottish and English policy documents. They found a lack of intersectional data on equality policy outcomes, concluding policymaking remains siloed and suffers from a lack of coherence (GSR, 2022). The report also highlights how data collection is limited by: transparency and accessibility; coverage and comprehensiveness (including gaps); granularity; harmonisation and comparability; inclusiveness in data collection and reporting.

Alongside these developments in government NGOs like the Good Things Foundation have helped generate a public narrative about the digital divide and the intersectional impacts of digital exclusion.

Germany

The FRA makes reference to a couple of intersectional data collection initiatives in Germany: In order to understand existing practices and scope for improvement, the [Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency](#) examined the equality data produced from 20 large-scale representative surveys. This was intended to provide an overview of questions and variables and find ways to expand the collection of equality data available. In addition, a [National Discrimination and Racism Monitor](#) was introduced in 2020 to examine the causes, extent and consequences of racism. This is intended to provide new means to assess the extent and effectiveness of existing policy tools.

Italy

In Italy the FRA highlight the introduction of a [Discrimination Survey](#) in 2023 to monitor opinions and experiences of discrimination. Following a pilot survey in 2022 the aim is to ensure the effectiveness and impact of equality policies related to several areas of life including education, employment, housing and health.

Norway

It is also worth acknowledging that beyond the initiatives noted by the FRA, countries are making inroads in improving equality data collection. For example, Norway have implemented a [new strategy](#) for inclusive development related to disability. As part of this

initiative the government has recognised the need to strengthen the data available to raise awareness and monitor effectiveness. While quite advanced in the adoption of digital technologies awareness of digital exclusion has risen on the political agenda as reflected in the current government strategy *Digital throughout life* (Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation, 2021).

Conclusion

Access to work and welfare as a result of digitalisation has exposed many long-term inequalities to exercise social citizenship. Some of these are clearly linked to universal social economic inequalities. Some of these, especially during the pandemic, have highlighted intersectional inequalities in relation to race, gender, disability, age and social economic deprivation. Roig et al. (2019: 35) conclude that '*there has been a relative disconnect between anti-discrimination measures and measures meant to promote equality.*'

At policy and legislative level the EUROSHIP country case studies reveal an inconsistency and lack of alignment in what and how categories of disadvantage are measured, monitored and targeted in each country.

Taking the EGEI as a starting point for the EU to monitor gender equality, we have seen how this has recently evolved to account for intersectional inequalities beyond those of gender alone but only since 2014-17. While some considerable changes have been made the EGEI (2019: 27) report concludes

> 'The Amsterdam Treaty represented a shift toward an intersectional approach, as it recognised discrimination on six grounds—sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation. However, most gender equality documents do not refer explicitly to intersectionality, the terminology varies, and the extent to which a cross-cutting gender and intersectional perspective is incorporated differs.'

It is widely acknowledged that intersectional data is required to advocate for evidence-based policy making to address digital divisions. As Crenshaw has noted, 'if we can't see a problem, we can't fix a problem'. Kantola and Nousiainen (2009: 473) argued more than a decade ago that

> '*the minimum requirements for equalities bodies in European law remain vague, it is for the member states to decide their level of ambition in addressing intersectionality. In the worst case, intersectionality may become simply a rhetorical concept, used to bring different constituencies behind reforms which give no real tools for addressing the conjunctures of inequality. In the best case, however, the diversity of European responses to cataclysmic shifts in EU law and politics may yield interesting results in dealing with intersectionality*.'

While many countries were aware of these gaps just before the pandemic, lockdowns brought to the fore the implications of these when dependency on digital increased. Digital divisions are being addressed by an ecosystem of actors (Verdin et al. 2023). Alongside

institutional mechanisms, third sector community organisations and business also monitor, collect data, and drive awareness on the effectiveness and gaps in statutory protections.[9] Despite these interventions movement remains limited.

This report evidences how the level of monitoring differs, as countries focus on different aspects of the digital divide. The category of race remains undetermined while new aspects for consideration are emerging, such as neuro diversity. However, the experiences of digital exclusion for some remains invisible.

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[9] In the UK, Good Things Foundation and Lloyds bank are illustrative examples.

Appendix

The FRA 2018 [Guidelines on improving the collection and use of equality data](#) proposed a number of concrete institutional and operational steps that EU Member States can undertake to enhance the availability and quality of equality data and to promote its effective use in developing evidence-based equality and non-discrimination policies.

The guidelines are divided into:

- **institutional and structural guidelines** on how to set up structures that enable a systematic, long-term and cooperative approach to collection and use of equality data; and
- **operational guidelines** on how to ensure comprehensiveness, timeliness, validity, reliability and representativeness of equality data and to improve their comparability.

1. Institutional and structural guidelines
    1. Map existing sources of equality data and identify data gaps
    2. Foster inter-institutional cooperation in the collection and use of equality data
    3. Set up a data hub on equality and non-discrimination
    4. Build institutional capacity to collect robust and reliable equality data
    5. Facilitate effective use of equality data
2. Operational guidelines
1. Ensure comprehensiveness of equality data
    2. Mainstream equality data into EU and national surveys
    3. Ensure regular and timely equality data collection
    4. Enhance validity and reliability of equality data
    5. Ensure representativeness of equality data
    6. Improve comparability of equality data

As a complement to these guidelines, the subgroup prepared a diagnostic mapping tool that EU Member States can use to assess the availability of equality data collected at national level and a compendium of practices that can provide inspiration when implementing the guidelines.

The [CIJ (2019)](#) recommends 10 steps **towards Intersectional Justice in Europe that include:**

Evidence-based human rights assessments; Trade union advocacy; Intersectional legal approach; Political participation from marginalized communities; End to discrimination in school; Increase visibility of disability justice movements; Strengthen intersectional data; Community led design of interventions; Affirmative action policy and programs; and Adoption of intersectional approach to policy.

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