

10. GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE IT SPHERE

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Some issues associated with social inequality problems are discussed in the paper. The notion of digital gap is described in detail and factors influencing the gap are analyzed. The gender aspect of digital inequality is in the focus of analysis. Based on the secondary data the gender gap in the area of access to information and communication technologies is studied. The use of information and communication technologies generally promotes levelling of gender inequality. The sociological studies give evidence about the existing difference in men's and women's level of involvement into activities associated with the use of information and communication technologies.

Social inequality has been one of the most pressing problems throughout human history. In modern society, new forms of inequality are emerging and gaining prominence – between “rich” and “poor” countries, “advanced” and “backward” regions of the world, etc. Inequality in access to information is emerging as one of the most important forms of inequality in human society today. The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) is accompanied by the emergence of various virtual social environments, the importance of which in social life is constantly growing.

The information sector is growing faster than the economy as a whole. Information and communication technologies are getting a direct productive force. The nature of the economy is becoming super-sophisticated. Ultimately, the multilateral interaction of information that ensures the movement of capital, technology and people is the basis of modern social development. For people with health restrictions, virtual social environments based on the latest information and communication technologies help compensate existing social inequalities and promote their active interaction with economic and financial institutions.

The term “information inequality” is a new kind of division arising from different opportunities in using ICT. This term has been in use since 1995. It reflects a key difference in access to ICT, including the global Internet. Internet technology is a special case of modern information and communication technology, which is a continuous process of storing, transmitting, and displaying information stored in computers connected to the global Internet demand [1].

In the 21st century, gender equality and expansion of women's rights and opportunities matter more than ever before. Given almost all-round availability of ICT, bridging the digital gender gap is becoming a task of paramount importance. The UN considers the problem of gender inequality to be global and recommends different countries to change existing and generally accepted gender models. The 4th UN World Conference on the Advancement of Women (Beijing, 1995) recognized that gender equality is a development goal. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to empower women. The Platform for Action adopted at this conference defined a set of measures to implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was recognized that discrimination against women in the allocation of economic and social resources is a direct violation of economic, social, political, and cultural rights. The document also recommended countries to include provisions for the protection of equal opportunities for men and women in their Constitutions and legislation, including labour laws. The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) adopted the Declaration and the Program of Action, which proclaimed the obligation of State Governments to develop or intensify policies and practical measures to enable women to participate fully in paid work and employment [2].

Since 2006, analysts of the World economic forum have calculated the Gender gap index (GGI) for the majority countries of the world (Figure 1). The GGI is designed to assist the countries in finding the efficient ways of overcoming the gender gap. 14 parameters are used to build the GGI. The index value received by the countries can be viewed as a percentage point equivalent of the eliminated gap between men and women, with 100 % for the complete equality and 0 % – the total inequality. The index accounts the gap between men and women in economic, political, and other spheres as well as a trend behavior. The methodology of GGI calculation relies on the assessment data on four critical areas of gender inequality:

- economy (the gap in pay, participation in decision-making, access to high-qualification jobs etc. between men and women);
- education (gender distinctions in accessibility of all stages of education);
- health and life expectancy (distinctions in the healthy life expectancy);
- politics (gender representation in the authorities) [3].

The contemporary ICT have a direct effect on these four areas of human life activity. Due to this, the crucial task is to monitor information gender inequality.

Over the latest decade, although there have been considerable changes of working conditions, due to the implementation of the ICT, the gender structure of the employed people in economy has not had substantial changes, because both the men and women activities have remained the same. There are only 19 % of women among the employees in the IT-sphere. The top-level IT-specialists being mostly “men-only” are programmers, with the percentage of women in this field not exceeding 17 %. The highest

percentage of women (34 %) in the group of medium level specialists is among technicians and operators of radio- and telecasting and telecommunication equipment [4].

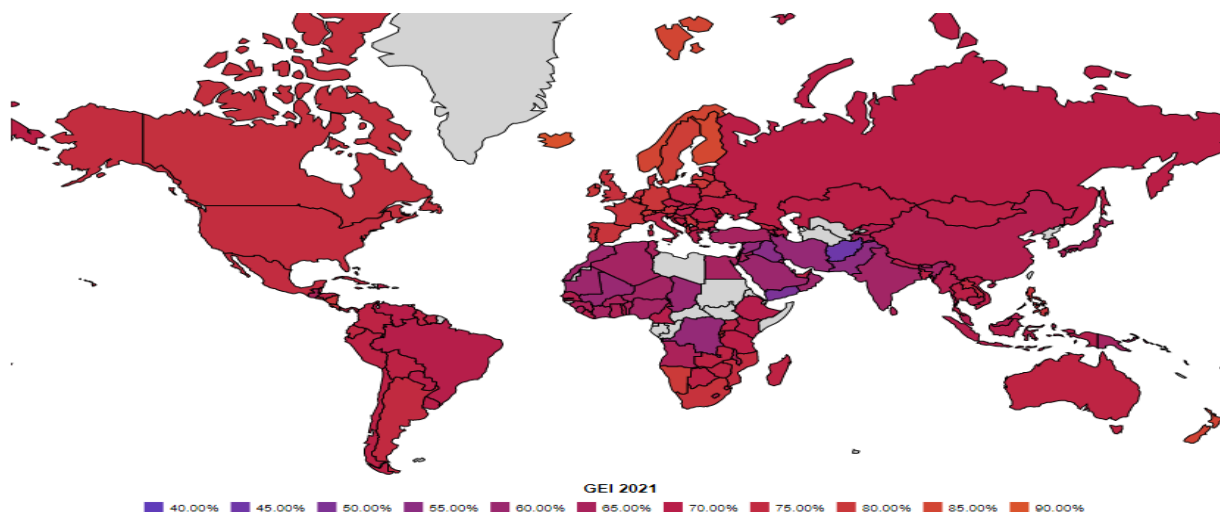


Figure 1 – Gender Equality by county [5]

Based on the data provided in the GGI index, it is possible to identify the top 5 countries with a high indicator of equality, as well as the top 5 countries with the lowest equality score (Table 1).

Table 1 – Top 5 countries with high and low indicator of equality

Top 5 countries with a high indicator of equality (%)		Top 5 countries with the lowest equality score (%)	
Iceland	89,2	Afghanistan	44,4
Finland	86,1	Yemen	49,2
Norway	84,9	Iraq	53,3
New Zealand	84,0	Pakistan	55,6
Sweden	82,3	Syria	56,8

In Belarus, according to the statistics of 2022, the GGI amounts to 75 %, which points Belarus the 36th place in the ranking of 144 countries [6].

The reason of gender inequality greatly concerns salaries. In the EU, the payment gap between men and women is 16.2 %. In other words, women earn an average of 84 cents for every euro earned by a man. The lowest salary difference between men and women is in Romania (5.2 %), Italy (5.3 %) and Luxembourg (5.5 %). The biggest difference in the invoices of men and women is registered in Estonia (25.3 %), the Czech Republic (21.8 %) and Germany (21.5 %). In 2022 the gap between payment of women and men in Belarus was 1.7 times (1893 Belarusian rubles and 3215 Belarusian rubles, respectively). Therefore, it is evident that the percentage of women having well paid jobs is essentially lower than that of men [7].

Digital inequality is a new kind of social differentiation, forever claimed by an ever more widespread use of ICT in various functional areas of human society. With the development of information and communication technologies, inequality acquired a new manifestation, the digital gender gap. The Gender Gap Index (GGI) enables monitoring to overcome this type of inequality. Workplace maintaining a work-life balance is important for all employees, but it becomes problematic when they witness discrimination and inequality at work. It is also extremely important to follow various rules in order to reduce gender inequality in the workplace. There are three main causes of gender imbalance: unequal pay, biased recruitment strategy, different opportunities. If these three factors do not depend on gender, then equality will appear.

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