

# How's Life for Women in the Digital Age?

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How does the digital transformation affect women's and men's well-being? Digital technologies are radically and rapidly changing the way people work, consume, get information and communicate, but their consequences may differ for women and men. Statistics can help understand whether and how the transformation risks widening the gender gap. This Statistical Insight previews some of the evidence from *How's Life in the Digital Age?* (OECD, 2019), which provides a comprehensive overview of how the digital transformation is impacting women and men's lives.

**The digital transformation creates gender gaps in some dimensions of well-being, but the overall impacts on women and men are balanced**

The digital transformation doesn't just affect ICT access and usage. In reality, it entails both opportunities (see Figure 1 Panel A) and risks (Panel B) that affect all the dimensions covered in *How's Life?*, the OECD flagship report on people's well-being.

Overall, Figure 1 suggests that the digital transformation has mixed effects on women relative to men, with women outperforming men on 8 of the 18 indicators. Compared to men, they make greater use of the internet for health purposes (making medical appointments online, seeking health information) and when searching for a

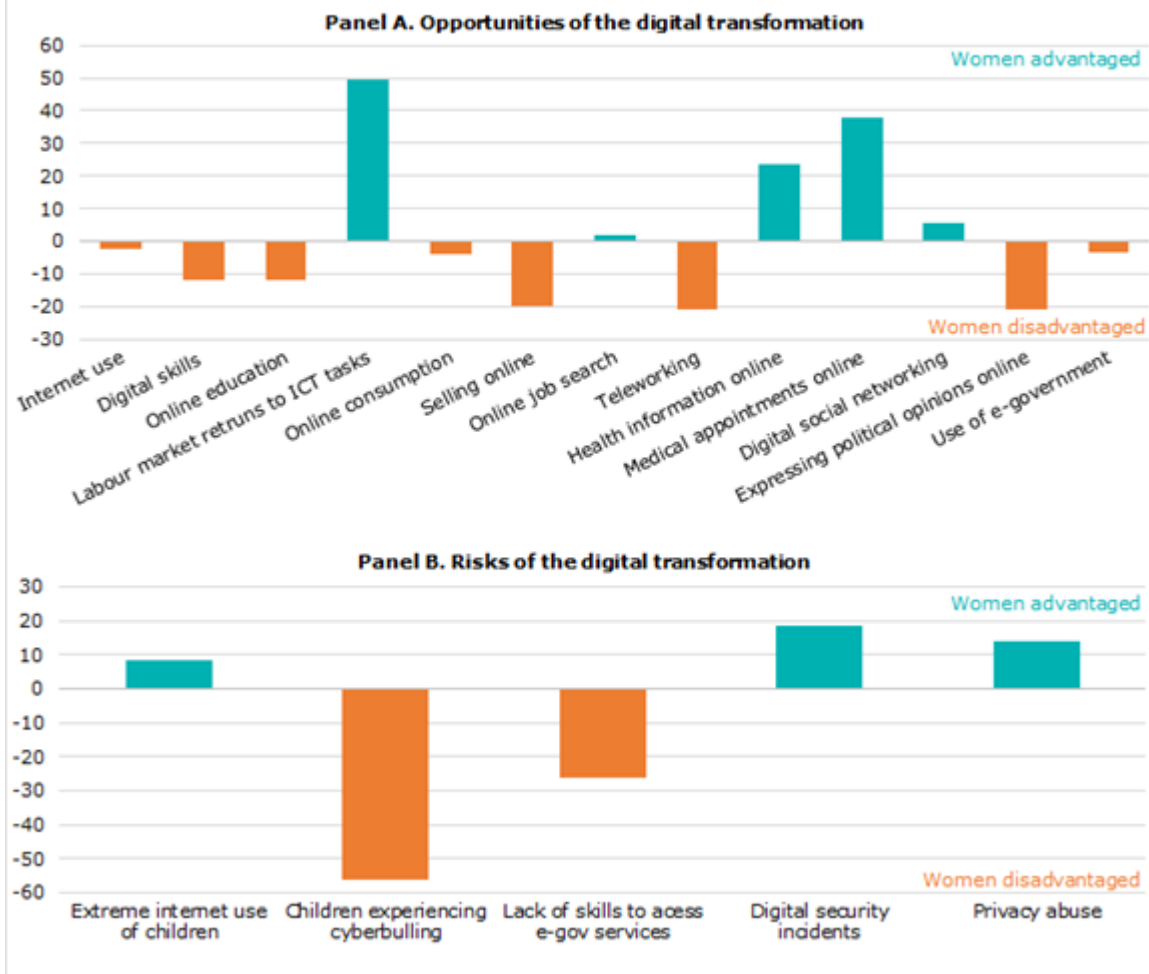
job or for social networking. Women also obtain much larger labour market returns for their digital skills (as measured by ICT task-intensity of jobs), and are also much less likely to experience security incidents, abuse of personal information and digital addiction during childhood.

On the other hand, girls are much more likely to be victimised through cyberbullying than boys, and more women than men report that they lack the skills to use e-government services. Similarly, women use online education facilities less than men. They are also less likely to use the internet to buy or sell goods and services, or to express their political opinion. Teleworking is also much less used by women than by men.

Overall, while the digital transformation is affecting the well-being of women and men in broadly similar ways, significant gender gaps are emerging in some specific dimensions of education, work-life balance, health, social connections, governance and digital security. Two specific examples are highlighted below.

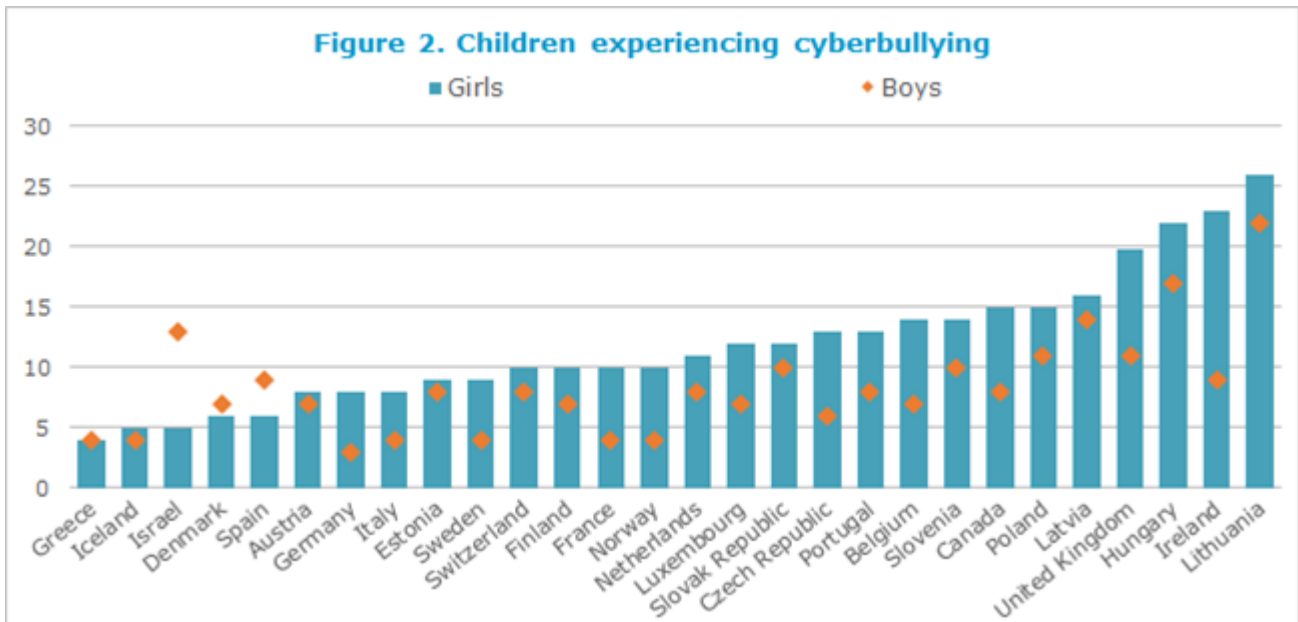
Figure 1. OECD average gender gaps in aspects of digital well-being

Positive values show women are relatively advantaged, data are from most recent year available



## Girls are more exposed than boys to cyberbullying

The link between cyberbullying and mental health problems has been extensively documented (Lindert, 2017). On average, across OECD countries with available data, about 12% of girls report having been cyberbullied, compared to 8% for boys. Girls report victimisation more often than boys in all countries except Denmark, Israel and Spain. Cyberbullying is particularly prevalent in a number of Eastern European countries as well as in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Conversely, children in Greece and Iceland report relatively few instances of cyberbullying.

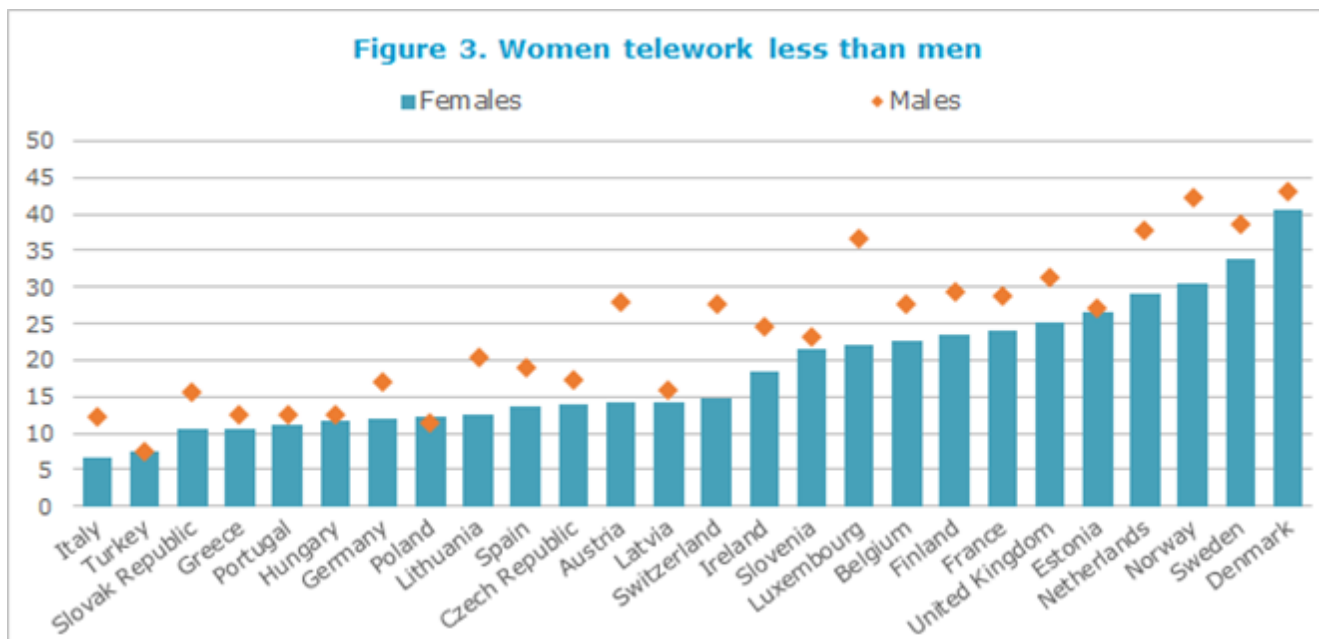


*Note:* Cyberbullying is measured as the share of girls and boys aged 15 who report having been cyberbullied by electronic messages at least once in their life. For the United States, self-reported cyberbullying covers a wider range of experiences, including being the subject of hurtful information online, having private information shared online, and cyberbullying while gaming. Data refer to 2013 for the United States, and to 2014 for other countries. *Source:* OECD calculations based on the 2014 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study ([www.hbsc.org/news/index.aspx?ni=3473](http://www.hbsc.org/news/index.aspx?ni=3473)) and the 2013 United States School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey ([www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/34980](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/NACJD/studies/34980)).

## Women telework less than men

Teleworking provides an opportunity for better work-life balance when it improves time management and reduces the time spent in commuting. Evidence from the American Time Use Survey shows, for instance, that reducing commuting time by using the Internet increases labour force participation in the United States, in particular among married women (Dettling, 2016). However, women do not seem to have equal access to teleworking. On average, 20% of male workers reported having teleworked at least once, compared to 16% of women. The gender gap was widest in Luxembourg, Austria, Switzerland and Norway,

but very small in Estonia, Hungary and Poland.



*Note:* Teleworking is measured as the share of workers who report using ICTs at work at least 75% of the time and having worked outside the employer's premises at least once; in the case of the United States, the survey question asks workers if they have ever worked from their home using a computer to communicate for their job.

*Source:* OECD calculations based on the Gallup World Poll ([www.gallup.com/services/170945/world-poll.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/services/170945/world-poll.aspx)).

## The measure explained

The new OECD publication

*How's Life in the Digital Age?* uses the OECD *How's Life?* framework to assess the impacts of the digital

transformation on 11 key dimensions of people's well-being (Income and

wealth, Jobs and earnings, Housing, Health status, Education and skills,

Work-life balance, Civic engagement and governance, Social connections,

Environmental quality, Personal security and Subjective well-being). ICT access

and use is also included as a cross-cutting aspect of the digital

transformation. Drawing on a large number of existing studies, *How's Life in the Digital Age?* shows positive impacts of the digital transformation when new technologies expand the range of available information and enhance human productivity and well-being, but also highlights risks ranging from cyber-bullying to overuse or cyber-hacking. It is based on 33 key indicators of the impacts of the digital transformation – 20 to measure digital opportunities and 13 to reflect digital risks.

Among the 18 indicators that allow for a gender breakdown, 13 refer to opportunities and 5 to risks. Altogether they span 9 dimensions of people's well-being, i.e. ICT access and usage, Education and skills, Income and wealth, Jobs and earnings, Work-life balance, Health status, Social connections, Governance and civic engagement, and Digital security.

## **For more reading**

- OECD (2019), *How's Life in the Digital Age?: Opportunities and Risks of the Digital Transformation for People's Well-being*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264311800-en>.
- J Lindert; Cyber-bullying and its impact on mental health:  
Jutta Lindert, *European Journal of Public Health*, Volume 27, Issue suppl\_3, 1 November 2017, cxx187.581, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cxx187.581>
- Dettling, L. J. (2017). Broadband in the Labor Market: The Impact of Residential High-Speed Internet on Married Women's Labor Force

Participation. *ILR*  
*Review*, 70(2),  
451–482. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916644721>