

International co-operation is the surest means of building better policies for better lives

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We live in challenging times for international co-operation. Against a background in which the voices of protectionism and nationalism seem to be gaining strength, at the OECD we are standing firm in our support for openness and collaboration as the surest means of building better policies for better lives. Otherwise we risk undoing many of the achievements we have

accomplished together as an international community since the OECD was formed 55 years ago.

Of course, there is much to fix in a system that for many people is not delivering and whose benefits need to be more equally shared. But the reality is that in a divided world, we all lose.

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No country can resolve global challenges by acting alone. We know this to be true within our countries, our regions and our cities; it is also true of our “global village”. Violent economic shocks, like hurricanes, do not respect borders, and pulling up the drawbridge offers fake protection. To find sustainable, effective solutions to the very real issues people face, our countries must pull together.

When the world’s countries forged the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Change Agreement in 2015, we saw how effective multilateral co-operation could be in forging collective action to tackle some of our planet’s most pressing challenges. There have been so many achievements like these over the years, in trade, investment, tax, fisheries, food, health, energy, science and more, based on multilateral agreements, which countries contribute to and benefit from as well.

Just last year for instance, some €85 billion were recouped for citizens around the world as a result of voluntary disclosure under the first automatic exchanges of tax information (AEOI). A similar breakthrough that has also changed policies for the better has happened in the quest to make multinationals pay their fair share, with more than 70 countries and jurisdictions signing up to the OECD’s Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project. Such initiatives bring tangible improvements to people’s lives, and illustrate the power of the international community.

Despite this, there is widespread disgruntlement with multilateral institutions, that their “experts” are out of touch with everyday concerns and that they serve powerful elites. Many citizens, especially those more vulnerable, feel left out and no longer believe multilateral approaches work for them.

At the OECD, we believe that the global economy cannot act as a force for all without international co-operation, and that no country can afford to turn away. However, we also realise that multilateral institutions such as ours must improve their game. We must reshape multilateral action boldly when it fails to deliver.

One critical component in this endeavour, especially for an organisation like the OECD whose ultimate credibility lies in its expertise, consists of bringing the power of our research and our data to centre stage. But as well as defending the facts, we must passionately defend our values, so that we can chart a new course for globalisation, based on people and planet. We must be ready to embrace new concepts of growth, equitability, wellbeing and sustainability, and work harder to

ensure that through our standards and codes we do a better job of safeguarding the integrity, aspirations and rights of people everywhere.

This state of mind drives our New Approaches to Economic Challenges initiative, and spurs our efforts to address multiple challenges, such as fostering inclusive, green and smart growth, empowering women and defeating corruption.

Today's tectonic shifts in geopolitics, the speed and unpredictability of technological change, and the complexity of cross-border challenges are concerning and compel us to work side by side. As the great Scottish scientist, Alexander Fleming, recognised, "the more complex the world becomes, the more difficult it is to complete something without the co-operation of others".

Only by co-operating across borders and among regions can we enable citizens to move forward together, so that winners no longer take all and that no one is left behind. By working together multilaterally we can address the issues that people care about, wherever they live.

We have several opportunities to show this in the months ahead, with a busy schedule of ministerial meetings and policy forums. OECD member and partner countries will examine how policy can harness small and medium enterprises for inclusive growth and jobs when they gather for the SME Ministerial Meeting in Mexico in February; in March in Paris our Global Anti-Corruption and Integrity Forum will focus on improving behaviour in business and politics; and in May ministers will meet in Canada to discuss how to improve our social policies. Then comes the 2018 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, which with the OECD Forum forms the high point of our annual calendar. We are honoured to be working closely with France, our chair, and our vice-chairs, Latvia and New Zealand, in an ambitious programme that should show us new ways to advance effective multilateralism. We are also intensifying our support to the G20 and G7, and scaling up our work with APEC, ASEAN and the Pacific Alliance. These offer golden opportunities to show that multilateral action can deliver results for all.

We live in a complex world and only together can we shape a prosperous, peaceful future. This is what 2018 asks of us. In the Chinese Year of the Dog, we must be dogged in our determination to show that we can, and will, make a difference. That together, we can design, develop and deliver better policies for better lives.

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