

## Executive summary

Gender inequality pervades all aspects of social and economic life, and affects countries at all levels of development. Young women in OECD countries now often obtain more schooling than young men, but women continue to be poorly represented in the lucrative science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. The number of women in the labour force has moved closer to that of men in the past few decades, but in every country women are still less likely to engage in paid work.

When women do enter the labour force, they are more likely to work part-time, they are less likely to advance to management and they earn less than men. The median full-time female worker earns almost 15% less than her male counterpart, on average, across the OECD – a rate that has changed little in the past decade. Women are less likely to be entrepreneurs, and female-owned businesses tend to earn less than male-owned ones. Across countries, gender gaps increase with age, reflecting the crucial role that parenthood plays in gender equality. Much more than fatherhood, motherhood typically has marked negative effects on workforce participation, pay and career advancement. Gender inequalities pervade public life, as well: women are underrepresented in political office, holding less than one-third of seats in lower houses of national legislatures, on average, in the OECD.

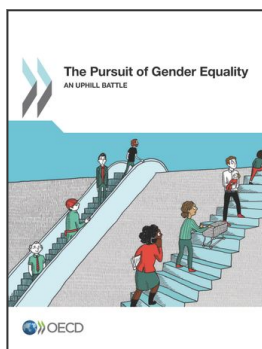
Clearly much remains to be done to narrow – and eventually close – gender gaps worldwide. In a survey carried out for this report, countries identified the three most important gender inequality issues in their country as violence against women, the gender wage gap and the unequal sharing of unpaid work. Motivated by these and other inequalities, as well as 2013 and 2015 OECD Gender Recommendations, countries have made some important policy changes in the past five years:

- Most OECD countries are tackling workplace harassment, a form of violence against women, through stronger laws and regulations governing sexual harassment. Information or awareness-raising campaigns aimed at defining and preventing sexual harassment are commonly used. More research is needed to understand whether (and how well) such programmes work.
- Several countries have initiated programmes aimed at getting girls and young women into STEM and encouraging more young men to study and work in health and education.
- About two-thirds of countries have introduced specific policies to close the gender wage gap. Pay transparency is a key lever; companies are increasingly required to analyse gender wage gaps and share the results publicly.
- Access to early childhood education and care is crucial for gender equality, as it helps both mothers and fathers work when children are young. Several OECD countries recently addressed affordability through increases in subsidies, benefits or rebates, the introduction or expansion of free childcare hours and/or more direct public investment in new facilities for young children.

- A majority of OECD countries have initiated policies that promote gender balance on boards and in senior management. Countries that adopted a quota saw a more immediate increase in the number of women on boards, while those that took a “softer” approach, using disclosure rules or targets, have seen a more gradual increase over time.
- Many OECD countries have implemented affirmative action measures to move more women into public leadership. More women have entered high-level political office as a result of mandatory quotas requiring a minimum number of women elected or quotas compelling parties to nominate a certain ratio of female/male candidates.
- In an effort to get parents to share caregiving more equally, many countries now provide fathers with financial incentives to take parental leave for at least two months. This is important, as fathers’ equal participation in caregiving is crucial for ensuring that mothers can remain and advance in the labour force.
- Many countries are trying to close gender gaps in access to finance and entrepreneurial skills by improving access to bank financing through loan guarantees. Two other common strategies are the use of public procurement to support female entrepreneurs and efforts to improve women’s access to risk capital. Entrepreneurship training, mentoring programmes, workshops, business counselling and support in building entrepreneurial networks have also shown promise.
- For gender equality to be fully realised, gender equality must be embedded in all policy making, in all ministries and at all levels of government. Gender budgeting is an increasingly common tool for ensuring that women’s and girls’ concerns are mainstreamed in policy and public administration, and almost half of OECD countries report that they have introduced, plan to introduce, or are actively considering introducing gender budgeting.
- The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Agenda 2030’s gender-dedicated goal and targets (SDG5), promises to increase the prioritisation of gender equality in national and global development agendas.

Despite these promising policy measures, progress has been far too slow so far. There has been little change in outcomes on the ground. Gender gaps stubbornly persist in educational, social, economic and political outcomes. These inequalities must be urgently addressed.

Countries must step up their efforts through sustained campaigns, monitoring policies aimed at gender equality, greater public investment, and the introduction and expansion of legal measures. The policy suggestions in this report, combined with the OECD Gender Recommendations, should serve as a toolkit for policy makers and stakeholders willing to tackle gender inequality. The time is now to ensure that better policies lead to better lives – for girls and boys, and for women and men.



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