

Foreword

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right. It is also a keystone of a prosperous, modern economy that provides sustainable inclusive growth. Gender equality is essential for ensuring that men and women can contribute fully at home, at work and in public life, for the betterment of societies and economies at large.

The OECD has long championed this cause. In 2010, building on its extensive work, the OECD launched the OECD Gender Initiative to examine the obstacles to gender equality in the fields of education, employment and entrepreneurship. This work led to the flagship 2012 publication *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now!* and an extensive work stream assessing policies to promote gender equality in different countries. These country reviews have informed novel policy initiatives like *NiñaSTEM PUEDEN*, which the OECD and the Mexican Ministry of Education jointly launched. The OECD's online Gender Data Portal has become a leading global source for statistical indicators on female education, employment, entrepreneurship, political participation, and social and economic outcomes.

The OECD's strong focus on gender equality, in collaboration with other international organisations, has been crucial for raising the profile of the gender agenda internationally and securing strong commitments by G20 and G7 leaders. In particular, the OECD was instrumental in advancing the G20 target to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation rates between men and women by 25% by 2025.

The 2013 OECD Gender Recommendation and the 2015 OECD Gender Recommendation in Public Life propose concrete measures that member countries and other adherents can implement to advance gender equality. The present report, *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle*, represents the OECD's stocktaking of how well – or not – countries are doing in implementing policy measures aimed at reaching gender equality goals. Despite the OECD's analysis, policy recommendations and international targets, countries need to do more.

This report presents a stark call to action. In the past five years, countries have made very little progress in reaching gender equality goals. Gender gaps persist in all areas of social and economic life and across countries, and the size of these gaps has often changed little. While young women in OECD countries now obtain more years of schooling than young men, on average, girls are much less likely to study in the lucrative science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. Women's labour force participation rates have moved closer to men's rates over the past few decades, but in every OECD country women are still less likely than men to engage in paid work. When women do work, they are more likely to work part-time, are less likely to advance to management, are more likely to face discrimination and 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 barely changed since 2010. Women also remain underrepresented in political and business leadership positions.

Countries are, however, making progress in some key policy areas:

- Several countries now offer *strong financial incentives to fathers to take parental leave* for at least two months. Fathers' leave taking is essential for gender equality in paid and unpaid work, as it encourages parents to share caregiving more equally and facilitates mothers' labour market participation. These egalitarian behaviours can improve father's and mother's well-being, set a good example for children, and – over time – are likely to lessen prevailing gender stereotypes.
- Gender pay gaps persist worldwide, despite women's dramatic gains in education. Many factors drive the gender pay gap, including gender segregation in fields of study and jobs, women's higher likelihood of interrupting their careers for caregiving, and – though harder to identify – discrimination and biases against women. Since 2013, about two-thirds of OECD countries have introduced new *pay equity initiatives* and pay transparency is a key lever in bringing gender pay differentials within companies to light.
- *Gender quotas and other targets* are helping to increase the number of women in political and private sector leadership. Women's underrepresentation in leadership limits the presence of female voices in important decisions, and deprives girls and young women of strong role models. Changing stereotypes requires a broad, societal understanding that women are capable of achieving as much as men in business and in public life.
- Harassment and violence against women (VAW) represent the worst manifestation of gender inequality, but VAW remains endemic in much of the world. A survey conducted for this report finds that addressing VAW is a top priority issue for most OECD countries, and governments and stakeholders are increasingly *strengthening legislation and conducting awareness-raising campaigns aimed at preventing and ending VAW*. Yet progress remains slow and uneven. This is a crucial front in the uphill battle for gender equality.

These inequalities should have long been resolved. There is no reason for women to trail behind men in social, economic and political outcomes. The cost of inaction is high: reducing the gender gap in labour force participation by 25% by 2025 could, through increases in the size of their labour forces, add 1 percentage point to projected baseline GDP growth across the OECD over the period 2013-25, and almost 2.5 percentage points if gender participation gaps were halved by 2025. In the face of sluggish growth, ageing societies and increasing educational attainment of young women, the economic case for gender equality is clear.

We must advance in making gender equality a reality.

The OECD Gender Recommendations help motivate governments, employers, families and schools around the globe to close gender gaps, empower girls and women, and promote gender equality. Every country faces its own obstacles to reaching gender equality, and to make a real difference we must change public policies in tandem with stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours. Together, we can ensure that boys and girls, and men and women, have equal opportunities to succeed and contribute to their society and economy.



Angel Gurría
Secretary-General of the OECD

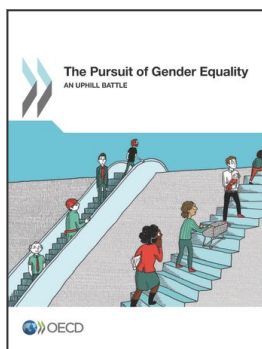
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The OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS) led the writing and co-ordination of chapters of this report, under the senior leadership of Stefano Scarpetta (Director of ELS), Mark Pearson (Deputy Director of ELS) and Monika Queisser (Senior Counsellor in ELS and leader of the OECD Horizontal Project on Gender Equality). Willem Adema, Senior Economist, supervised the organisation of chapters and managed the project.

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