

## Chapter 7

# Towards greater gender equality

*Valerie Frey, Fianna Jurdant, Caitlyn Guthrie,  
Pinar Guven, Gaëlle Ferrant and Gamze Igrioglu*

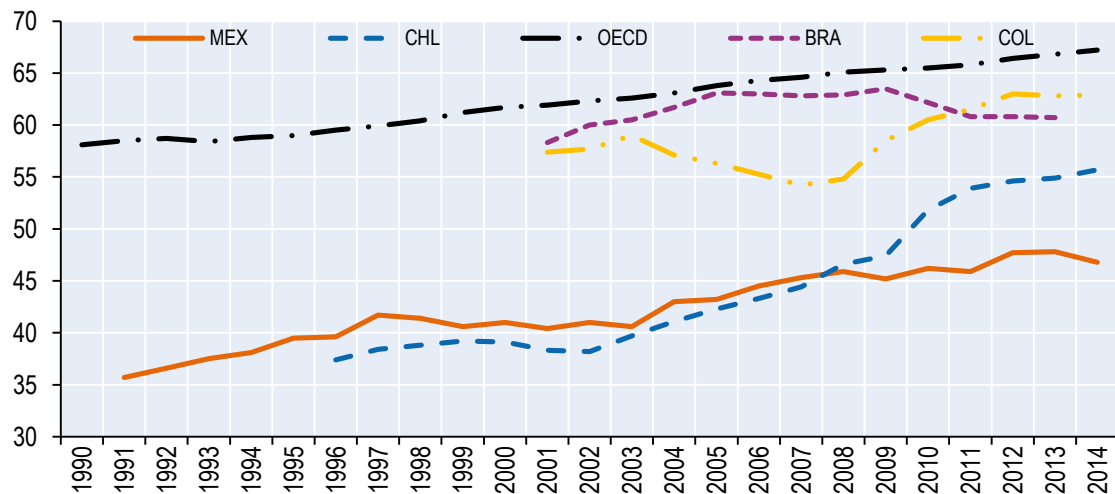
Mexico has a long way to go on the road to gender equality. Over the past two decades, Mexico has achieved some progress thanks to comprehensive laws strengthening women's rights. However, entrenched acceptance of discriminatory social norms, legal loopholes and inadequate public support for working parents undermine gender equality. Although women's educational attainment now matches men's, fewer than half of working-age Mexican women are in the labour force. Nearly 60% of Mexico's working women hold informal jobs, with little social protection and low pay. Mexico's adolescent pregnancy rate remains five times as high as the OECD average, and the share of young women not in employment, education or training is nearly four times the rate for young men. Across all age groups, Mexican mothers are less likely to be employed than mothers in most OECD countries. Violence against women remains widespread. Aside from the moral imperative, greater gender equality will ensure a more efficient use of Mexico's resources and promote sustainable inclusive growth.

Social and economic outcomes for Mexican women and girls continue to lag not only behind outcomes for women in the rest of the OECD, but also behind women’s outcomes in many other middle-income Latin American countries (OECD, 2017a). In 2016, fewer than half (47%) of working-age Mexican women participated in the labour force, a rate far below the average for Mexican men (82%) and the OECD average for women (67%) (Figure 7.1). Women face barriers in advancing to leadership roles, and experience occupational and sectoral segregation in both private and public sector jobs. Many women are trapped in informal jobs, which offer low pay, inadequate social protection and little safeguard against poverty.

Women are still underrepresented in managerial positions, both in the public and private sectors. In 2017, only 4.7% of large companies in Mexico had more than three women on the board (MSCI, 2017), compared to 47% in OECD countries. Meanwhile, women managers in Mexico represented 36% of total managerial employment in 2016, slightly above the OECD average of 32%. Unlike many other OECD countries, Mexico has not established a policy to enhance women’s participation in corporate leadership. However, in 2017, a sub-index measuring the participation of women on boards was introduced in the Mexican Stock Exchange’s Sustainability Index.

**FIGURE 7.1. MEXICAN WOMEN’S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IS IMPROVING, BUT LAGS BEHIND MOST OF THE OECD**

Female labour force participation rates, 15-64 year-olds, selected countries, 1990-2014



Note: Data for Brazil and Colombia in 2006 are interpolated.

Source: OECD Employment Database (2016).

Self-employment is widespread in the Mexican labour market. While both men and women face challenges to growing their business in Mexico, including inadequate access to credit and a difficult business environment, male self-employed workers are more likely to be employers and to be formally registered with the government. In contrast, self-employed women tend to be own-account workers and are more likely than men to work informally, often as domestic workers or street vendors. Among Mexican businesses participating in international trade,

men entrepreneurs are more likely than women entrepreneurs to export to businesses only, while women entrepreneurs are more likely to export to individual consumers only, reflecting traditional polarisation in manufacturing and services sectors.

Women are more likely than men to live in poverty in Mexico, and even more so in the case of indigenous women. Women of indigenous origin have less education and are far more likely to be illiterate than indigenous men and non-indigenous men and women. Indigenous women also have worse maternal health outcomes, including mortality (OECD, 2017a). Indigenous women in rural areas are often beyond the reach of the state and consequently face constraints in securing land and property rights as they are more likely to lack legal documentation, such as identification cards and birth certificates required to access land assets (OECD, 2017b).

Mexico's extensive legislative framework on gender equality has brought about real and substantive improvements in women's rights and well-being over the past decade. However, legal loopholes and discrimination remain, which undermine the legislative progress and expose women and girls to ongoing discrimination. For example, the high prevalence of early marriage is partly due to the slow progress made in taking action (through national legislation, among other means) to end the practice. The minimum legal age of marriage is set at the state level, and ranges from 14 to 18. Even where laws exist, unregistered unions may be seen as a solution to get around the legal age of marriage (OECD, 2017b). As a result, in 2016, 23% of girls have been married before their 18th birthday, the eight highest number of child brides in the world (UNICEF, 2016).

Gender inequality comes at a high moral and economic cost. The participation of women in the labour force is crucial for promoting and sustaining economic growth, and the gains are largest in countries where large gender gaps persist, like Mexico. OECD models project a sizable impetus to growth in Mexico if women are able to engage in the labour market at rates similar to men. In Mexico, halving the current gender gap in labour force participation among 15- to 74-year-olds by 2040 could potentially add 0.16 percentage points to the projected average annual rate of growth in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) for the period 2013-40, boosting the projected average growth rate to 2.46% per year. By 2040, this extra growth would translate into an increase of around USD 1 100 in GDP per capita, relative to the baseline scenario. This is one of the largest projected pay-offs to gender equality in the OECD (Adema et al., 2015). Given Mexico's sizeable (and growing) pool of well-educated women, the losses are enormous if these women – and their valuable human capital – are not fully incorporated into the economy.

## Removing barriers to paid work

As in the rest of the world, women and girls face a number of barriers to paid work in Mexico. Stereotypes, social norms, legal loopholes and restrictions, and discrimination still limit their choices. Mexican women perform over three-quarters of all unpaid housework and childcare in their homes – one of the highest burdens of unpaid work in the OECD – and these hours in unpaid work restrict time that could be spent in paid work. The culture of long work hours has also had effects on labour force participation, as fathers are more likely than mothers to be able to spend long days at the office (OECD, 2017a).

Discriminatory practices and attitudes, as well as legal loopholes related to workplace protection continue to obstruct women's equal employment opportunities (OECD, 2017b). For example, Mexico does not provide for parental leave for fathers after the maternity and paternity leave periods end and the law does not prohibit prospective employers from asking about family status. Across age groups, Mexican mothers are far less likely to be in paid work than mothers in most OECD countries: 25- to 54-year-old mothers are about eight percentage points less likely to be in paid work than comparably-aged women without dependent children in other OECD countries. Mexico's motherhood labour force participation gap is larger than most countries in the OECD, including Chile (4 percentage points) and Colombia (about 3 percentage points). This has implications not only for gender equality, but also for children. Maternal employment is strongly negatively correlated with child poverty across countries, and, indeed, Mexico has one of the highest child poverty rates in the OECD.

Parental leave allowances and early childhood education and care (ECEC) supports are relatively weak, gender norms regarding the behavior of fathers remain inegalitarian. Eligible mothers in formal jobs are entitled to 12 weeks of publicly-funded paid maternity leave, while eligible fathers are entitled to five days of employer-sponsored paternity leave. These are among the lowest entitlements in the OECD, and the fact that paternity leave is sponsored by an employer rather than the government likely reduces fathers' take-up.

ECEC is another important tool, not only for improving children's educational outcomes, but also for reducing mothers' unpaid work burdens and enabling them to enter the workforce. Participation in ECEC in Mexico has grown enormously over the past decade, especially following the introduction of compulsory preschool. Children aged three- through five-years-old are now enrolled in preschool at rates comparable to the OECD average. SEDESOL's Programme of Childcare Facilities to Help Working Mothers (*Programa de Estancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras*) offers a useful example of rapidly expanding childcare access, at low cost, for very young children. Notwithstanding this progress, demand for ECEC still far outpaces supply, especially for children under age three, and quality of care remains a concern.

Young women and mothers, in particular, face high barriers to paid work. Mexico's share of young women not in employment, education, or training (so-called "NEETs") is 35% – the second-highest rate in the OECD. Young women are nearly four times as likely as young men to be NEETs in Mexico. Motherhood is a key driver of NEET status. Additionally, Mexico's adolescent pregnancy rate remains the highest among OECD countries (OECD 2017a), and often leads to young women's school dropout.

## Achieving gender equality in the public sector

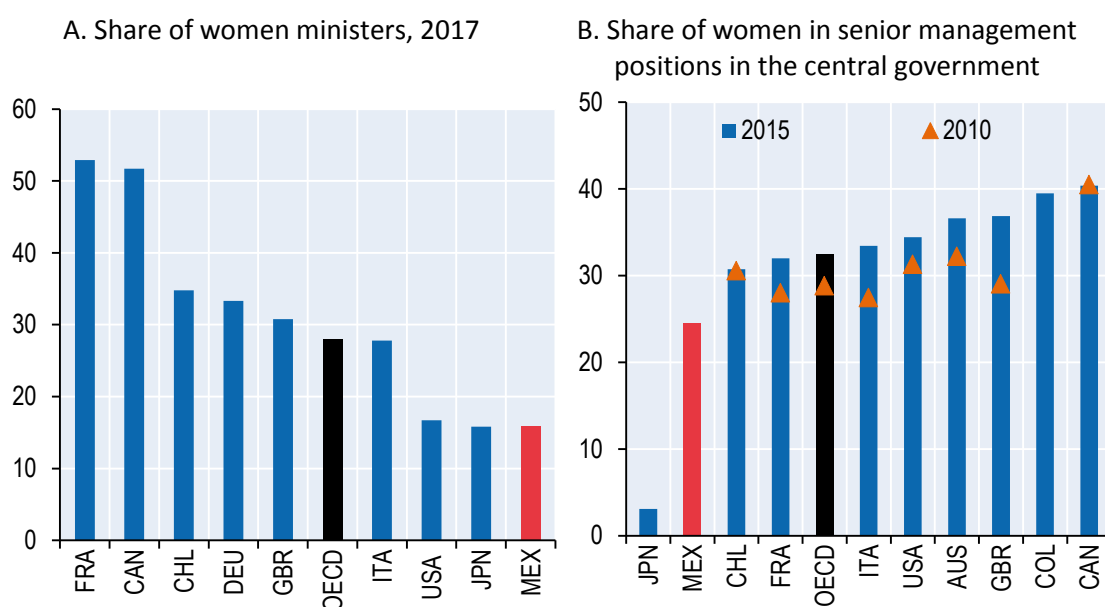
Important reforms were initiated by the 2012-18 administration to advance gender equality in public bodies, including the electoral reform introducing gender parity in 2014 and the Protocol to Address Political Violence Against Women of 2016. Between 2012 and 2017, Mexico also made significant progress in increasing women's representation in the Congress, placing itself among the top countries in the OECD and globally. In the Chamber of Deputies, women made up to 42.6% of seats in 2017, considerably above the OECD average of 28.8% and far higher than the rate of women's representation achieved in 2012 (26.2%). These achievements mostly reflect the successful implementation of the parity measures established in Mexico's

Constitution in 2014, in line with the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life and the 2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship. Women’s increased representation in Mexico’s Congress has resulted in an upsurge of proposed bills to prevent gender-based violence, discrimination and accelerate gender equality and women’s empowerment (OECD, 2017a).

Despite impressive progress, there is further scope for improving gender equality in key positions of power and influence in public bodies. For instance, gender balance is still not achieved in the chairs of ordinary commissions in the Congress. The gender gap in the executive branch remains significantly wide, and women still occupy far fewer political positions than their male counterparts at all levels of government (Figure 7.2, panel A). In state-level cabinets, women held an average of only 16.8% of seats in 2015; ranging from all-male cabinets in Sonora and Yucatán to 55% representation of women in Morelos. The gender gap in the judiciary is akin to that of the political executive. Women occupy only 21% of offices in first instance courts, 19% in appeal courts and 18% of judgeships in supreme courts in Mexico.

In public employment, women make up 51% of Mexico’s public employees. However, there is a wide gender gap in top managerial positions in central government. In 2015, women held only 24% of senior management posts, compared to the OECD average of 32% (Figure 7.2, panel B). Mexican women in public employment are also affected by lower occupational and sector-related segregation (OECD, 2017a).

**FIGURE 7.2. MEXICO HAS SCOPE TO FURTHER IMPROVING GENDER EQUALITY IN KEY POSITIONS OF POWER AND INFLUENCE**



Source: Panel A.: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women “Women in Politics”, 2015 and 2017. Panel B.: OECD (2016), “Survey on the composition of the workforce in central/federal government”.

Many barriers continue to restrict women’s equal participation in public decision-making positions. Among them are political harassment and violence against women holding office; sexual harassment; difficulties in balancing professional and personal life; and inadequate maternity and parental leave. Key initiatives to overcome these inequalities

include the 2016 Protocol to Address Political Violence Against Women, and the 2016 instruction of the President of Mexico to the Executive Cabinet to seek certification by the Mexican Standard for Equal Employment Opportunities and Non-Discrimination.

## **Fostering a greater participation of women in STEM fields of study**

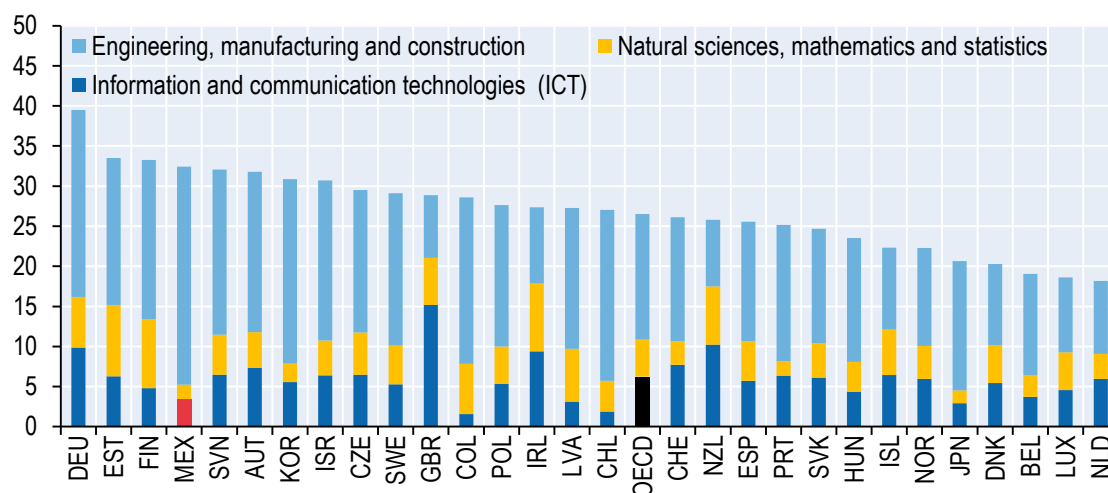
Mexico has adopted measures which have succeeded in narrowing the gender gaps in primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolment, but both girls and boys continue to face challenges in the educational system (see Chapter 5). As in many other countries, boys in Mexico outperform girls in the science and mathematics domains of PISA, while girls perform better than boys in reading. Furthermore, many young women in Mexico are lost in the transition from secondary school to tertiary education and/or the labour market, resulting in high female NEET rates.

Like in other OECD countries, not enough girls and women enter the potentially lucrative fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). However, due to the increasing competitiveness of the global economy and labour market, Mexico has endeavored to increase the number of students and researchers in science and engineering. Mexico's overall share of new entrants to tertiary STEM (32%) is now slightly above the OECD average (27%) and many of these new entrants are women (Figure 7.3): nearly half of new entrants to degrees in natural science, mathematics and statistics in 2015 were women. Furthermore, the share of new female entrants in information and communication technologies (ICT) (28%) and in engineering, manufacturing and construction (27%) were above the OECD averages (19% and 24%, respectively).

Still, more can be done to empower women to pursue STEM careers by raising awareness and combating gender stereotypes. The OECD-Mexico “NiñaSTEM Pueden” initiative, launched in 2017, has created a network of Mexican women engaged in prominent careers in science and mathematics to visit schools and encourage girls to be ambitious and pursue STEM studies. A greater female presence in these areas could have a positive effect on Mexico's economic performance.

FIGURE 7.3. MANY NEW STEM STUDENTS ARE WOMEN

Share of women among new entrants to tertiary education, by STEM field of study, 2015



Source: OECD/UIS/Eurostat (2017), Table C3.1. See Source section for more information and Annex 3 for notes ([www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm)).

## Fighting violence against women

Sexual harassment is widespread in Mexico. In 2011, 63% of Mexican women over 15-years of age declared that they had been victims of some kind of violence in their lifetime. In addition, 47% of Mexican women who have had at least one intimate male partner report having been victims of violence.

Many of these Violence Against Women (VAW) related crimes go unreported for various reasons, including fear of further victimisation and threats (towards the woman and her loved ones), stigma, lack of means for self-support and lack of institutional protection. One major factor behind underreporting is mistrust in the criminal justice system (see Chapter 3).

Mexico is making progress on measuring VAW, conducting regular surveys on the prevalence of VAW, and also on prioritising its prevention and eradication. Important legal instruments protect women from violence, and the Mexican government has rolled out a multi-pronged approach to addressing VAW, entitled the Integrated Programme to Prevent, Address, Sanction and Eradicate Violence Against Women, 2014-2018. This programme proposes several strategies and policies to eradicate VAW and includes many government actors. Following the dispositions of the Belém do Pará Convention, spousal rape has been included in national legislation. Similarly, to improve the access of victims to legal support, Justice Centres for Women have been established across the country (OECD 2017a, 2017b). Despite these efforts to strengthen legal and legislative frameworks, culture and inertia discriminatory attitudes complicate the implementation of these laws: for example, 16% of women agree that domestic violence is justified under certain conditions.

To further address gender-based violence, Mexico should strengthen links between justice and social services and make them more responsive to the specific legal needs of women and girls. It is also important to tackle gender stereotypes within the justice system through

specific training initiatives to improve awareness of the legal needs of women and girls. Improving the analysis and monitoring of women's legal needs and disaggregating data collection will help with gender mainstreaming and the development of tailored responses to those needs.

## Changing social norms and expectations

Gender-neutral laws and policies are not enough to guarantee equality due to discrimination in social norms. Securing women's rights and promoting gender equality requires gender-responsive laws, policies and programmes that take into account the structural barriers to equality. Discriminatory social norms overlap with development outcomes throughout a woman's life-cycle: they will determine whether she has any opportunity to forge her own pathway to empowerment and to contribute to the empowerment of her community. Public policies can only go so far in promoting gender equality if inegalitarian attitudes, sexism and misogyny persist in society.

Mexico's extensive legislative framework on gender equality has brought about real and substantive improvements in women's rights and well-being over the past decade. However, the plurality of legal systems and the persistence of discriminatory customary practices undermine the legislative progress, and expose women and girls to ongoing discrimination. According to the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), discriminatory formal and informal laws, social norms and practice are more pervasive in Mexico than in other OECD countries, except Turkey (OECD, 2014). Among other actors, the media in Mexico widely contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes, inequalities and the "traditional" role of women. This is something which must be addressed and confronted through informed debate, scientific evidence, policy formulation and a responsible regulatory framework which recognizes the important role the media plays in promoting gender equality.

Mexico would benefit from a holistic approach that takes into account the role of discriminatory social norms. First, harmonising customary laws (i.e. traditional laws that shape gender relations in indigenous communities) with national laws in line with Mexico's international human rights' commitments (e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, CEDAW) would significantly improve women's rights and wellbeing. Regarding early marriage, for example, harmonising these laws by removing discrimination would have direct benefits for girls by challenging the social expectation that they should marry before the age of 18. Second, designing and launching a campaign to create awareness would transform social norms into sources of empowerment for women and men. In some cases, legal protection can be insufficient to prevent discrimination, due to poor implementation and awareness of these laws. The MenCare campaign (*Campaña de paternidad* or *Programa de los Cómplices por la Equidad*), for example, promoted men's involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers as a means to achieve family well-being, gender equality and better health for both parents and children.

While representative public opinion polls reveal the strong persistence of patriarchal gender norms in Mexico, the younger generation gives cause for optimism. Young Mexicans are more gender progressive than their older counterparts across many measures, but especially so in accepting women's equal role in the labour market and access to education. When similar



survey questions are asked in consecutive waves (e.g. the question on priorities regarding boys' versus girls' higher education, and on child well-being when mothers work), there is also evidence that attitudes are evolving with time across age cohorts (OECD, 2017a).

## Mainstreaming gender in all policy areas

Some of the challenges faced by Mexico in implementing effective gender equality policies stem from underlying governance challenges. These include difficulties in the timely engagement of stakeholders, limited capacities to integrate gender-sensitive data and analysis in decision making and absence of standard gender mainstreaming tools (OECD, 2017a).

During the 2012-18 administration, Mexico made significant improvements in its approach to dealing with gender gaps in a comprehensive manner. INMUJERES has played a key role in boosting gender equality policy frameworks (through PROIGUALDAD) and promoting measures such as gender quotas, which have proven to be very effective to increase gender equality in political participation. With the National Development Plan (2013-18) mandating the federal public administration to implement gender equality as a cross-cutting principle, Mexico is among the few OECD countries to have successfully aligned its legal, policy and planning instruments to build a gender perspective into all government actions. Subnational governments have also adopted such frameworks, though not all to the same degree. Reconvening the National System for Equality between Women and Men in 2016 under the chair of the President of Mexico sent unmistakable signals about the importance of this political agenda. The OECD has worked with Mexico hand in hand on this initiative, contributing evidence and international comparisons. Mexico works to advance gender-budgeting by earmarking funds to programmes that seek to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender mainstreaming is also a requirement in Mexico's Federal Budget and Fiscal Accountability Act.

Despite these strides, there is scope for further strengthening gender mainstreaming. The absence of a standard gender analysis tool and sex-disaggregated data makes it difficult for the federal administration to meaningfully apply a gender lens to its policies and budgets. Policy evaluation also remains fragmented and would benefit from a stronger gender perspective. Mexico performs well within the Latin American and Caribbean region when it comes to the collection of sex-disaggregated gender statistics. However, line ministries still seem to struggle with the systematic collection of data to inform sectoral policies such as justice, trade and the environment. The available data generated by the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI) is not systematically used to inform the general design of all sectoral policies from a gender perspective. Mexico could make progress in closing gender gaps, such as those found in employment, unpaid work, violence and access to decision-making roles (see Chapter 6) if it addressed these gaps.

Putting social institutions at the core of the policy response can help open new and sustainable paths to promote gender equality. Constitutional and legal protections do not suffice to protect women's rights and empowerment opportunities due to discrimination in social institutions, which intersect and overlap to reinforce women's marginalisation (OECD, 2017b).

## Key recommendations

- Shorten the social security contribution period to ensure that more women are eligible for publicly-funded maternity leave, and add at least two weeks of paid maternity leave – equalling a total of 14 weeks – to bring Mexico closer to international best practice.
- Provide more than the current five days of paternity leave to fathers, publicly fund the paternity leave period and incentivise fathers to take the leave for which they are eligible.
- Increase places in preschool for children aged three to five years-old, and increase the length of the preschool day for three- to five-year-olds, as most programmes are currently only a half-day long.
- For infants and children under age three, expand childcare supply and improve the quality of care.
- Ensure that men and women have equal time to combine work and family responsibilities by reducing Mexico’s labour market culture of excessively long work hours and enabling access to flexible work arrangements.
- Reduce women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid household labour by changing gender norms at home, involving the private and public sectors as stakeholders, and investing in time-saving technology and public infrastructure.
- Ensure greater access to formal employment in both private and public sectors and employment-related social security by incentivising formal jobs, enforcing labour laws and reinforcing the link between contributions and social security pay-outs.
- Consider introducing pay transparency measures to shine light on pay inequality.
- Recommit to evaluating gender programmes and to evaluating gender outcomes in all areas of social, economic, and public life.
- Expand the collection and availability of sex-disaggregated data and develop a standardised tool for gender analysis.
- Raise awareness among line ministries about the use of sex-disaggregated data in sectoral policy making, monitoring and evaluation.

## References

Adema, W., C. Clarke and V. Frey (2015), "Paid parental leave: Lessons from OECD countries and selected U.S. states", *OECD Social, Employment, and Migration Working Papers*, No. 172, OECD Publishing, Paris, [dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jrqqvqqb4vb-en](https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5jrqqvqqb4vb-en).

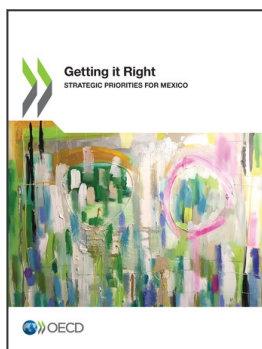
MSCI (2017), *Women on Boards: Progress Report 2017*, MSCI.

OECD (2017a), *Building an Inclusive Mexico: Policies and Good Governance for Gender Equality*, OECD Publishing, Paris, [dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265493-en](https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264265493-en).

OECD (2017b), *Latin America and the Caribbean SIGI Regional Report*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

OECD (2014), *Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2014 Synthesis Report*, OECD Development Centre. OECD Publishing, Paris, [www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/BrochureSIGI2015-web.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/BrochureSIGI2015-web.pdf).

UNICEF (2016), *State of the World's Children 2017*, UNICEF, Paris.



**From:**  
**Getting it Right**  
Strategic Priorities for Mexico

**Access the complete publication at:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264292062-en>

**Please cite this chapter as:**

Frey, Valérie, *et al.* (2018), "Towards greater gender equality", in OECD, *Getting it Right: Strategic Priorities for Mexico*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264292062-8-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to [rights@oecd.org](mailto:rights@oecd.org). Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at [info@copyright.com](mailto:info@copyright.com) or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at [contact@cfcopies.com](mailto:contact@cfcopies.com).