

WOMEN AND MEN IN OECD COUNTRIES
Extracts of the draft publication

Foreword

From indicators to action: OECD provides the analysis

The OECD exists to promote policies designed “to achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living”. We are proud of the role we play in helping countries learn from one another in achieving these goals, and in identifying ‘best practice’ in a very broad range of policies, from education and pensions to macroeconomic policy and trade.

To identify best practice, the OECD develops indicators which illustrate some vital differences in experience, across countries, over time and across different groups. Such indicators are not plucked from thin air. Rather, they are the product of many years of painstaking work in identifying the issue, getting agreement across countries, collecting and standardising data. For many years now, we have been trying to improve analysis by collecting statistics separately for women and men. Outcomes for women and men are very different across many different areas of life, and policies have to reflect this. Best practice across countries in many areas of policy cannot be ‘gender-blind’.

The “Quality Framework and Guidelines for OECD Statistics” indicates that, whenever appropriate, the OECD should collect data disaggregated by gender. The indicators in this brochure are a tiny sample of the data which is now collected by the OECD. They illustrate some important differences between women and men. Sometimes outcomes are better for women than for men – they perform better at school, they are less likely to go to prison, to smoke, are less likely to be ‘socially isolated’, and they live longer. In other areas, men have a better time of it – they earn more, are more likely to get into positions of power in both political and economic life, and they are happier.

In addition to these indicators of outcomes, we need to analyse policy. There is not space to showcase all of our gender-related work in this brochure, but we are making a lot of headway in many different areas of gender analysis, not just in the areas that you would expect – pensions, family policies and education, for example – but also in trade, entrepreneurship and development aid. If governments want “more growth, employment and a better standard of living”, then they are going to need more of this sort of gender-sensitive analysis, and more indicators of how men and women are doing. The OECD is committed to sustain this effort providing solid statistical evidence and analytical results.

Better policies for men and women

Indicators are only the first step in developing better policies for women and men: the next stage is to understand why these differences occur, and then what we can do about them. The following describes a few of the most important recent and ongoing projects aimed at improving gender policy in OECD countries. Information on OECD work on gender issues in developing countries follows.

Gender differences are striking in school performance, as the OECD 'PISA' study of attainments at age 15 shows. National experiences are being reviewed in an 'Equity in Education' project, which looks at why different groups – including the different sexes – end up with different outcomes. While female participation in tertiary education has been grown rapidly in comparison to males, the choice of subjects remains very different. This contributes in part to the result that women end up in low-wage sectors of the economy, as documented in country reviews on 'The Transition from School to Work'.

Work on the reconciliation of work and family life (*Babies and Bosses*) and studies in the *OECD Employment Outlook* and the *OECD Economic Outlook* show that taxation, provision of childcare and parental leave, and the availability of part-time work can all have a big impact on the working patterns of parents, particularly mothers. Family-friendly policies can also affect *fertility rates*, which have collapsed in many OECD countries.

Children are not the only family members that need care: older relatives may need help too. This is another task which predominantly falls on women. OECD work is looking at *Disability Trends* among older people and at different models for delivering *Long-Term Care Services* either at home or in institutions. For younger age groups, most new claims for disability benefits are by women rather than by men – see new reviews on *Sickness, Disability and Work*. Some people argue that this is because of an increase in stress. This in turn is said to be due to the rise in female employment which, when combined with continuing care responsibilities, now find themselves doing two jobs.

One of the ways in which countries have coped with the increase in demand for carers has been through immigration. This is the main area of employment for female migrants (see reviews of *the Social Integration of Migrants*). The fact that women provide more than half of all new immigration into OECD countries (see the *International Migration Outlook*) has too often been ignored by policymakers.

The OECD has long pioneered analysis of women's entrepreneurship, through elimination of barriers to enterprise creation and growth. The *Istanbul Declaration* by OECD Ministers has recognised the importance of women's entrepreneurship, and recommendations have been developed. *Local Reviews on Women's Entrepreneurship* have been undertaken in order to explore the role of women's entrepreneurship in local development.

Gender issues have also been prominent in some unexpected areas. For example, the *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* have been used to promote gender equality in the operations of multinationals in non-OECD countries. *Gender and Trade* argues that women sometimes face particular barriers in taking advantage of trade liberalisation. Information on *Equal Opportunity Policies* is collected as part of OECD's work on Public Governance. New work is beginning which will look at how specified target groups, including women, could be more involved in *Policymaking*. OECD work suggests that having a gender dimension in *Environmental Policy* might be justified – women and men behave differently in areas such as use of transport, recycling, and purchase of organic food.

A Guidance Document for regulators and industry on how best to assess whether *Hazardous Chemicals* can have adverse effects on a woman's ability to become pregnant and have healthy babies is under

discussion. The OECD has developed a new hazard category within the *Globally Harmonised System* for classification of chemicals covering risks during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

The OECD *Health Care Quality Indicators* project has collected data on breast and cervical cancer screening and survival rates, with further work underway on colorectal cancer rates, and myocardial infarction and stroke mortality rates. This will lead to future work on gender-based differences in how the health care system operates.

Some aspects of the pension system favour women over men – lower retirement ages (though these are often being phased out – see *Living Longer, Working Longer*) and longer life expectancy combined with gender-neutral actuarial tables in calculating pension payouts, for example (see *Pensions at a Glance*). On the other hand, women have lower pensions than men and are more likely to be in *poverty* in old age than men. This reflects reduced earning (and therefore pension contributions) through their lifetime, partly because of child-rearing. Furthermore, work on *financial education* suggests that women have less understanding and confidence in making financial decisions, have less to save, and invest more conservatively than do men.

Further information is available on those projects in italics above. It will be soon possible to go to the Gender Topic on the OECD website (www.oecd.org/gender) and to click on whichever link interests you. Alternatively, contact mark.pearson@oecd.org (chief editor of the publication) for further information.

Women and Men in OECD countries

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OECD work on gender equality in developing countries

Progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment is vital for improving economic, social and political conditions in developing countries. The OECD provides strategic support to governments to take gender equality into account in development policies and practices. This consists of policy advice to non-Member countries, but the OECD also helps countries which give aid to do so in a way that supports gender equity.

The Gender, Institutions and Development Database

In large parts of the developing world, traditions and socio-cultural norms still trap countries in poverty as they bar women from economic activities: more discrimination – less economic growth – more poverty!

To help governments choose policies that will be effective in assisting economic growth, the OECD has created the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID). Compiled from various sources, the data base gives comparative data for 162 countries on the socio-economic status of women. Its true innovation is the inclusion of institutional variables that range from intra-household behaviour to social norms. Information on cultural and traditional practices is coded so as to measure the level of discrimination, making the GID a unique tool for a wide range of analytical queries and allowing a case-by-case adaptation to specific research or policy questions.

By identifying cultural and traditional practices that discriminate against women, from forced marriages and female genital mutilation to restrictions on inheritance and ownership rights, the GID helps design effective policies for sustainable development. More funding will be effective only if the underlying causes of discrimination are addressed. Building new classrooms, for example, will make no difference for gender equality if girls are not allowed to attend. The Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base can be accessed free of charge at the GID's homepage at www.oecd.org/dev/institutions/GIDdatabase.

Gender Equity and Aid

The *Network on Gender Equality*, **GENDERNET** (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender>), is the forum where gender experts from development co-operation agencies meet to define common approaches in support of gender equality. Civil society groups are also invited to contribute to participate in GENDERNET events.

The OECD asks countries to provide information on aid in support of gender equality. In the OECD's Aid Activity Database, donor countries are asked to indicate for each individual aid activity whether or not it targets gender equality as one of its policy objectives. A study conducted in 2005 showed that two thirds of aid in support of gender equality was in the social sectors, especially basic education and basic health. About one half of aid to basic education and basic health targeted gender-specific concerns, while little was reported as targeting gender equality in the sectors of transport, communications and energy infrastructure.