



Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life

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Background Information

The Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life was adopted by the OECD Council on 14 December 2015 on the proposal of the Public Governance Committee (PGC) and in co-operation with the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC). The Recommendation has been developed in the framework of the OECD Gender Initiative and is a critical part of the Inclusive Growth Agenda. It builds on and complements the 2013 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship [[OECD/LEGAL/0398](#)].

The OECD's work on gender equality in public life

There is growing awareness among the OECD community that gender equality is a cornerstone of inclusive growth. Beyond the issues of fairness and competitiveness, gender equality in public institutions is particularly crucial. Public institutions that fully represent and reflect the diversity of the people they serve are more likely ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equally, thereby reinforcing trust in public institutions and democracies. Gender-balanced leadership and gender-responsive policy help ensure that the expectations and needs of all members of society are being met.

Yet, governments continue to face challenges in designing inclusive and gender-sensitive public policies, and in ensuring that gender equality initiatives are effectively implemented. These remaining gaps not only undermine the well-being of societies, but represent missed opportunities for achieving economic growth that benefits all. To address these challenges, the OECD has worked for over a decade to support governments in being agents of change for gender equality, including through mainstreaming gender considerations across the policymaking cycle using a whole-of-government approach that relies on effective governance mechanisms and tools, as well as sound public administration capacities.

An OECD-wide process to develop the Recommendation

The Recommendation was developed by the PGC and its subsidiary bodies, in cooperation with the ELSAC, as well as in consultation with the Regulatory Policy Committee and the secretariats of other bodies. During its development, three rounds of stakeholder consultations were held and the Secretariat received comments from over 50 public institutions in more than 30 Member and partner countries. The OECD Network of Parliamentarians, gender equality agencies, representatives of the judiciaries and participants of the 2014 Global Forum on Public Governance were also consulted.

Before its adoption by the Council, the efforts to develop the draft Recommendation were welcomed by the Ministers at the OECD Public Governance Ministerial Meeting in Helsinki on 28 October 2015. During this meeting, Ministers highlighted that equal access to public services is fundamental to achieve opportunities for all. They recognized the need to strive for greater gender equality in public life, and support the development of gender mainstreaming in relevant public governance areas, including through gender-based analysis of public policies to instill a renewed vision of governance for inclusive growth.

Promoting a government-wide strategy for gender equality

The Recommendation builds on and complements the 2013 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship [[OECD/LEGAL/0398](#)], which includes three high-level priorities related to gender mainstreaming and gender balance in both the public and private sectors:

- increasing women's representation in decision-making,
- mainstreaming gender equality in policies and budgets, and
- strengthening accountability mechanisms.

The Recommendation refines these priorities, setting forth 16 action-oriented recommendations to promote a government-wide strategy for gender equality reform, sound mechanisms to ensure accountability and sustainability of gender initiatives, and tools and evidence to inform policy decisions. It also brings forward policy options to boost equal access to public life, including politics, judiciaries, and public administrations for women and men from diverse backgrounds.

For more information, please consult <https://www.oecd.org/governance/gender-mainstreaming/> and <https://www.oecd.org/gender/>.

Implementation

When adopting the Recommendation, the Council instructed the PGC to monitor its implementation in co-operation with the ELSAC and report back to the Council. Since its adoption, the Secretariat and the Adherents have worked to disseminate the Recommendation to promote its implementation at all levels of government. This has included support for technical level discussions and exchange of good practices among Adherents, notably through the OECD Working Party on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance, which was established in 2019.

The [OECD Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality](#) was developed by the Secretariat to support policy makers in implementing the Recommendation, helping them design gender-sensitive public policies and services and enable women's equal access to public decision making. It highlights a range of possible actions to take and pitfalls to avoid in: institutionalising gender equality and gender mainstreaming; supporting gender balance in all state institutions (executive, legislative, and judiciary) and structures, and at all levels; developing and sustaining gender mainstreaming capacity; and establishing inclusive accountability structures.

2017 Report to the Council on the Implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations

The [2017 report](#) presents the progress made on the implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations in a number of areas such as education, employment and entrepreneurship and provides a first assessment of government policies by drawing on specific examples from a variety of Adherents.

It shows that, while Adherents are increasingly prioritising policies that combat violence against women and sexual harassment in the workplace, the gender wage gap, and the unequal division of unpaid housework and care work, gender gaps persist across Adherents in education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life opportunities and outcomes.

In order to ensure that public policy truly reflects – and results in – more inclusive societies, the report calls on the Adherents to build on recent progress through sustained campaigns, monitoring and reviewing policies aimed at gender equality, the introduction and/or expansion of legal measures and public investment and the exchanges of best practice.

Such good practices and policies include: the various STEM initiatives across the OECD; experiences with developing work-life balance supports with parental leave and ECEC for parents with children in e.g. Nordic countries, France and Korea; the many pay transparency initiatives to reduce gender pay gaps; different policy pathways towards greater representation of women in public and private leadership; efforts to obtain a better sharing of paid and unpaid work among partners in Germany; initiatives to improve access to finance for entrepreneurs; and, the efforts to promote good governance for gender equality in for example, Canada and Mexico.

2019 Interim Report to PGC

The Report “[Fast Forward to Gender Equality: Mainstreaming, Implementation and Governance](#)” maps strategies, governance tools, institutional settings and innovative approaches used by governments across the OECD and throughout all state institutions (including legislatures and judiciaries) to drive and support the advancement of society-wide gender equality goals. It also identifies current challenges faced by Adherents in ensuring long-lasting impacts of their gender equality agendas. Finally, the report provides key actionable policy messages to all state institutions, supported by examples of “what works” across the OECD. It will serve as the basis for supporting the implementation and the future monitoring of progress to the OECD Council in implementing the Recommendation. The next monitoring report is scheduled for 2022.

2022 Report to the Council on the Implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations

The [2022 report](#) presents the progress made on the implementation of the OECD Gender Recommendations since the last reporting exercise in 2017. It shows that, despite significant progress in some areas such as offer and take-up of paternity leave, equal pay, access to flexible work opportunities, access to leadership positions and requirements to use gender impact assessments in policymaking, gender gaps remain large in the areas of education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life.

In education, challenges remain in reaching greater gender balance in the choice of fields of study, and in reducing the feminisation of the teaching profession. In employment, further progress is needed to support gender equality in labour market participation, address vertical and horizontal labour market segregation, and support job quality and access to flexible work opportunities, career progression and leadership positions. This will also contribute to a further reduction of the gender pay gap. In entrepreneurship, governments should also strengthen the policy frameworks for women’s entrepreneurship including through an increased use of tailored measures, such as accelerator programmes and growth-oriented finance. Policy should also focus on promoting the right mind-set to advance gender equality.

In public life, key roadblocks are seen in the form of wide implementation gaps in the use of gender impact assessments; limitations in government capacities to close gender gaps; uneven advance in gender equality in public institutions and decision-making; and limited availability of gender-disaggregated data. Adherents are advised to strengthen their policy efforts in education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life and to consider the development of tools to strengthen their implementation in cross-cutting policy areas.

The next reporting to Council is scheduled to take place in 2027.

THE COUNCIL,

HAVING REGARD to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

HAVING REGARD to the Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship [C/MIN(2013)5/FINAL] which the present Recommendation builds on and aims to complement (Sections I/C, I and J of the above Recommendation);

HAVING REGARD to the report by the OECD Gender Initiative “Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship: Final Report to the MCM 2012” [C/MIN(2012)5] and to the 2014 report by the Public Governance Committee “Women, Government and Policy-Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth” (OECD, 2014);

RECOGNISING the significant foundation already provided by several international instruments on various aspects of gender equality, notably the principles embodied in the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth UN World Conference on Women; the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and the “United Nations Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs);

RECOGNISING that fostering gender diversity in public decision-making is critical for achieving inclusive growth at all levels of government, as well as anticipating current and future steps needed to increase citizen trust and well-being;

RECOGNISING that achieving gender balance in public leadership requires a deep cultural change at both societal and organisational levels;

RECOGNISING that a whole-of government approach, supported by effective institutions and robust accountability, is needed to ensure that gender equality efforts are sustainable and that achieving gender equality requires committed leadership, effective institutional frameworks, resources, tools and gender mainstreaming at appropriate levels of governments;

RECOGNISING that gender mainstreaming strategies should occur at appropriate levels of government and in relevant policy and governance areas thus creating a context of shared responsibility across all public institutions;

NOTING that, at the Public Governance Ministerial meeting on “Public Governance for Inclusive Growth: towards a new vision for the Public Sector” on 28 October 2015, Ministers agreed to strive for greater gender equality in public life and to support the development of gender mainstreaming in relevant public governance areas including through gender-based analysis of public policies and very much welcomed the draft Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life [Chair’s Summary, see GOV/PGC/MIN(2015)5/FINAL].

On the proposal of the Public Governance Committee and in co-operation with the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee:

I. RECOMMENDS that Members and non-Members having adhered to the Recommendation (hereafter the “Adherents”) **mainstream gender equality in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of relevant public policies and budgets**. To this effect, Adherents should:

1. Secure leadership and commit at the highest political level, at the appropriate level of government, to the development and implementation of a whole-of government strategy for effective gender equality and mainstreaming, which would enable:
 - i) setting a rationale, action plans, priorities, timelines, objectives, expected outcomes and/or targets, and effective policy planning across public institutions for promoting gender equality. These measures should be accompanied by information and awareness campaigns, media strategies and regular reviews;

- ii) engaging relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders with a view to ensuring an inclusive and comprehensive coverage of gender equality issues; and
- iii) adopting a dual approach to narrowing equality gaps through both gender mainstreaming and specific targeted actions to promote gender equality.

2. Establish an institutional framework to ensure the effective implementation, co-ordination and sustainability of the gender equality and mainstreaming strategy, by:

- i) establishing clear roles, responsibilities, mandates and lines of accountability of key governmental and oversight bodies in implementing gender equality and mainstreaming initiatives;
- ii) bolstering the capacities and resources of gender equality institutions to facilitate a consistent response at appropriate levels of government and to develop, implement and monitor gender-sensitive programmes and policies throughout the government, based on gender-disaggregated statistics and indicators. Effectiveness of gender equality institutions can also be strengthened by placing them at the highest possible level in the government (see also recommendations II.2 and III.2);
- iii) ensuring the capacity and resources of public institutions to integrate gender equality perspectives in their activities, for example, by identifying gender equality focal points across governmental bodies, by investing resources in training and promoting collaborative approaches with knowledge centres to produce gender-sensitive knowledge, leadership and communication, by ensuring the collection of gender and gender-disaggregated statistics in their areas of responsibility and by providing clear guidelines, tools, communication and expectations to public institutions in this area (see also recommendations II.2 and III.2); and
- iv) strengthening vertical and horizontal co-ordination mechanisms for policy coherence across governmental bodies and levels of government that involve relevant non-governmental stakeholders to ensure synergies and effective implementation of gender equality initiatives.

3. Integrate evidence-based assessments of gender impacts and considerations into various dimensions of public governance (for example, public procurement, public consultation and service delivery management) and at early stages of all phases of the policy cycle (for example, by aligning *ex ante* assessments of gender impacts with broader government-wide policy development processes, such as regulatory impact assessment), as appropriate.

4. Consider integration of the gender perspective in all phases of the budget cycle, as appropriate, so that transparency regarding gender-relevant resource allocation decisions is maximised.

II. RECOMMENDS that Adherents **strengthen accountability and oversight mechanisms** for gender equality and mainstreaming initiatives across and within government bodies. To this effect, Adherents should:

1. Consider establishing or strengthening capacity of independent institutions (such as Independent Commissions, Supreme Audit Institutions, Ombuds Offices), and advisory bodies (e.g., Government councils) to monitor the implementation of gender equality strategies, integrate gender issues in policy-making, and facilitate regular reporting, audits and measurement. To be effective, such oversight should be undertaken in a balanced manner and avoid prescriptive approaches to foster continuous improvement while enabling to track progress in gender equality.
2. Strengthen the evidence base and systematically measure progress towards gender equality performance, based on gender impact indicators and measurable outcomes, by:
 - i) developing and implementing evaluation, measurement and accountability frameworks and indicators and collecting data to regularly assess and report on performance of

gender equality and mainstreaming strategies, initiatives, public policies and programmes at appropriate levels of government. Consider building capacity of public institutions based on these evaluations;

- ii) actively promoting data dissemination and ensuring affordable, effective and timely access to performance information on gender equality and mainstreaming, that allows for tracking results against targets, monitoring progress towards socio-economic development and for comparison with international and other benchmarks; and
- iii) increasing co-ordination among data collecting and producing bodies and collaboration with relevant stakeholders with a view to developing better gender impact indicators.

3. Encourage greater role of parliaments and parliamentary committees to support progress in gender equality, for example, by integrating gender perspectives in parliamentary practices, legislation and budgets, by promoting legislative initiatives focusing on gender equality and by providing oversight of the implementation of gender equality and mainstreaming strategies and initiatives.

4. Establish or maintain effective, independent, impartial and efficient complaint and appeal mechanisms to protect rights for gender equality and consider complaints in an efficient, competent and impartial manner.

III. RECOMMENDS that Adherents **consider measures to achieve gender balanced representation in decision making positions in public life** by encouraging greater participation of women in government at all levels, as well as in parliaments, judiciaries and other public institutions. To this effect, Adherents should:

- 1. Embed a political commitment at the highest level to promote gender equality in public life, as appropriate, by developing a comprehensive framework to encourage balanced representation of women and men in public decision making positions by:
 - i) considering comprehensive (transitional or correctional) regulatory or voluntary measures to promote gender diversity in parliamentary and executive bodies, including in parliamentary committees and leadership posts. For example, based on good practices and as appropriate, these measures can include disclosure requirements, quotas, voluntary targets, parity laws, alternating the sexes on the party list and linking gender ratios in political parties to their access to public funding. Considering penalties for non-compliance can be important to ensure the effectiveness of such measures;
 - ii) introducing measures, as appropriate, to enable equal access to opportunities in senior public service and judicial appointments such as disclosure requirements, target setting or quotas, while ensuring a transparent and merit-based approach in judicial and senior public sector appointments through open competition, clear recruitment standards and wide vacancy advertisement;
 - iii) mainstreaming work-life balance and family-friendly work practices at the top level in public institutions and promoting gender-sensitive working conditions, for example, by reviewing internal procedures of public institutions, reconsidering traditional working hours, developing schemes to support the reconciliation of family and professional obligations, providing incentives to men to take available care leave and flexible work entitlements; and
 - iv) facilitating capacity and leadership development opportunities, mentoring, networking and other training programmes in public institutions, promoting female role models in public life and encouraging active engagement of men in promoting gender equality.
- 2. Systematically monitor gender balance in public institutions, including in leadership positions and different occupational groups, through regular data collection, such as the use of employee surveys, and reassess its alignment with overall gender equality objectives and priorities, taking into account the results of evaluations (see also recommendation II.2).

3. Consider measures to tackle the root causes of barriers to women's access to decision-making positions, and to improve women's image in society by developing information campaigns and awareness-raising programmes about gender stereotypes, conscious and unconscious biases and social and economic benefits of gender equality while addressing double or multiple discrimination.

IV. RECOMMENDS that Adherents **take adequate measures to improve the gender equality in public employment**. To this effect, Adherents should:

1. Promote the flexibility, transparency, and fairness of public employment systems and policies to ensure fair pay and equal opportunities for women and men with a mix of backgrounds and experience.
2. Develop both comprehensive and more cause-specific measures to address any gender pay gap in the public sector and horizontal occupational segregation, as appropriate through:
 - i) enacting pay equality and equity laws and regulations, tools and regular pay assessments in public sector institutions, including the identification of the predominantly female and male job classes in the public sector, and the evaluation of compensation differences among them and of the need for adjustments;
 - ii) performing regular and objective desk audits, targeting low-paid and/or female-dominated sectors to ensure pay equality and equity, and implementing policy recommendations based on their results; and
 - iii) ensuring effective channels of recourse for challenging the gender wage gap in the public sector as appropriate, for example by considering independent complaint and legal recourse mechanisms for non-compliance.
3. Promote merit-based recruitment; consider positive policies and practices to ensure a balanced representation of men and women in each occupational group in public sector employment; and, develop concrete measures to ensure the effective removal of the implicit barriers within hiring and staffing processes, where appropriate and necessary.
4. Establish clear institutional roles and responsibilities for promoting gender balance in the public sector, including independent recourse and appeal mechanisms, which should be adequately funded, resourced, and linked to executive teams to ensure their effectiveness.
5. Raise awareness of gender equality considerations among public sector managers and enhance management and executive accountability to ensure gender balance at all levels and occupational groups, and deal with gender equality issues in workplaces, including through performance management frameworks.

V. RECOMMENDS that Adherents strengthen international co-operation through continuously sharing knowledge, lessons learned and good practices on gender equality and mainstreaming initiatives in public institutions.

VI. INVITES the Secretary-General to disseminate the Recommendation.

VII. INVITES Adherents to disseminate the Recommendation at all levels of government.

VIII. INVITES non-Adherents to take due account of and adhere to the Recommendation.

IX. INSTRUCTS the Public Governance Committee to monitor, in co-operation with the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee, the implementation of this Recommendation, including through the development and use of benchmark indicators and country reviews and, report thereon to Council at the same time as the implementation of the Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Employment, Education and Entrepreneurship [C/MIN(2013)5/FINAL] will be reported on and regularly, thereafter.

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