

Gender for sustainable development

AN INTEGRATED POLICY AGENDA

- ▶ Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a universal policy goal and a systemic approach to mainstreaming gender at all levels would spur progress on the Sustainable Development Goals
- ▶ Discriminatory legislation and social norms must be removed and replaced by frameworks and social institutions that can promote women's economic empowerment in both private and public sectors
- ▶ Responsible business conduct initiatives address the environmental impact of business activity, and now should consider the interlinkages between gender equality and sustainability goals
- ▶ Policymakers should apply a gender-sustainability lens to their trade, investment and development co-operation policies
- ▶ More action is needed in sectors that are relatively gender-blind, such as energy and infrastructure

What's at issue?

Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a universal policy goal. It is a key pillar of inclusive growth initiatives and of the 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goal 5), with benefits for every citizen. While in many OECD countries income and labour market participation gap between women and men has decreased in recent decades, gender gaps in economic life remain vast in all countries. Major deficits are particularly pronounced on several dimensions of empowerment, such as access to leadership (SDG 5.5), asset ownership and control of land (SDG 5a), and on social and physical infrastructure. In many non-OECD countries discriminatory legislation on ownership rights and limited access to decision making persist in both the public and private sectors. Furthermore, discriminatory social norms affect women's development throughout

their lives and may badly undermine their economic empowerment.

Getting domestic policies right is key to address these challenges. However, gender equality also has an important international dimension. We are starting to understand the impact of global trade and investment on women's economic empowerment, for instance, and this remains an important area for further research. Global value chains (GVCs) have helped create new employment opportunities for women in developing countries, in such sectors as electronics assembly and garments, but sometimes under detrimental working conditions. Digitalisation may create new opportunities for women to participate in international trade, but a gender divide persists in access to technology. Unequal access to finance, especially trade finance, is common in all economies.

Take also environmental trends. Adverse effects of climate change, deforestation, air and water pollution and other forms of environmental damage often affect lower income groups in developing countries. Girls and women can be most affected due to their traditional roles in cooking, gathering water and biofuel for the household. Environmental pressures can also make women vulnerable by threatening the subsistence agriculture on which they depend much more often than men.

What should policymakers do?

More concerted and determined efforts are needed to mainstream gender right across the policy spectrum, from education, social protection, and labour markets to property rights, tax, and infrastructure. A system-wide transformation is required, combining leadership and commitment from



OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría discusses the challenges of gender inequality on International Women's Day 8 March. Watch the video at <https://youtu.be/Q14XikZRQIE>

the highest levels, tailored resource allocation and increased capacity among stakeholders at national, subnational and international levels. As set out in the OECD Gender Initiative, the 2013 and 2015 OECD Council Gender Recommendations and in the 2030 Agenda, countries can achieve progress by using solid institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks, such as linking gender and green budgeting tools. They should of course root out discriminatory laws, replace them with equitable legal frameworks and create social institutions in support of these systemic changes. This core policy response, combined with community-wide action, can open new pathways for achieving gender equality goals. However, monitoring implementation and progress is key.

At an international level, **governments should continue to step up their international co-operation** on gender equality and SDG actions, including in multilateral settings, where there is scope for better policy integration. Take global value chains, for instance. Thanks in part to initiatives by the OECD—our Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and work on due diligence in supply chains, for instance—and by the UN, greater consideration is now being given to gender issues in sectors that have a large female presence, such as agriculture and textiles. But our understanding of how trade impacts women—as workers, consumers and traders—is still needed if we are to create better policies. Moreover, while initiatives aimed at responsible business conduct squarely address environmental impacts, closer attention needs to be paid to the interlinkages between gender equality and sustainability goals.

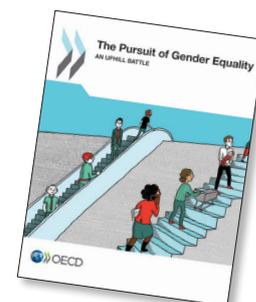
In fact, on the environmental front generally, better targeting of aid within development co-operation efforts can strengthen the so-called “gender-sustainability” nexus. We have found that less than a quarter of official development assistance (ODA) in the economic and productive sectors targeted gender equality as a primary or secondary objective in 2013-14.

More action is clearly needed particularly in the energy and transport sectors, which remain largely gender-blind in so far as women’s specific needs and perspectives are rarely taken into account, and where women are still largely cut out of representative, decision-making and policy-shaping roles. Compare this to agriculture, where some 51% of aid was targeted at gender equality and women’s empowerment in 2013-14. Climate finance also requires action: in 2014, 31% of DAC members’ bilateral ODA for climate change also targeted gender equality objectives, though only 3% set gender as a principal objective.

Mainstreaming means that **policymakers should apply a gender and sustainability lens** to all their international policies, while monitoring and assessing everything from

trade, foreign investment and development co-operation, to energy and environmental policies. For the OECD this means wearing a gender-sustainability lens too, to gather further evidence and provide meaningful policy analysis in all areas of the SDGs. A special focus should be placed on disadvantaged women, to reinforce inclusiveness and honour the 2030 Agenda’s cardinal principle of leaving no one behind.

Improving how policies work together is fundamental. In fact, by applying a framework for policy coherence for sustainable development, as called for under SDG 17.14, policymakers can identify synergies between different domestic and international policies that can help them advance towards both gender equality and sustainability goals. For instance, it shows how development and foreign investment efforts can become more effective in boosting female participation in “green” labour markets, if they are also backed by education policies that encourage girls and women to study science technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). It is by leveraging such synergies within the SDGs that gender can be systematically mainstreamed as part of implementing a successful 2030 Agenda.



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