Background and Forum’s Structure*

Equal economic opportunities for both men and women lead to stronger and sustainable growth through increased labour productivity and human capital. However, despite numerous improvements in women’s outcomes there are still many gender gaps in economic opportunities.

The OECD Gender Initiative was launched to explore economic aspects of gender equality and develop knowledge on why barriers to greater equality persist, focusing on three key dimensions: education, employment and entrepreneurship (“the three Es”). The Gender Initiative also identifies policy practices that can reduce the gender gaps in economies around the world.

The Forum “Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now” brings together leading policy makers and representatives from business and civil society to give their views on the crucial steps that governments and the private sector should undertake to achieve greater gender equality in economic opportunities.

The Forum is envisaged as a one day event structured around three panels. The first panel will focus on the contribution of gender equality to economic growth; the second will look at gender equality from a business angle; the third will debate ways to address gender stereotypes.

09:00 - 09:30  Opening Remarks: The OECD Gender Initiative

Welcoming remarks by Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD, will open this forum that marks the launch of the OECD publication, “Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now”.

09:30 - 11:00  Panel session 1: The economic case for gender equality

Reducing persistent gender inequalities is imperative not just because of fairness and equity but also out of economic necessity. Improved educational attainment among women has boosted economic growth but greater participation in the labour market, more equal labour market outcomes and a more efficient use of women’s skills are needed to ensure continued economic growth and provide governments with additional, much needed tax revenue and social security contributions as the population ages.

Proposed issues for discussion: What should governments, political leaders and individuals do to enhance the gender balance in economic opportunities? How have women been affected by the crisis? How can governments make sure that fiscal consolidation and public sector spending cuts do not hinder female participation in the labour market?

Moderator: Mr. Anthony Gooch, Director of Public Affairs and Communications, OECD

Speakers:

Ms. Elsa Fornero, Minister of Labour and Welfare, Italy

Mr. Ulf Kristersson, Minister for Social Security, Sweden

Ms. Jennifer Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Australia

Ms. Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, Minister of Women's Rights and Government spokesperson, France
11:00 - 11:15  
**COFFEE/TEA**

11:15 - 12:45  
**Panel session 2: Advancing Women in Business**

**Introduction:** Ms. Martine Durand, Chief Statistician and Director of Statistics Directorate, OECD

Unleashing women’s potential in the workplace bears significant economic gains for companies, as well as for societies as a whole. By promoting more women into senior positions, companies can tap into the best talent, enhance leadership through diversity, achieve a better understanding of consumer markets and ultimately improve their performance.

**Proposed issues for discussion:** What are the ongoing obstacles to progress in advancing women in business? What approaches are being successfully used by companies and business organisations to promote gender diversity in leadership positions? What are the key public policies that enable employer best practices? Women on Boards: should governments step in when employers dither in getting women to the top?

**Moderator:** Ms. Heather McGregor, Managing Director of Taylor Bennett and Financial Times columnist

**Speakers:**

Mrs. Anniken Huitfeldt, Minister of Labour, Norway

Mr. Roger Dassen RA, Global Managing Director Clients, Services & Talent, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Ltd

Ms. Frances O’Grady, General Secretary of the British Trades Union Congress, United Kingdom

Ms. Kaori Sasaki, Founder & CEO of ewoman; Founder & President of UNICUL International Inc.; Chair, Committee for the International Conference for Women in Business, Japan

13:00 - 14:30  
**LUNCH**
Panel session 3: Boys, Girls and Stereotypes

Introduction: Ms. Barbara Ischinger, Director for Education, OECD

Achieving gender equality in education and a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men will involve changing norms, culture, mindsets, and attitudes. Such changes involve individual choices and take time, but policy and dissemination of evidence have a role to play.

Proposed issues for discussion: Attitudes and aspirations are formed early in life. What can schools and parents do to change gender stereotypes and attitudes among children? How can girls be attracted to typically male fields of study and vice versa? What are effective ways of raising awareness of gender biases that restrict the economic and social role of girls and women?

Moderator: Ms. Alison Smale, Executive Editor of the International Herald Tribune

Speakers:

Mr. Jaak Aaviksoo, Minister of Education and Research, Estonia

Mr. Manu Sareen, Minister for Gender Equality, Denmark

Ms. Brigitte Grésy, Observatoire de la parité et Conseil supérieur de l'égalité professionnelle, France

Ms. Ripa Rashid, Vice President, Global Workforce Diversity and Inclusion, Time Warner Inc., United States

16:10 - 16:30 Closing remarks

Mr. John P. Martin, Director for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, OECD

Mrs. Jeri Guthrie-Corn, Chargé d’Affaires, Permanent Delegation of the United States to the OECD

Ms. Daniela Bankier, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, DG Justice, European Commission

*Interpretation in English and French will be provided during the event.