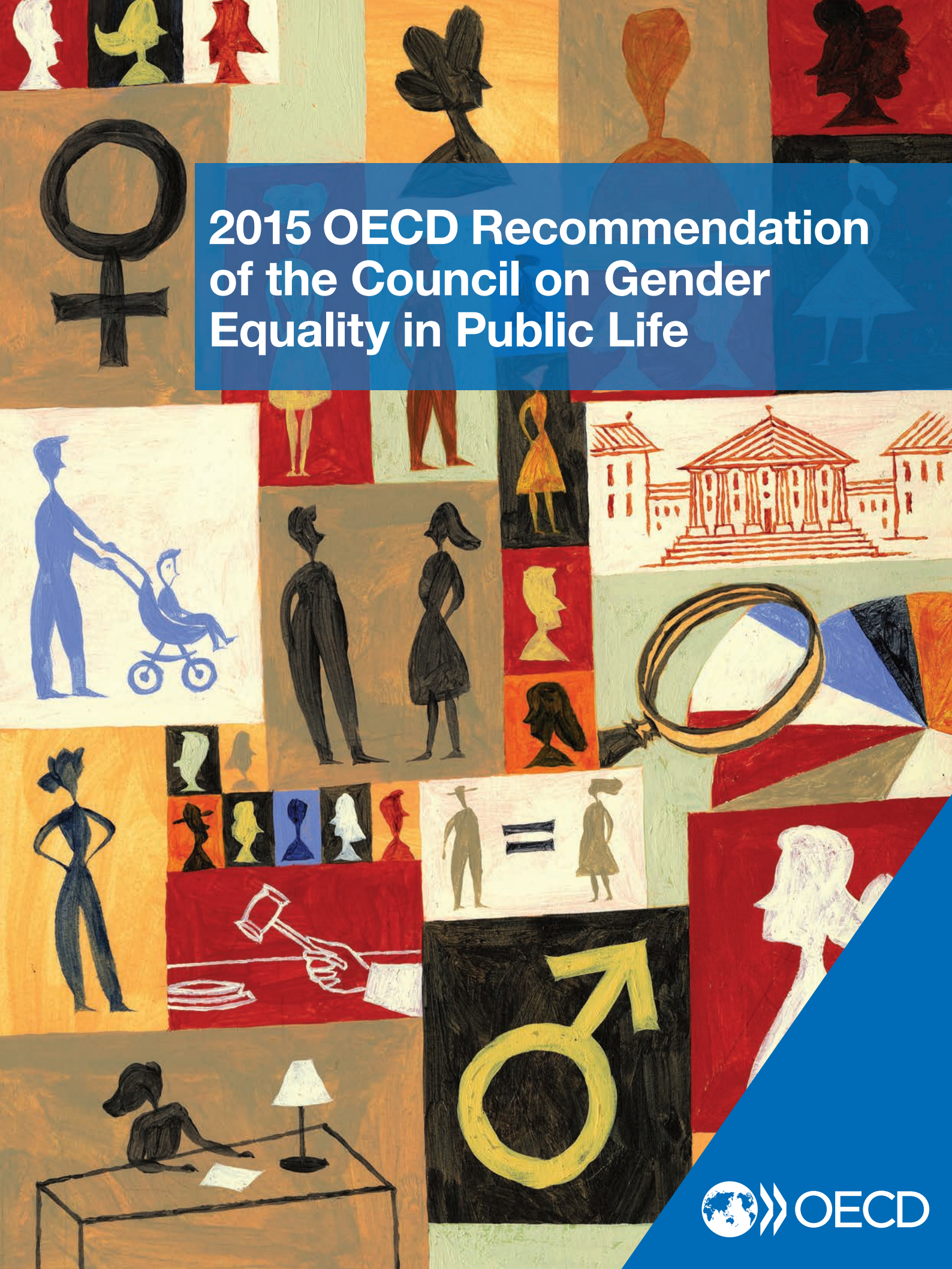
2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life



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FOREWORD BY THE OECD SECRETARY-GENERAL

There is growing awareness among the global community that gender equality is a cornerstone of inclusive growth. Gender-balanced leadership and gender-responsive policy making are more likely to ensure that the benefits of growth are shared equally. Women's full involvement in decision-making and agenda-setting are crucial for adequately reflecting the priorities and needs of all members of society. It also contributes to generate greater trust of citizens in public institutions.

While governments are increasingly implementing gender equality initiatives, the pace of progress is slow and varies across countries and levels of government. Women's participation has been increasing in middle/senior management levels in many OECD countries. However, the disparities between men and women increase as one climbs the organizational ladder. Women still lag behind men in access to decision-making and leadership positions, while men continue to be underrepresented in caring professions such as nursing. While gender considerations are embedded in social sector initiatives, such goals are barely articulated when it comes to other sectors, such as transport, urban infrastructure or energy.

Governments also 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 be successful, governments need effective governance mechanisms, and sound public sector capacities to ensure effective implementation of gender equality initiatives.

In the framework of the OECD Gender Initiative, the path-breaking 2015 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Public Life complements the 2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship by focusing on the implementation mechanisms to ensure the policy impact. The 2015 Recommendation promotes a government-wide strategy for gender equality reform, sound mechanisms to ensure accountability and sustainability of gender initiatives, and tools and evidence to inform inclusive policy decisions. It also promotes a "whole-of-society" approach to reducing gender stereotypes, encouraging women to participate in politics and removing implicit and explicit barriers to gender equality.

This Recommendation is unique, as it provides not only governments, but also parliaments and judiciaries, with clear, timely and actionable guidelines for effectively implementing gender equality and gender mainstreaming initiatives, and for improving equal access to public leadership for women and men from diverse backgrounds.

This Recommendation was developed by the OECD Public Governance Committee, in co-operation with the OECD Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee, as a critical part of the Organisation's Inclusive Growth Initiative. This work builds on the extensive expertise developed by the Public Governance Committee and its policy communities, including the 2014 report *Women, Government and Policy-Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth.*

This Recommendation was developed through a global stakeholder consultation process with OECD Committees, government officials, parliamentarians, representatives of the judiciary, experts and civil society organisations. It represents the political will of OECD member countries to promote gender equality to achieve inclusive growth. I encourage adherents to use this Recommendation actively, and implement it to achieve fairer societies and foster inclusive economic growth.

Angel Gurría

OECD Secretary-General

2015 OECD RECOMMENDATION OF THE COUNCIL ON GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

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.

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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