

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 (Programme for International Student Assessment) 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 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, means many women 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. Caring 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 to foster women's entrepreneurship. *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 the way they use transport, recycle or purchase organic food.

A guidance document for regulators and industry on how best to assess whether *Hazardous Chemicals* can harm 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 heart attack and stroke mortality rates.

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. Simply go to the Gender Topic on the OECD website (www.oecd.org/gender) and click on whichever link interests you. Alternatively, contact mark.pearson@oecd.org for further information.

