OECD

Gender Equality at Work

Gender Equality in a Changing World

Taking Stock and Moving Forward

Gender Equality in a Changing World

TAKING STOCK AND MOVING FORWARD

OECD

BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

Sizeable gender gaps persist in economic, social, and political outcomes despite significant progress (and rising awareness) over the last century in member countries of the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 tackled many of these gender gaps through policy and legislative actions, with considerable success, yet challenges persist. Continued action – including via a new strategy – is needed to achieve full gender equality in the EU.

To support these efforts, the European Commission (EC) Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers partnered with the OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS) to map existing gender gaps and identify new ways to address structural gender inequalities in future policies in EU and OECD countries. The report presents the findings of this research, including a quantitative assessment of the state of gender equality in all 43 EU and OECD countries using surveys and administrative data; a review of cross-portfolio policies that advance gender equality with the aim of dismantling silos; a conceptual framework for evaluating and assessing the impact of legal, policy and budgetary measures on gender equality; and a list of recommendations for policy action.

Gender equality at the OECD

Gender equality is a strategic priority for the OECD and is mainstreamed in its work. The OECD regularly monitors progress and policy developments supporting gender equality in member and partner countries in a range of areas, including education and skills, employment, entrepreneurship, public life, as well as agriculture, development co-operation, digitalisation, energy, environment, finance, foreign direct investment, health, housing, justice, migration, social protection, taxation, technology, trade, transport and more. The *2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship* and 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life set out principles and measures for policy makers and stakeholders to address gender inequalities in their countries. The related stocktaking reports *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle (2017)* and *Joining Forces: What's Holding us Back? (2023)*, as well as a range of country- and policy-specific reports, have helped advance member countries' efforts to promote gender equality. Together with the ILO and UN Women, the OECD also constitutes the Secretariat of the multi-stakeholder Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), which calls for equal pay for work of equal value by 2030.

The OECD is also at the forefront of expanding the coverage of gender-sensitive data. It offers a range of statistical resources to analyse gender equality, such as the *OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps*, the *OECD Family Database*, the *OECD Going Digital Toolkit*, the *Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)*, the *Gender Equality at Work* series, and data on official development assistance for gender equality and women's empowerment. The OECD recently prepared the *G7 Dashboard on Gender Gaps*, including key indicators to track progress on gender equality in various areas.

This report – *Gender Equality in a Changing World* – presents a thorough stocktaking of gender equality outcomes and policies across EU and OECD countries using these extensive datasets, as well as through new data collection and policy mapping.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the reliable support of officials working at government ministries in EU and OECD countries who completed the OECD's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality; delegates at the November 2024 meeting of the Working Party on Social Policy (WPSP) who provided feedback on chapters of the report; delegates to the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC) who coordinated responses to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and provided feedback on the report; and the many civil servants at government ministries in EU and OECD member countries who reviewed and provided feedback on the report. Their ongoing commitment to gender equality is invaluable.

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Executive summary

Gender equality is a moral and a legal imperative. It has also become an economic necessity as the world transitions through socio-demographic, economic and climate changes. This report – *Gender Equality in a Changing World* – presents a comprehensive analysis of gender equality in EU and OECD countries, and suggests paths forward to a more inclusive and prosperous future.

This report calls on governments, social partners, civil society and the private sector to renew their commitments to gender equality and advance on implementation of important legislation – such as EU Directives on work-life balance, pay transparency, gender balance in corporate leadership and combating violence against women – and to embrace innovative policy combinations that integrate gender considerations through all stages of policy design, implementation and evaluation.

While women have made remarkable gains over recent decades in education, labour markets and political representation, longstanding barriers and emerging challenges demand a renewed approach. In **education**, equitable access to quality learning is fundamental to empowering girls and boys and fostering a skilled workforce. Gender equality in the **labour market** demands policies that address inequalities in paid employment and foster the reconciliation between work and private life, including by ending inequalities in the often-overlooked realm of **unpaid labour**, including care – which is still disproportionately borne by women. In **leadership**, low numbers of women in public and private sector decision-making roles remain a barrier to achieving representative governance and management.

Health and **gender-based violence** (GBV) are equally central to the discussion. Ensuring that health systems are responsive to the unique needs of women and men in both prevention and care is vital, as is the development of effective strategies to combat GBV – a pervasive and transversal issue that undermines the safety, dignity and potential of at least one in three women throughout EU and OECD countries. GBV hinders gender equality in every single policy area.

As the world navigates the challenges and opportunities of the **green transition and the digital transformation**, this report also explores the degree to which existing indicators enable a gender lens and how a well-coordinated gender angle can support better and more effective policies moving forward. Considering emerging issues through gender-disaggregated data is crucial to ensure that economies and societies drive innovation by leveraging the diverse talents, perspectives and experiences of all people.

To overcome these challenges, the report proposes:

- **Effective gender mainstreaming, strong institutional mechanisms and robust gender-disaggregated data**. This entails embedding a gender lens into every policy field – from health to environment to social protection and beyond – to anticipate and address needs and outcomes, as well as strengthening bodies responsible for gender equality with clear mandates, co-ordination mechanisms, dedicated funding, and systematic monitoring to ensure accountability. The collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data are particularly critical to understanding gender gaps and assessing policy effectiveness.

- **Policy combinations to advance gender equality**. Governments must move beyond isolated interventions to "bundles" of complementary measures, ensuring that different policies are horizontally and vertically co-ordinated across ministries, agencies and levels of government. For example, the provision and take-up of childcare will likely be more effective if it is accompanied by parental leave reforms and public awareness campaigns that help shift the (unequal) division of unpaid care practices. These actions, in turn, would cumulatively help women's labour market outcomes.

- **Multi-stakeholder engagement** to improve processes and outcomes. The production of this report itself illustrates the importance of leveraging the insights and capacities of all actors –national and local governments, employers, trade unions, academia, civil society and women's organisations – to design and implement concrete actions that reinforce one another.

- **Extensive issue-specific policy recommendations** to support better gender equality outcomes in paid and unpaid work, education, leadership, health, gender-based violence, the digital transition and the green transition.

To support policy makers in transforming gender equality goals and data into outcomes, *Gender Equality in a Changing World* also provides a novel **conceptual framework** to guide the consideration of gender in policy combinations. The framework supports policy makers with tools and methods to evaluate the impact of their decisions on women and men across sectors, policy areas and phases of the policy cycle.

Of course, policy innovation must not overlook existing institutions and achievements. The EU's legislative acquis – including the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Pay Transparency Directive, the Directive on Gender Balance in Corporate Boards, the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, accession to the Istanbul Convention and other steps – and corresponding measures in OECD countries provide an important foundation for gender equality progress. Yet their real-world impact hinges on tailored implementation, continuous evaluation and adaptation to emerging and evolving issues. This report – and the OECD more broadly – will support the EU and national governments in overcoming these challenges in the years ahead.

1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the main findings of the report *Gender Equality in a Changing World: Taking Stock and Moving Forward*, which provides a comprehensive stocktaking of gender gaps in education, employment, unpaid work, leadership, health, violence, the green transition and the digital transformation in European Union (EU) and OECD countries – and suggests ways to move forward. The report serves as a call to policy makers, stakeholders and societies at large to reaffirm and advance the EU's historic commitments to gender equality.

1.1. Gender equality in a changing world: Meeting commitments and moving forward

The pursuit of gender equality is, first and foremost, a moral and legal imperative. In a time of rapid social and economic transformations, gender equality also serves as a cornerstone of economic growth. Technological advancements, population ageing, the climate crisis and evolving social structures are reshaping our societies (OECD, 2024[1]). These changes have sometimes been accompanied by a resurgence of attitudes that resist the transformative potential of gender equality. In some places, this has led to policy rollbacks or superficial changes that fail to address inequities meaningfully.

This environment demands a critical re-evaluation of established policies and the development of robust, integrated policy combinations that can adapt to and drive gender equality as part of a broader societal transformation. While women have made tremendous strides over past decades, persistent inequalities highlight the need for renewed commitments and innovative policy actions (OECD, 2023[2]).

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of gender equality in European Union (EU) and OECD countries and suggests paths forward. It is a call to policy makers, stakeholders and societies at large to reaffirm and advance the EU's historic commitments and progress towards gender equality. This includes Directives on work-life balance, gender balance in leadership of listed companies, pay transparency, and combating violence against women and domestic violence; the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention; and the adoption of Council Recommendations on new Barcelona targets for early childhood education and care and on access to affordable high-quality long-term care.

Most recently, building upon the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 – which laid out the promotion of gender mainstreaming throughout all EU policy fields, combined with specific actions for gender equality including the gender equality legislative acquis of the EU – the European Commission adopted the "Roadmap for Women's Rights" in March 2025. The Roadmap puts a new focus on today's gender equality challenges – in society, economy, and the revolutionary aspects of digital technologies – and sets out the key principles for women's rights for the EU. Outside of the EU, strong legislative and policy measures to advance gender equality have also been (and continue to be) taken in other OECD countries included in this report.

Central to this report is the further deepening of **gender mainstreaming** as a strategic approach to institutional reform. Gender mainstreaming involves the systematic incorporation of a gender perspective in all policy processes and at every step, ensuring that diverse needs and experiences are considered in every aspect of governance. This approach entails adapting the mechanisms through which policies are conceived, implemented and evaluated. By establishing effective institutional mechanisms, governments can better respond to the complex interplay of factors that perpetuate gender gaps.

The report also stresses the need for **multi-stakeholder involvement** – from policy makers at different levels of governments to the private sector, academia, social partners, civil society and the voices of women – to fully advance gender equality through a combination of top-down (e.g. legislation) and bottom-up (e.g. workplace practices) approaches supporting change.

A variety of policy measures to support gender equality are already in place, but there is great variation in terms of design, implementation and (evidence of) impacts. Alongside advancing efforts to ensure the best possible implementation of existing measures, a critical dimension addressed in this report is the concept of building policy combinations to advance gender equality. Traditional policy silos often fail to capture the interconnected nature of gender issues. For instance, progress in educational attainment, paid and unpaid work, and leadership and representation is interwoven with health outcomes and experiences of gender-based violence (GBV), yet policy design often looks in isolation at only one or two of these factors. Furthermore, the emerging challenges posed by the green transition and the digital transformation require that gender considerations be integrated into emerging policy solutions. Through a holistic approach, policy

makers can design and implement priority interventions that are mutually reinforcing, ensuring that progress in one area propels advancement in others.

This report explores specific policy issues that are crucial for achieving gender equality. In **education**, equitable access to quality learning is fundamental to empowering girls and boys and fostering a skilled workforce. Gender equality in the **labour market** demands policies that address inequalities in paid employment and foster the reconciliation between work and private life, including by ending inequalities in the often-overlooked realm of **unpaid work** – work that is still disproportionately borne by women. In **leadership**, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles remains a critical barrier to achieving balanced governance and inclusive progress.

Health and **GBV** are equally central to the discussion. Ensuring that health systems are responsive to the unique needs of women and men in both prevention and care is vital, as is the development of effective strategies to combat GBV – a pervasive and transversal issue that undermines the safety, dignity, and potential of at least one in three women throughout EU and OECD countries and that affects gender equality in every single policy area.

As the world navigates the challenges and opportunities of the **green transition and the digital transformation**, this report also explores the degree to which existing indicators enable a gender lens and how a well-co-ordinated gender angle can support better and more effective policies moving forward. Looking at "new" and emerging issues through gender-disaggregated data is crucial to ensure that economies and societies drive innovation by leveraging the diverse talents, perspectives and experiences of all people.

Similarly, the report consistently highlights the need to adopt an **intersectional approach** to gender equality, acknowledging the diverse and overlapping forms of discrimination that individuals may face based on gender and age, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, family configuration and other identity factors, as well as their different levels of exposure to GBV and poverty, among other risks. This approach is essential to ensure that policies are inclusive, equitable and responsive to the specific needs of all women and their lived experiences.

In a context of emerging political priorities – such as security and competition – gender equality should continue to be mainstreamed rather than be treated as a competing priority, to ensure no one is left behind.

To support policy makers in transforming gender equality goals and data into outcomes, this report provides a **conceptual framework** that guides the consideration of gender in policy combinations. The framework provides policy makers with tools and methods to evaluate the impact of their decisions on women and men across diverse sectors and policy areas. With the aim to support the best possible gender equality outcomes, it also provides policy makers with a "gender equality continuum" tool to categorise policies, and their combinations, according to their gender equality impact – on a scale ranging from "gender negative" (causing harm and implying a risk for gender equality) to "gender transformative" (meaningfully changing gender norms and power relations).

It is challenging to reinvigorate gender equality efforts at a time when progress is threatened by both longstanding structural barriers and emerging social and economic shifts. The stakes are high. Yet this only heightens the importance of historic EU commitments and renewed efforts to meet them.

This report's detailed analysis of gender mainstreaming, policy combinations and quantitative indicators provides policy makers with the tools and insights needed to forge a more gender-equitable future. It is incumbent upon policy makers and societies at large to seize this moment, rethink, reconfigure and recommit to a path where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a tangible reality for all.

1.2. Report findings and recommendations

1.2.1. Gender equality in educational outcomes remains elusive (Chapter 4)

Gender gaps in educational attainment and skills arise in early childhood, reflecting gendered socialisation processes. From an early age, girls and boys, on average, expect to pursue different careers, mirroring existing occupational segregation in labour markets. Gender gaps in basic skills – including reading, mathematics and science – also appear relatively early.

In nearly all EU and OECD countries, women have now attained higher levels of education than men, reflecting several interrelated factors, including perceived differences in labour market opportunities for women and men. These are influenced, in part, by occupational and industrial segregation, changes in social norms and economic opportunities, and educational systems and occupational degree requirements. Despite women's tremendous progress in tertiary education, notable segregation by field of study persists, with women being far less likely to pursue studies in engineering, mathematics, information and technology.

Gender gaps in literacy and numeracy also evolve over the life course, reflecting that women and men use different skills at home, at school and at work. Women and men report similar levels of participation in adult education and training. Yet among women and men who are not participating in education and training, women are much more likely than men to report that family responsibilities are the barrier to engaging in learning opportunities.

This report focuses on policy combinations governments are using to address two issues: gender segregation by field of study and gender gaps in lifelong learning and adult skills.

To overcome gender segregation by field of study, governments have implemented a range of interventions, including gender sensitive learning materials, teacher training and career counselling, dedicated career pathways, industry partnerships and targeted financial incentives. To close gender gaps in lifelong learning and adult skills, governments are turning toward flexible learning options and short-cycle programming at learning institutions, as well as policies and programmes that support a better balance between work, family and education.

Recommendations to ensure equal access to good-quality education

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Communicating with parents, schools and society around the importance and impact of gender stereotypes and norms and adopting a gender-balanced perspective at all levels of education, including in curricula, teaching materials, textbooks, teacher training and guidance.
- Ensuring zero-tolerance for GBV, harassment and bullying in all levels of education (see Section 1.2.5).
- Supporting the role of boys and men in advancing gender equality by promoting role models, challenging harmful gender stereotypes, and fostering positive attitudes towards gender equality from an early age – starting with targeted interventions in educational settings.
- Ensuring women and men have equal opportunities to access post-secondary education or training, such that no one is left behind in the changing world of work.
- Reducing gender segregation in fields of study and in jobs – which has consequences for pay and advancement – by encouraging girls and women to participate in "science, technology, engineering and mathematics" fields (STEM) and encouraging boys and men to engage in education, health and welfare fields (see Section 1.2.1) through awareness campaigns, adjustments to educational

resources, industry partnerships, social protection programmes (e.g. family leave, childcare, out-of-school care), and more.

- Promoting a better balance between women and men teachers by attracting more men into the education field by challenging stereotypes as well as improving working conditions – including wages – in teaching profession across all levels of education.

- Promoting the role of all educational stakeholders – from teachers to school directors and students, families, academia, policy makers, and others – as drivers of change in combatting gender stereotypes and gender roles.

- Ensuring equal opportunities and access to upskilling and reskilling, paying particular attention to periods when gender gaps are likely barriers (e.g. parenthood) and to the role of different stakeholders (education providers, employers, etc.) to support this process.

- Promoting gender balance in leadership roles within educational institutions, such that education policies and practices reflect diverse perspectives, including more marginalised voices (see Section 1.2.3).

- Creating action plans for the improvement of gender equality in education (see Section 1.2.7) that promote integrated, cross-sectoral policy combinations (see Chapter 3) and ensure the involvement of all relevant ministries, including but not limited to those working on education, health, GBV, social protection and youth.

- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, including via the provision of inclusive education for girls and women with disabilities, better access to learning and upskilling opportunities for women with a migrant background, and more, and by monitoring progress toward targeted objectives.

- Continuing to close gaps in (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement, including around the relationship between career expectations and education and occupation choices, as well as the impact of policy environments on gender norms and stereotypes relating to career expectations, job choices and the roles of women and men in society.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on combatting gender stereotypes and norms and on supporting women who are transitioning back into the workforce after a career break and who may require re-training or re-skilling to meet the demands of a changing labour market – also considering how different groups are affected. These are areas that could be strengthened or enhanced in the follow-up to the 2020-25 Gender Equality Strategy. The European Commission is also encouraged to monitor and enforce the EU Work-Life Balance Directive, to continue expanding flexible work arrangements for all and to combat the stereotype that work-life balance is principally for women (and men) with children. In the face of rapid technological changes, the European Commission is additionally encouraged to track and monitor the ways in which new modes of working may be either helping or hindering gender equality in these areas, and the ways in which policy changes may be able to play a role (see Chapter 9).

1.2.2. Gender gaps in paid and unpaid work persist (Chapter 5)

Women continue to fare worse than men across a range of labour market outcomes, including lower labour force participation and employment rates. Women workers also spend fewer hours in paid work and are more likely to work part-time than men, which affects pay, career progression and eligibility for contribution-based social protection (e.g. unemployment, family leave). Women, too, are less likely to be entrepreneurs than men, and even when they are self-employed, they are less likely to have employees than men. Occupational and industrial segregation is a continuing issue for both employees and entrepreneurs, as is

the gender pay gap. Indeed, on average across the EU, full-time working women earned 9% less than full-time working men at the median in 2023 (OECD, 2024[3]).

These gender gaps in labour market outcomes accumulate throughout the life course to result in lower pension entitlements and lower pension income, which puts older women at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion in most EU and OECD countries.

The differences in men's and women's labour market outcomes reflect, in part, gender norms and stereotypes around paid and unpaid work. Indeed, one of the biggest obstacles to further gender equality progress in the labour market is women's and men's different roles in providing unpaid care, particularly for children. Unpaid care obligations affect labour force participation, part-time work, occupational and industrial segregation, earnings and pay, and labour market exit.

Norms and stereotypes in paid and unpaid work – and specifically care – interact with social, policy and economic environments that disadvantage women in the labour market, including inadequate access to affordable, high-quality childcare and out-of-school care; inadequate access to long-term care for relatives; low pay in traditionally women-dominated sectors; the poor design of family leave policies in terms of pay, access (e.g. for self-employed workers) and unequal distribution of leave; tax-benefit systems that disadvantage second earners; as well as gaps, fragmentation and sub-optimal implementation of existing policies.

To try to close gender gaps in paid and unpaid work, governments have implemented and continue to invest in work-life balance policies, including better access to high-quality affordable childcare and long-term care and better access to adequately paid parental leave for both parents. In addition, governments have intervened to build entrepreneurship ecosystems that seek to support women entrepreneurs and improve the quality of their businesses, to encourage or mandate gender pay gap reporting by firms, and to provide care credits to offset the negative impacts of care-related leave on pension entitlements and earnings.

Recommendations to promote equal opportunities in labour markets

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Adopting and implementing legislation guaranteeing equal treatment of women and men workers (e.g. ratification of ILO Convention 156) and protecting women from gender-based discrimination in employment, entrepreneurship and beyond (e.g. mainstreaming and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – CEDAW).
- Challenging gender stereotypes and norms around paid and unpaid work through awareness campaigns, adjustments to media standards, family leave, and more.
- Combating all forms of violence and harassment related to work – perpetrated by co-workers, employers or third-parties (such as clients, customers, patients, service users, students or parents, members of the public, or other service providers) – to ensure equal and safe working conditions and opportunities for women and men in all sectors and occupations, including by fully implementing legislation to ensure a work environment free from violence and harassment (e.g. ILO Convention 190); supporting occupational health and safety, ensuring multi-sectoral social dialogue and multi-stakeholder co-operation to counter violence and harassment at work; and promoting actions to tackle GBV at a broader societal level.
- Building strong, comprehensive and resilient care infrastructure across the life course (e.g. childcare, out-of-school care, and long-term care), while strengthening and improving existing policies on care and families (including ensuring adequate paid leave around childbirth and support for parents with disabilities) and ensuring fair remuneration of care jobs

- Tackling gender segregation by field of study (see Section 1.2.1).

- Implementing policies and programmes to ensure women and men have equal opportunities for career advancement (see Section 1.2.3), including encouraging and training companies to embed transparency and gender-equality criteria into selection, recruitment, retention and promotion processes (e.g. "opt-out" mechanisms for promotion, diversity and inclusion committees, tailored hiring practices, training, mentorship and networking).

- Closing gender pay gaps by addressing gender segregation in jobs; tackling the undervaluation of jobs largely done by women; eliminating discrimination; and promoting pay transparency to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

- Encouraging gender equality within firms and supporting family-friendly workplaces by promoting or enforcing flexible working arrangements (e.g. part-time, flexible hours, teleworking and job sharing), including by granting all employees a right to request flexible working; encouraging social partners to cover workplace flexibility in collective bargaining agreements; and/or helping companies change their work organisation, through the exchange of best practice and information campaigns,

- Supporting employers as they embed gender equality into their workplace policies and practices.

- Ensuring gender-responsive design and governance of AI systems by requiring transparency in algorithms and auditing for discriminatory outcomes, as well as the involvement of diverse stakeholders throughout the development and deployment of AI technologies, paying attention to critical areas such as recruitment, performance evaluation, and the monitoring of flexible work arrangements.

- Supporting entrepreneurship ecosystems, ensuring that women have access to entrepreneurship assistance, networks, mentorship, counselling, knowledge and financial supports, incubators and accelerator programmes, including in green and digital sectors.

- Eliminating gender pension gaps by addressing gender pay gaps, promoting longer contribution periods of women, and promoting financial literacy among women and girls.

- Reforming tax and social protection systems to minimise disincentives for second earners (who are mainly women) to enter or return to work, such as through the elimination of family taxation and/or the promotion of individual taxation.

- Combating the constant connectedness facilitated by digitalisation by introducing and enforcing a right to disconnect (see Section 1.2.6).

- Supporting older women and men workers by ensuring access to a robust care infrastructure across the life course, including for spouses and younger and older family members.

- Encouraging employers to adopt supportive workplace practices for women experiencing menopause, such as flexible work options, awareness training, and adjustments to working conditions.

- Ensuring that the take-up of family-friendly leaves and flexible working arrangements does not negatively impact long-term social protection entitlements, including by guaranteeing that periods of caregiving contribute to the accumulation of pension rights and by preventing any form of direct or indirect discrimination in career progression, pay, or pension accrual for workers who exercise these rights.

- Creating action plans for the improvement of gender equality in paid and unpaid work (see Section 1.2.7) that promote integrated, cross-sectoral policy combinations (see Chapter 3) and ensure the involvement of all relevant ministries, including but not limited to those working on education, labour, social protection, health and GBV.

- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age,

ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, including via the provision of specific care and financial support for single mothers, among other actions, and by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives. This also requires sector-specific interventions that are tailored to different contexts and involve relevant stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, social partners, academia, civil society and the voices of women).

- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps, including around pay and earnings, wealth and the intra-household distribution of economic resources, as well as on the impacts of AI on gender equality in the labour market.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on monitoring and enforcement of existing Directives, including on pay transparency and work-life balance, including by supporting Member States with transposition, implementation, evaluation and course correction as needed in the short and longer term. The European Commission is also encouraged to advance and expand upon supports for women entrepreneurs, as this is an area that could be strengthened or enhanced in the follow-up to the 2020-25 Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendations to address inequalities in unpaid work

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities and household work between women and men, including by challenging gender stereotypes and norms (e.g. awareness campaigns, changes to educational resources, etc.) (see Section 1.2.1).
- Leveraging benefit systems to encourage the take-up of family-friendly working arrangements and leaves, including by ensuring leave benefits replace a sufficient portion of income to make take-up feasible for all workers and by providing both mothers and fathers with individual paid leave entitlements (e.g. maternal, parental and paternity leave).
- Promoting equitable access to hybrid and remote working arrangements by investing in digital infrastructure and training, and ensuring that digital work policies are designed in a way that supports gender equality rather than reinforces traditional gender roles.
- Preventing discriminatory stereotypes and unfavourable treatment of workers who take caregiving leave or use flexible working arrangements, such as hybrid and remote working arrangements.
- Investing in affordable, accessible, and good-quality early childhood education and care and out-of-school-hours care for all children, and investing in affordable, accessible and good-quality long-term care.
- Continuing to improve access to, and to spur investment on, digital tools and technologies that could reduce the burden of unpaid work.
- Improving pay and job quality and increasing formalisation of predominantly women-dominated caregiving professions and encouraging men to choose care-related careers.
- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, including via the provision of financial support for single mothers, women with disabilities, and more, and by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives.
- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps, including around the distribution of work within the household, time use and unpaid work.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on monitoring and enforcement of existing Directives around work-life balance, including supporting Member States with transposition,

implementation, evaluation and course correction as needed in the short and longer term. The European Commission is also encouraged to support Member States in achieving the Barcelona targets and in the development of frameworks for long term care, including through the implementation of the European Care Strategy. In the medium to long-term, the European Commission could consider strengthening or enhancing existing Directives over time by expanding certain concepts (e.g. shared parental leave, a widening of flexible work arrangements) or gradually increasing targets.

1.2.3. Women still lag behind men in reaching leadership roles (Chapter 6)

Gender gaps in aspirations to leadership emerge early, as boys are more likely than girls to want to work in leadership positions. Recent data, for example, show that boys account for about two-thirds of 15-year-old students stating that they expect to be working as managers and managing directors and chief executives by age 30. These gaps foreshadow women's underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making positions in adulthood, with evidence of the leaky pipeline across all areas of private sector and public leadership. Indeed, women are underrepresented among board members, CEOs and presidents in the private sector; among legislators at all levels of government; among members of cabinet and ministers; and among country leaders (e.g. presidents, prime ministers or chancellors).

Several factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership, including gendered perceptions of abilities and skills, motherhood penalties, gender differences in actual and expected behaviours, and experiences of harassment and discrimination. Other key factors play a role in specific areas. In business, they include a lack of transparency in selection criteria, gendered differences in work assignments and experiences, and a lack of women role models and mentors. In politics, gendered party recruitment, differences in electoral systems, gender gaps in campaign financing, violence and harassment of women public figures and differences in media coverage drive down women's participation. Voter bias and (mis)perceptions about the electability of women also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. For example, in a recent EU survey, one-quarter of women and men in EU countries believe that men make better political leaders than women (Eurobarometer, 2024[4]), which may contribute to negative perceptions about women's electoral chances and lead to strategic voting against women.

To tackle underrepresentation of women in leadership, governments have implemented disclosure requirements, quotas and targets supporting gender balance on boards and in politics. Simultaneous interventions to change social and policy environments in business have included promoting the transparency and objectivity of hiring and promotion procedures; engaging with social partners, civil society and educational institutions to raise awareness about gender equality in leadership; and introducing targeted sector-specific initiatives to tackle gender inequality, especially in men-dominated industries and occupations. In politics, governments implement rules around sitting times, offer on-site childcare for legislators, and work toward eliminating the violence and harassment experienced by women politicians.

Recommendations to ensure equal access to leadership

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Challenging gender norms and stereotypes, including through adjusted and revised learning materials and methods (see Section 1.2.1) and through awareness campaigns to encourage the participation of women in politics, increase the visibility of women leaders (including mothers) and ensure better understanding of the benefits of gender equality in representation.

- Supporting committed and representative leadership at all levels and across sectors – including political, public, civil society, and organisational spheres – to advance gender equality and drive policy implementation, particularly in the face of growing political backlash.

- Introducing, continuing and enforcing regulations and requirements supporting gender balance in management and in politics, including, for example, quotas and/or the application of parity-based nomination systems such as zipper methods (alternating women and men on candidate lists or appointments) to ensure sustained progress toward equal representation.

- Promoting opportunities for learning and skills development, including building networks of (women) leaders to facilitate mentorships and supporting training and skills development programmes for women considering positions of leadership.

- Implementing initiatives to combat inequalities in unpaid work (see Section 1.2.2).

- Implementing gender transformative legislation, regulations and procedures, such as equal pay, pay equity and pay transparency legislations (see Section 1.2.2).

- Ensuring the safety of women in public life and zero tolerance towards violence, hatred or harassment against women and girls, both online and offline, specifically addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) through comprehensive legal, policy and educational measures, including the development and enforcement of legal frameworks that criminalise online harassment and abuse, the regulation of digital platforms to ensure rapid response and accountability, and the integration of digital safety and respectful online behaviour into school curricula and public awareness campaigns, with particular attention to protecting women and girls in public, professional, and political life (see Section 1.2.5).

- Creating action plans for the improvement of gender equality in leadership (see Section 1.2.7) that promote integrated, cross-sectoral policy combinations (see Chapter 3) and ensure the involvement of all relevant ministries, including but not limited to those working on education, labour, social protection, health, youth, and GBV.

- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women, by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, including via the provision of tailored solutions such as awareness raising and anti-discrimination actions to ensure diversity and representation among (women) leaders, and by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives. This also requires sector-specific interventions that are tailored to different contexts and involve relevant stakeholders (e.g. policy makers, social partners, academia, civil society and the voices of women).

- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps, including around women's representation in all types of decision-making positions and GBV against women politicians and women in the workplace.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on monitoring and enforcement of existing Directives around gender balance on corporate boards, including supporting Member States with transposition, implementation, evaluation and course correction as needed in the short and longer term. The European Commission is also encouraged to develop mechanisms to support Member States in increasing the share of women in politics at all levels of government, as this is an area that could be strengthened or enhanced in the follow-up to the 2020-25 Gender Equality Strategy. The European Commission is additionally encouraged to continue to monitor and tackle TF-GBV, including by working with online platforms and digital tools providers and developers.

1.2.4. Health and healthcare access is gendered (Chapter 7)

Gender inequalities in health are complex. Women tend to live longer than men, though many of their additional years are spent in poorer health. Over the life course, there are also gendered risks and areas of concern. Women and girls face higher rates of poor self-reported physical and mental health, specific gendered risks related to pregnancy and childbirth, lower rates of participation in physical activity and

sports, and poorer experiences of healthcare – including unmet healthcare needs and misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis. In contrast, men are more likely to engage in more risky behaviours (e.g. smoking, drinking heavily, drug abuse), have higher rates of death by suicide, are more likely to be overweight or obese and exhibit a greater reluctance to use preventive medicine and seek care.

Gender norms and stereotypes around access to and use of healthcare, as well as healthy and health-reducing behaviours among both patients and healthcare providers, likely contribute to gender differences in health. Societal expectations of stoicism, for example, may be deterring men from preventive care, while women's more limited inclusion in healthcare decision-making and research may be restricting women's access to care and contributing to gaps in understanding of women's specific health needs and challenges.

Overcoming gender gaps in physical and mental health requires a comprehensive approach throughout the life course, including efforts to combat gender bias in healthcare institutions that limit women's access to healthcare and the quality of services they receive. This can be achieved, in part, by mainstreaming gender considerations into all healthcare settings – e.g. emergency, long-term treatment and preventive – and by continuing to invest in gender-disaggregated health data and research to support evidence-based changes in policies and practices among governments and healthcare providers. Combatting gender stereotypes and norms through adequate health education for girls and boys and awareness raising and training among care providers regarding gender sensitivity and unconscious biases can also help ensure girls and boys and women and men can seek and receive adequate care when they need it.

Reducing and eliminating gender gaps in physical activity also requires a range of interventions across various domains and actors, such as early involvement of girls in physical activity and sports through school curricula and extracurricular activities; investments in safe and inclusive sports complexes, fitness facilities, recreational centres and active transportation methods; and equal and predictable media coverage of women's sports to establish role models and encourage girls to see themselves as athletes.

Recommendations to ensure equal access to good health

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Understanding women's, girls', men's and boys' unmet needs in healthcare and designing tailored programmes to support specific groups.
- Challenging gender norms and stereotypes around access to and use of healthcare.
- Integrating gender-specific health needs into healthcare systems and workplace policies, through all healthcare settings, including prevention and long-term care, and throughout the life course, by improving access to information, diagnosis and treatment for gender-specific conditions (e.g. menopause, endometriosis) and by training healthcare professionals to recognise and address gender biases in medical treatment.
- Improving health outcomes for women by continuing to invest in gender-disaggregated health data (see last bullet), better incorporating women in medical research, and improving diagnostics for women.
- Creating action plans for the improvement of gender equality in health (see Section 1.2.7) that promote integrated, cross-sectoral policy combinations (see Chapter 3) and ensure the involvement of all relevant ministries, including but not limited to those working on education, health, labour, social protection, GBV, environment, sports and more.
- Building national policies and action plans that recognise the relationship between gender, climate change and health (see Section 1.2.6).
- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women, by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age,

ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, including via the provision of tailored solutions to meet the specific needs and realities of different groups – such as language support for foreign women during pregnancy, etc. – by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives. This also requires sector-specific interventions that are tailored to different contexts and involve relevant stakeholders (policy makers, social partners, academia, civil society and voices of women suffering from different forms of discrimination, etc.).

- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps around health, including but not limited to chronic conditions related to the reproductive system and health support for victims/survivors of GBV, including TF-GBV.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on (and support Member States in) investing in gender-sensitive health research in the EU, building gender-sensitive healthcare policies and promoting gender-sensitive training among healthcare professionals, as these are areas that could be strengthened or enhanced in the follow-up to the 2020-25 Gender Equality Strategy. The European Commission should also invest in expanding gender-disaggregated data collection on healthcare access, healthcare experiences and health outcomes.

1.2.5. Gender-based violence and violence against women remains pervasive (Chapter 8)

GBV remains a pervasive problem in every country. In EU countries, 36% of ever-partnered women report having experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime and 34% of ever-working women report having experienced sexual harassment at some point in the workplace. Violence and the threat of violence affect the day-to-day lives of millions of women across the EU, with 32% of women reporting feeling unsafe while walking alone at night. These numbers should be considered low estimates, as underreporting is a serious problem for measuring GBV prevalence. The majority of victims/survivors of GBV are women and the majority of perpetrators are men.

Violence against women (VAW) has become an increasingly important issue since the OECD began surveying governments on gender equality priorities in 2016. This issue has jumped from a top-three priority for 68% of the 31 OECD countries responding to the OECD questionnaire in 2016 to a top-three priority for 86% of the 43 OECD and EU countries responding in 2024. Yet the continued prevalence of VAW on the ground seems to indicate that this prioritisation has not resulted in adequate policy or programme actions, including budget commitments.

The causes and consequences of GBV are complex, and addressing such violence – including workplace harassment, IPV and sexual assault – requires co-ordinated and collaborative efforts across policy domains and across the life course. Policy combinations to tackle GBV have focused not only on providing support to victims/survivors, but also on preventing violence, addressing the perpetrators of violence, and building capacity across society to comprehensively prevent, identify and respond to violence. This means involving educational institutions, healthcare providers, social protection systems, employment supports, justice institutions, frontline service providers, and more. Emphasising integration and information sharing (while protecting data and privacy) across actors can help victims/survivors navigate a seamless network of supports and services without feeling re-traumatised at every re-telling. Campaigns on the prevalence and impacts of GBV, including sexual harassment in the workplace, may help raise awareness of the fact that such issues persist in all EU and OECD countries.

Recommendations to support women in leading lives free from violence

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, femicide, sexual violence and TF-GBV through prevention programmes, awareness

campaigns, and perpetrator programmes.

- Ensuring robust legal structures to address GBV, including implementing, amending or strengthening laws to protect women and men from all forms of violence and harassment.

- Investing in justice systems that are sensitive to GBV, including improving access to justice and strengthening the capacity of justice systems to appropriately manage cases related to GBV.

- Designing victim/survivor-centred, integrated and accessible supports and services, including the provision and take-up of integrated services (e.g. single point of access, data sharing, network structures, subnational co-ordination).

- Building the capacity of service providers to identify and address GBV, including by providing training and tools – including (digital) risk assessment tools – to relevant actors (e.g. employers, schools, unions, medical staff, legal practitioners, service and support organisations, law enforcement, etc.) to improve identification of GBV; facilitate early and targeted support; and provide an appropriate response.

- Ensuring employer support of victims/survivors, such as through regulations or obligations for employers to combat sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace (including in telework settings) and regulations for employers to support victims/survivors of GBV both inside and outside of the workplace (e.g. offering paid leave and/or flexible working arrangements for victims/survivors) (see also Chapter 5).

- Combating TF-GBV as an integral part of GBV prevention and response strategies, including by updating legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement and judicial capacity, ensuring digital platforms implement robust safety and reporting mechanisms, and expanding support services.

- Creating action plans (see Section 1.2.7) that promote integrated, cross-sectoral policy combinations (see Chapter 3) and ensure the involvement of all relevant ministries, including but not limited to those working on education, health, labour, social protection, GBV, environment and sports.

- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women, by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, which further expose women to the risk of GBV and by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives. This also requires sector-specific interventions that are tailored to different contexts and involve relevant stakeholders (policy makers, social partners, academia, civil society and voices of women suffering from different forms of discrimination, etc.).

- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps, including around gender norms and stereotypes around GBV; childhood maltreatment and abuse; abuse of older women; TF-GBV; workplace harassment and sexual assault; the nature and scope of IPV, as well as access to and use of support services and justice systems; and experiences of violence among groups of women who could be at increased risk of violence due to intersecting characteristics, such as migrant and disability status.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on supporting Member States in the transposition and implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the ILO Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work, including supporting Member States with evaluation and course correction as needed in the short and longer term. The European Commission is also encouraged to focus on harmonising legislation to ensure consistent protections for victims/survivors and on ensuring adequate funding of supports and services for victims/survivors.

1.2.6. Looking ahead: The green transition and the digital transformation present challenges and opportunities for gender equality (Chapter 9)

Achieving gender equality requires not only looking at past outcomes – it also means looking ahead at where gaps are likely to emerge. This report therefore considers two fundamental megatrends affecting EU and OECD countries: the green transition and the digital transformation.

Climate change and climate change mitigation have produced and will continue to generate significant health, economic and social costs (and benefits) across EU and OECD countries. As a result of occupational and industrial segregation, for example, job losses linked to the green transition are expected to be more pronounced for men than for women, and women are less likely to benefit from growing job opportunities in expanding green sectors. The net impact is unclear ex ante and requires close monitoring through gender-disaggregated data.

Environmental degradation, natural disasters and climate change can also lead to increased mortality for both women and men. Current estimates suggest that men are more likely to die from air pollution, while women are more likely to die from natural disasters. At the same time, however, mortality alone is a narrow definition of health impacts. To better understand the gendered health impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation beyond mortality, governments must invest in effective monitoring and in the production of gender-disaggregated data.

The digital transformation, too, will have gendered impacts on the labour market, with women and men experiencing different degrees of change (e.g. skills requirements, job tasks) and having different capacities to deal with workplace digitalisation (e.g. learn new skills or tools). As with the green transition, this is in large part because of occupational and industrial segregation. Although there is agreement that labour markets will be disrupted, there is little consensus yet on the net gendered effects.

Digital technologies that facilitate flexible working arrangements and telework are further expected to have gendered impacts, but the direction of impact is also unclear ex ante. Flexible working arrangements and telework may further entrench existing patterns of unpaid care and household responsibilities, but they may also support greater take-up among men.

Additionally, in both the green transition and the digital transformation, women are underrepresented in leadership and in research and innovation. And while opportunities and risks exist for women and girls in digital environments, TF-GBV presents a significant and growing risk, especially for women public figures.

To promote gender equality in the green and digital transitions, governments must introduce policies that span across government and across the life course. Key policy measures relate to gender stereotypes and norms around career expectations, skills and abilities and sustainable consumption. Re-training and re-skilling are also needed to adjust to changing skill needs in the labour market throughout the green transition and the digital transformation, both for those who lose their jobs and for unemployed or underemployed individuals. This includes women who exited the labour market for caregiving and who could benefit from new job opportunities. Tackling gender bias in artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning systems – for example, through legislation – can also contribute to more equitable treatment of women and men across various systems and services, including employment, health, social protection, justice and more. At the same time, embedding gender considerations into infrastructure and emergency planning could enhance women's safety, particularly by reducing the risk of GBV when using public transportation and during crises, including climate-related disasters.

Recommendations to ensure equal opportunities in the green and digital transitions

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Preparing for the climate transition with a gender lens, such as by embedding gender considerations into urban planning and infrastructure development and into disaster planning and risk preparedness, including around supports for victims/survivors of GBV (see Section 1.2.5).

- Investing in effective monitoring of the gendered health impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation (see Section 1.2.4).

- Reducing gender segregation in fields of study and skills and fostering girls' and women's acquisition of digital skills and competencies to prepare for ongoing changes in the world of work, including in the use of AI and related to the climate transition (see Section 1.2.1 and Section 1.2.2).

- Tackling online violence, including cyberbullying and TF-GBV, through prevention and detection and support of victims/survivors (see Section 1.2.5).

- Creating sectoral action plans for the improvement of gender equality (see Section 1.2.7).

- Ensuring that policies are inclusive and responsive to diversity among girls and women, by identifying and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, migration status, socio-economic background and family configurations, which may overexpose certain groups to the negative consequences of climate change or prevent them from keeping pace with the green and digital transformations, by monitoring progress towards targeted objectives. This also requires sector-specific interventions that are tailored to different contexts and involve relevant stakeholders (policy makers, social partners, academia, civil society and voices of women suffering from different forms of discrimination, etc.).

- Continuing to close (intersectional) gender data, research and measurement gaps, including around the employment impacts of green transition; the impact of the digital transformation on well-being; and gendered misinformation and disinformation.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to ensure that gender considerations are embedded into all policies and programmes and sectoral and strategic action plans relating to climate change, the green transition and the digital transformation.

1.2.7. Gender mainstreaming and institutional mechanisms to support policy combinations that advance gender equality

This report illustrates and applies the concept of policy combinations – i.e. the combination of various interventions across policy areas – to tackle gender inequalities in social and economic life. The use of such policy combinations is becoming increasingly common across EU and OECD countries as governments shift to addressing policy issues through comprehensive solutions. But getting such policy combinations to successfully address their stated goals requires strong governance and institutions. This is where insights, practices and lessons from the field of gender mainstreaming prove particularly useful – especially those relating to **strategic planning** and **whole-of-government co-ordination**. These tools and approaches can help to overcome silos, ensure cross-cutting work and facilitate data sharing.

According to the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations (see Box 1.1), most EU and OECD countries have adopted a gender equality strategy, with gender equality in paid and unpaid work and leadership as top-reported priorities. By contrast, aspects such as disaster prevention, social protection systems, natural resources and agriculture, and justice feature less frequently. Many EU and OECD countries are also increasingly embedding an intersectional focus into their gender equality strategies.

Sector-specific strategies (e.g. education, health, environment, etc.) and broader national strategies (e.g. data, foresight, disaster management, recovery and resilience, etc.) can be complementary tools to gender equality strategies. By integrating gender equality considerations into sectoral plans, governments can make substantial progress toward reducing or eliminating gender gaps and inequalities. Yet, across

EU and OECD countries, gender equality considerations are rarely systematically embedded into sectoral plans.

There is no standard blueprint for whole-of-government co-ordination of gender equality policies across EU and OECD countries, with co-ordination bodies taking many shapes and sizes, involving many different types of stakeholders, and using many different approaches. To ensure that efforts are not duplicated by multiple levels of government and that key concerns are not accidentally overlooked through a lack of communication or collaboration, both horizontal and vertical co-ordination within and between governments can be useful.

Other tools and approaches within gender mainstreaming – such as gender impact assessments (GIAs), gender budgeting, legislative requirements, gender-sensitive data and evidence – can also be applied throughout the policy cycle and across policy combinations to ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive, both individually and collectively.

Gender mainstreaming may additionally need to be applied within subnational governments to ensure a comprehensive and complete application of gender considerations across all interventions.

Recommendations to ensure gender equality is effectively embedded and advanced in policy and decision making

EU Member States and OECD Member States are encouraged to act on, and the European Commission is encouraged to support progress at the EU and Member State level in:

- Supporting the continued development and implementation of stand-alone national gender equality strategies as well as the integration of gender equality objectives within sector-specific strategies (e.g. education, health, environment, etc.) and broader national strategies (e.g. data, foresight, disaster management, recovery and resilience, etc.).
- Ensuring gender equality strategies are enforceable, properly funded and resourced, and can be effectively evaluated, including through the use of independent equality bodies.
- Building and properly financing and resourcing whole-of-government co-ordination bodies for gender equality policies, such as a specialised institutional infrastructure for gender equality and gender mainstreaming, while ensuring co-ordinating bodies have clear and accountable roles and responsibilities from the outset.
- Ensuring the right level of representation and the right level of resources for whole-of-government co-ordination bodies to appropriately and effectively influence broader policy and priority setting and translate decisions into concrete follow-up actions.
- Supporting the use of gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and in budgets.
- Providing sustainable funding for gender equality policies, and for women's rights organisations.
- Continuing to invest in gender-sensitive research, data collection, design and planning (with an intersectional approach), including the use of gender data strategies.

Going forward, the European Commission is encouraged to focus on building gender equality strategies, action plans and frameworks that are properly financed and resourced, enforceable and accountable. The European Commission could, for example, look toward building commitment trackers to highlight progress to date and anticipated or assessed impacts, thereby drawing attention to the importance of gender equality policies and programmes and promoting transparency.

In developing new strategies, action plans and frameworks, the European Commission should continue to advance on the many key gender equality policies and programmes that are already in place in most EU and OECD countries, including by improving their implementation or effectiveness (e.g. through

adjustment to policy parameters or targeted low-cost complementary initiatives, such as increased awareness, information dissemination, administrative support).

The European Commission should also consider investing in more rigorous evaluation methods across policy areas, supporting or encouraging random or quasi-random evaluation methods to enable estimation of causal impacts and a deeper understanding of "what works" on the ground, and for whom.

1.3. A strong foundation: Building on existing Directives and Recommendations

The road to gender equality has been far too long, meandering and full of roadblocks. Yet key international commitments in EU and OECD countries have helped to build a foundation upon which shared values can produce meaningful change.

In recent years, the EU has made historic progress in advancing gender equality with a series of impactful legislation, including:

- the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019) (European Union, 2019[5]), which aims to improve work-life balance for parents and caregivers, with provisions like paid parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and the right to request changes to working hours (see Chapter 5).
- the Directive on Gender Balance in Corporate Boards (2022) (European Union, 2022[6]), which sets targets for increasing the representation of women on corporate boards, promoting gender diversity in decision-making roles within large companies (see Chapter 6).
- the Pay Transparency Directive (2023) (European Union, 2023[7]), which seeks to address the gender pay gap by requiring companies to be more transparent about pay structures and offering tools to employees to assess and challenge pay disparities (see Chapter 5).
- the Directive on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2024) (European Union, 2024[8]), which aims to combat GBV, providing legal frameworks for preventing violence, supporting victims, and holding perpetrators accountable (see Chapter 8).

The EU also joined the Istanbul Convention in 2023 (European Union, 2017[9]; European Union, 2017[10]; European Union, 2023[11]; European Union, 2023[12]).

Important steps have additionally been taken by the EU to tackle gender gaps in paid and unpaid work through the adoption of the Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care (ECEC) (European Union, 2019[13]), revisions to the Barcelona targets for childcare (European Commission, 2022[14]), the adoption of the Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care (European Union, 2022[15]), related to the European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers adopted in 2022. The Council Recommendation on ECEC focuses on ensuring that all children have access to high-quality early childhood education and care, encouraging EU Member States to invest in ECEC systems that are inclusive, affordable, and supportive of children's development, helping to close educational gaps and support working parents. The Barcelona targets, originally set in 2002, aimed to increase the availability of childcare services. The revisions – adopted in 2022 – include more ambitious targets for the provision of childcare for children under the age of three and for children aged three to primary school age, as well as recommendations on affordability, accessibility and quality and expanding services in, for instance, out-of-school care. The Council Recommendation on access to affordable, high-quality long-term care focuses on ensuring that people, especially older adults and those with disability, have access to affordable, high-quality long-term care. It encourages Member States to improve care services, enhance the quality of care, and make long-term care more accessible, particularly for vulnerable populations. This aims to address the challenges posed by an ageing population.

Most recently, the European Commission unveiled its "Roadmap for Women's Rights" on 7 March 2025, outlining a comprehensive strategy to enhance gender equality across the EU (European Commission,

2025[16]). This Roadmap builds upon the past achievements of the EU (see above) and the 2020-25 Gender Equality Strategy (see Chapter 2) (European Commission, 2020[17]), setting out eight key objectives, including freedom from GBV; the highest standards of health; equal pay and economic empowerment; work-life balance and care; equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions; quality and inclusive education; political participation and equal representation; and institutional mechanisms to deliver on women's rights.

Together, the EU's recent actions, strategies and roadmaps reflect the EU's ongoing efforts to foster gender equality and protect women's rights. And these recent actions, strategies and roadmaps are part of a broader EU gender equality acquis that remains a key tool in preventing discrimination between women and men, including the Directive on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in matters of Employment and Occupation, the Directive on Safety and Health at Work of Pregnant Workers and Workers who have Recently Given Birth or are Breastfeeding, the Directive on Equal Treatment of Self-Employed Workers, the Directive on Equal Treatment in Social Security Systems, the Directive Prohibiting Discrimination based on Sex in the Access To and Supply of Goods and Services, Article 23 of the EU Charter guaranteeing gender equality in all areas, Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) on equal pay for equal work, Articles 8 and 10 of the TFEU on gender mainstreaming and combating discrimination, and much case law from the European Court of Justice.

The OECD is also committed to ongoing action to ensure gender equality, as evidence by the 2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship (OECD, 2017[18]) and the 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life (OECD, 2016[19]).

The 2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship aims to eliminate barriers to gender equality and create opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, including ensuring equal access to education, delivering gender-sensitive curricula, eliminating gender stereotypes, reducing gender pay gaps, promoting work-life balance, combating discrimination and harassment, enhancing women's career development, supporting women entrepreneurs, improving women's' access to finance, removing gender-biased legal and structural barriers, and promoting networking and mentorship.

The 2015 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Public Life provides guidelines and best practices for improving gender equality in political and public decision-making processes, including increasing women's representation in political and public life, promoting gender-inclusive policies, supporting work-life balance for political leaders, enhancing gender-sensitive governance, encouraging monitoring and accountability, and enhancing public awareness and education.

In 2023, the OECD advanced its work on gender equality when Ministers welcomed a formal gender strategy at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting, titled "OECD Contribution to Promoting Gender Equality" (OECD, 2023[20]). This "OECD Gender Strategy" sets out the opportunities for the OECD to boost its actions in support of gender equality, structured around four main pillars: data, mainstreaming, policy and outreach. An important part of the Gender Strategy is that it focuses on mainstreaming gender throughout the OECD, including in Directorates that have not traditionally worked on gender.

Through these recommendations and this strategy, the OECD aims to help member country governments empower women, enhance their participation in the economy, and achieve inclusive and sustainable growth for all.

1.4. Guidance for readers

This report is structured in two main parts. Part 1 describes and discusses gender mainstreaming and institutional mechanisms to close gender gaps in EU and OECD countries. Part 2 practically applies these

approaches to specific policy areas, emphasising the use of horizontal co-ordination and policy combinations to improve gender equality and empower women and girls.

Part 1 consists of two chapters: Chapter 2 reviews tools for building policy combinations to advance gender equality, including practices and approaches from the field of gender mainstreaming, focusing specifically on strategic planning and co-ordination. Chapter 3 presents a conceptual framework for embedding gender considerations into policy combinations. A sample tool supports the operationalisation of selected priority considerations.

Part 2 focuses on specific policy areas: educational attainment and skills (Chapter 4); paid and unpaid work (Chapter 5); leadership and representation (Chapter 6); health (Chapter 7); gender-based violence (Chapter 8); and the green transition and the digital transformation (Chapter 9). Each chapter contains a background section and a policy combinations section.

The background sections of Chapters 4-9 explore gender gaps in outcomes using a life course approach, emphasising that many gender gaps are the product of experiences accumulated throughout the life course. The background sections leverage gender-disaggregated data from multiple sources and use recent research to draw attention to key gender inequalities. Spotlights on intersectionality are presented to highlight that disadvantages may be compounding. An Online Annex with supplementary data is made available for each chapter to support the continued availability and accessibility of gender-disaggregated data.

The policy combinations sections of Chapters 4-9 are structured around key gender equality goals and centre around policy tables. These policy tables are composed of policy options relating to the identified policy goals. These policy tables are designed to provide an overview of possible actions that EU and OECD countries have adopted or can adopt to make progress toward gender equality. In this respect, they are not intended as comprehensive lists and not all options may be relevant in specific contexts. The tables are instead designed to provide an entry point for understanding and conceptualising co-ordinated action and interventions across domains and policy areas and to encourage integrated, cross-sectoral approaches for the achievement of gender equality. Although policy tables only present policy options relating to between two and four gender equality goals, the principles used to develop the policy tables (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) can be applied to any policy goal – whether narrow or broad in scope.

Structurally, the policy tables are designed to highlight two key features of policy co-ordination: feedback loops and the importance of the life course.

- Feedback loops: Gender gaps in one area have repercussions in other areas. Gender segregation in fields of study (Chapter 4), for example, contributes to occupational and industrial segregation (Chapter 5), which itself contributes to gender gaps in pay, pensions, leadership and representation (Chapters 5 and 6) and gender differences in the impacts of the green and digital transition (Chapter 9).
- Life course: As individuals and families move through the life course, they experience different needs and life events – such as transitions from school into work, childbirth, retirement, etc. Governments need to ensure that all individuals and families are supported at all life stages. For example, care systems need to be well-developed to support parents from birth to old age, including in terms of childbirth, parental leave, early learning and childcare, school starts and out-of-school care. Families also need to be supported as their own parents age and require elder care and access to long-term care.

Case studies of policy combinations in EU and OECD countries follow the policy tables. These case studies, selected to showcase different policy approaches, are based on responses to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality (see Box 1.1) as well as desk research by the OECD Secretariat. The geographic diversity of the case studies highlights that all EU and OECD countries have important lessons that can be shared. Spotlights on intersectionality are also

provided to highlight targeted policies, complementary programmes and mitigation strategies used to support people who face multiple disadvantage or discrimination.

> **Box 1.1. 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality**
>
> In January 2024, the OECD Secretariat distributed the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality to 43 EU and OECD countries. It was distributed to all 38 OECD countries through the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (ELSAC) and to the five EU countries that are not OECD members through the European Commission. Overall, 36 EU and OECD countries responded to the questionnaire throughout the first and second quarter of 2024. As needed, supplementary information on the remaining seven countries was completed via desk research and validated by delegations.
>
> The questionnaire consisted of three parts: a) mainstreaming gender equality, b) gender equality policy mixes and c) key challenges for gender equality. The Ministries receiving the questionnaire – typically the labour and social affairs Ministries – were strongly encouraged to consult other Ministries in the completion of the questionnaire given the cross-cutting nature of gender equality priorities and policy responses.

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2 Tools for building policy combinations to advance gender equality

This chapter applies concepts from gender mainstreaming to the development and implementation of inter-ministerial policy combinations to advance gender equality. First, the chapter presents an overview of practices, tools and approaches to gender mainstreaming. Second, the chapter zeroes in on strategic planning and co-ordination as principal approaches that are particularly useful in the development of policy combinations. The application of these approaches is contextualised with results on gender mainstreaming in EU and OECD countries from the OECD's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Key findings

- Policy combinations – across ministries and levels of government – can be an effective way to address gender inequality due to their ability to simultaneously tackle multiple cross-cutting challenges. However, getting policy combinations right requires strong governance and institutions.
- Practices, tools and concepts from the field of gender mainstreaming – such as gender impact assessments, strategic planning and horizontal and vertical co-ordination – can be helpful in building strong governance and institutions around gender equality considerations.
- As of 2024, many EU and OECD countries had already adopted relevant practices, tools and concepts from gender mainstreaming. In 2024, for instance, 31 out of 41 EU and OECD countries reported using whole-of-government gender equality strategies. Formal co-ordination systems are also regularly applied at the horizontal level in 26 out of 33 reporting countries and at the vertical level in 21 out of 34 reporting countries.
- Despite this, much work remains to be done. Countries cite various operational challenges to gender equality strategies, such as limited enforceability of strategic frameworks, the absence of data and resources, limited involvement from line ministries, and funding shortfalls against the approved action plan or strategy. Countries also report that co-ordination systems suffer from competing priorities and a lack of interest at the central level, as well as insufficient funding, capacities and expertise of policy makers.

Over the last decade, policy makers in many countries have increasingly shifted toward addressing policy issues through comprehensive solutions that combine various interventions, rather than relying on single policy tools. These policy combinations, also referred to as "policy mixes", consist of a bundle of different policy measures that contribute to a common overarching goal and that are, ideally, complementary or synergetic (Sewerin, Cashore and Howlett, 2022[1]; Rogge, Kern and Howlett, 2017[2]; Rogge and Reichardt, 2016[3]; Howlett, Vince and Del Río, 2017[4]; Cejudo and Michel, 2021[5]).

Given the cross-cutting nature of gender equality, policy combinations may be a useful approach for governments aiming to tackle persistent gender inequalities. But getting policy combinations right is challenging and requires strong governance and institutions – something that can be better achieved using gender mainstreaming.

The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows. Section 2.1 begins with a brief introduction to common practices, tools and concepts from gender mainstreaming. Section 2.2 and 2.3 then zero in on two key governance elements from the field of gender mainstreaming that could prove particularly helpful for adopting policy combinations that tackle gender inequalities: **strategic planning** and whole-of-government **co-ordination.** A third element – discussed in Section 2.1.1 – encourages the use of gender impact assessments (GIAs) throughout the policy cycle to ensure that all policies are gender-sensitive, both individually and collectively.

These three elements are given special emphasis in the context of policy combinations because they can help to overcome silos, ensure cross-cutting work, facilitate data sharing and ensure gender equality considerations are embedded into policies.

2.1. What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming is an approach that seeks to ensure that all areas of government, including government agendas, policies, programmes and practices, strategically tackle harmful gender norms,

stereotypes and gaps between women and men. It also aims to ensure government systems and practices do not inadvertently perpetuate or entrench existing gender inequalities. Gender mainstreaming helps governments make more inclusive decisions and achieve better outcomes for all.

According to the 2015 OECD Recommendations on Gender Equality in Public Life, the OECD recommends a dual approach that (a) aims to level the playing field between women and men through actions that target specific forms of gender discrimination and enable progress in the areas affected and (b) promotes the assessment of gender impacts in all governance areas from the earliest stages through to monitoring and evaluation. This recommendation recognises that targeted action is only one way in which to tackle discrimination and bias in the pipeline of policies, budgets, regulations and programmes, etc. (OECD, 2016[6]). Indeed, to ensure that policies, regulations and other strategic tools of public governance do not embed structural and systemic biases and stereotypes, gender mainstreaming also requires transformation of systems, including through:

- gender impact assessments,
- gender budgeting,
- a strong legal foundation,
- whole-of-government strategic planning,
- robust and effective co-ordination mechanisms,
- adequate resources and capacities,
- stakeholder engagement,
- high-quality and accessible gender sensitive data and evidence, and
- comprehensive monitoring and evaluation with a gender lens (OECD, 2016[6]).

Other elements can also indicate a strong government commitment to improving gender equality, including requirements to advance gender equality and remove implicit and explicit barriers in key government documents (e.g. policies and laws), gender sensitive public procurement, gender sensitive infrastructure planning and delivery, the existence of cabinet committees to lead the gender equality agenda, and the allocation of the responsibility to promote gender equality at the highest level of office. Governmental efforts to ensure that gender mainstreaming is applied across all levels of government – i.e. national, regional, municipal, provincial, state – may also prove helpful.

This section is only meant as a brief introduction to and overview of gender mainstreaming. For a more thorough review of gender mainstreaming practices, see OECD (2023[7]; 2023[8]; 2019[9]; 2023[10]; OECD, 2022[11]) and EIGE (2020[12]; 2017[13]; 2024[14]; 2023[15]). Two reports merit specific mention. First, EIGE's report "The pathway to progress: Strengthening effective structures for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU," provides an overview of institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in EU countries and offers guidance and recommendations for going forward (EIGE, 2023[15]). Second, the OECD's report "Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023" offers a practical resource to support governments and other decision-making institutions as they implement and refine gender mainstreaming (OECD, 2023[8]).

2.1.1. Gender impact assessments

Gender impact assessments (GIAs), sometimes also referred to as gender analysis, are a helpful tool for identifying the potential impacts of government decision making on women and men from diverse backgrounds. Indeed, GIAs are increasingly being viewed as a key policy making tool for promoting gender equality and are one of the most widely used tools for gender mainstreaming in OECD countries (OECD, 2023[7]).

GIAs are most effective when performed at multiple points throughout the policy process: *ex-ante*, by considering possible gender impacts of policies during the design and decision-making stage; throughout implementation, by monitoring the performance and results of policies; and *ex-post*, by evaluating the gender impact of policy outcomes (OECD, 2022[11]). GIAs can support parliaments in ensuring government performance remains on track and that government decision-making is transparent.

But policies do not exist in a vacuum. They are layered on top of one another in a complex system. For this reason, GIAs may be even more helpful when applied not only to individual policies, but also to policy combinations. In practice, this means that governments need to assess a set of policies in combination to have a holistic understanding of potential gender equality impacts. As an example, examining the impact of maternity leave policies alone is important, but it is equally important to analyse the impact of maternity leave policies in combination with other family leave policies (e.g. paternity leave, parental leave), with policies supporting the availability and affordability of childcare and with policies dictating school start ages. Indeed, these policies create a "continuum" of care that cannot be fully understood by looking at a single policy alone (ILO, 2023[16]).

According to the 2021 OECD Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance, 26 out of 34 respondent countries have a formal requirement for GIAs in place. There is, however, no one-size-fits-all approach. In some countries, GIAs are undertaken as a part of a broader regulatory impact assessment, while in other countries, they exist as a standalone exercise. Figure 2.1 shows the range of decisions that are subject to GIAs across the OECD.

Figure 2.1. Requirements for gender impact assessments (GIAs) are most common for laws and regulations

Number of countries indicating the existence of gender impact assessment (GIA) requirements, by type of document
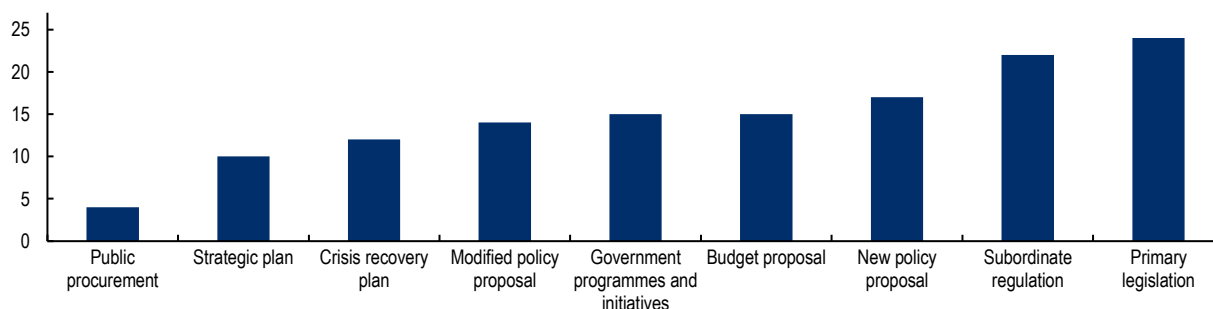
Note: Data include responses from 27 OECD countries.
Source: OECD (2023[7]), *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding us Back?*, based on 2021 OECD Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance (https://stat.link/9c15nu).

To understand how government policies and processes impact people differently, policy makers can undertake quantitative and qualitative gender and intersectional research and data analyses (see Section 2.1.8). This can include population-level statistical analyses, reviews of previous evaluations and expert advice from those targeted by the policy or programme as well as any service providers involved in delivery (OECD, 2023[8]) (see Section 2.1.7). This evidence can also inform prioritisation decisions (see Section 2.1.4). A growing recognition by policy makers across the OECD that gender inequalities may be the result of gender-based discrimination interacted with other identity-based discriminations (OECD, 2023[7]) means that considering evidence disaggregated by a range of factors in addition to gender – such as race, ethnicity, age, pregnancy status and disability – can further strengthen the impact of intended results, especially among the most marginalised groups.

To ensure that policies and programmes are designed in a way that supports gender equality outcomes, governments can also consider developing a guiding framework (e.g. mandate, guidelines, approach, methodology, etc.) for the implementation of GIAs across all policy areas, even in those areas where gender considerations are not immediately apparent to policy makers. Indeed, many policies can appear to be gender-neutral at face value, but high-quality gender data analysis can help to (a) reveal the ways in which policies may differently impact women and men and (b) identify and redress unintended consequences of policy design decisions that may undermine broader gender equality goals.

Consider, for example, a hypothetical gender-neutral parental leave policy that gives all parents – regardless of gender – the same amount of leave time and benefits. On the surface, this policy is gender neutral, but a high-quality data analysis might reveal that women are much more likely than men to take the full amount of leave, with men only taking a portion of leave or none. Further data analysis might suggest ways to redress the unintended consequences of such a policy design. For example, analysis might suggest that dedicated "use-it-or-lose-it" leave for fathers helps to increase take-up among fathers.

2.1.2. Gender budgeting

Government tax and spending decisions have powerful social, environmental and economic implications. Gender budgeting is a way for governments to ensure that decision-makers have information on how tax and spending choices impact gender equality.

As of 2022, 23 out of 38 OECD countries had introduced gender budgeting measures (OECD, 2023[10]) (see Box 2.1 for a country example from Canada). As with gender impact assessments, there is no one way to implement gender budgeting and countries tend to choose an approach that builds on the key features of their existing budgeting system. To do so, a range of tools exists, including ex ante gender impact assessment of policies, ex post gender impact assessment of policies, a gender dimension in performance setting, a gender dimension to resource allocation, and a gender needs assessment. Gender budgeting practices are also typically accompanied by standard guidelines from the central budget authority on implementation, general and/or specific gender-disaggregated data, training and capacity development, and an annual budget circular with instructions related to gender budgeting. In addition, many countries that implement gender budgeting also publish information alongside the annual budget to help inform budget oversight, and this information often takes the form of a "gender statement" (OECD, 2019[9]).

Box 2.1. Gender budgeting in Canada

The 2018 *Canadian Gender Budgeting Act* enshrined gender budgeting in the federal government's budgetary and financial management process. Gender budgeting in **Canada** is achieved through the use of two underlying tools, namely Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) and the Gender Results Framework (GRF). The Gender Results Framework (GRF) is a whole-of government tool designed to track how Canada is currently performing, define what is needed to achieve greater equality, and determine how progress will be measured going forward. It identifies six key areas where change is required to advance gender equality: Education and Skills Development, Economic Participation and Prosperity, Leadership and Democratic Participation, Gender-based Violence and access to Justice, Poverty reduction, Health and Well-Being, and Gender Equality around the World. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) is an approach that recognises that many identity factors, such as gender, income, age, disability, and geography, can affect access to opportunities, helping to deepen understanding of how policies uniquely affect people with diverse experiences.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

2.1.3. Strong legal foundation

A strong legal foundation can provide the basis for integrating a gender perspective into government action. An increasing number of EU and OECD countries have integrated gender equality and mainstreaming requirements into legal frameworks and other statutory obligations (OECD, 2022[11]). These provisions can take various forms, including:

- general laws and binding decisions on gender equality and mainstreaming;
- general obligations for public servants to advance gender equality in all actions; and
- gender mainstreaming requirements enshrined in specific legislation (e.g. budget, impact assessment, procurement, planning, economic recovery, and emergency management laws) (OECD, 2023[7]).

2.1.4. Whole-of-government strategic planning

Ensuring strong commitment to gender equality among political leadership and at the highest levels of government is critical to making the topic a priority for the government's agenda (OECD, 2016[6]). For this reason, many OECD countries have adopted gender equality strategies, frameworks and action plans (hereafter, strategies) with the explicit purpose of advancing gender equality and reducing gender gaps. Indeed, in 2024, of 41 EU and OECD countries with available data, 31 had gender equality strategies, and another 3 countries reported that such approaches were under development (Figure 2.2).

Social cohesion plays a role in the formulation of effective public policy and whole-of-government strategic plans, requiring a commitment to inclusive public policies (e.g. gender-sensitive social protection systems, guaranteed access to healthcare) and continuous engagement with civil society stakeholders (e.g. involvement of trade unions, women's associations, rights organisations).

Section 2.2 provides more details on the use of gender equality strategies in EU and OECD countries, including barriers to their effective implementation.

2.1.5. Robust and effective co-ordination mechanisms

Given the cross-cutting nature of gender inequality, ensuring co-ordination and coherency across policy areas and between related policy and legislative instruments and ministries is essential. This requires gender equality policies to be connected to national economic and social development plans, for legislation and regulation to take gender impact assessments into account and for government decision-makers to be briefed on the cross-cutting gender impacts of new policy proposals. Cross-ministry co-ordination mechanisms can help by ensuring all relevant ministries have contributed to policy design and are aware of their role in implementation and by facilitating an administrative culture and infrastructure that helps to manage horizontal and vertical challenges (OECD, 2021[17]; 2022[18]).

Across the OECD, there is no standard blueprint for the institutional set-up to implement, co-ordinate and advance the government's gender equality agenda. Conventionally, a central gender institution (CGI) or body is responsible for the co-ordination and implementation of gender equality at the central or federal level. CGIs can be a separate ministry, paired with other portfolios within a single ministry, or located at the Centre of Government within the office of the head of government or state. In 2021, the OECD Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance found that in the majority of responding countries, the body responsible for implementing, co-ordinating and advancing the government's gender equality agenda was located within the Centre of Government (OECD, 2023[7]).

Beyond day-to-day co-ordination, such bodies and committees may also play an important role by ensuring and maintaining a long-term focus on gender equality at national and supra-national (e.g. European Commission) levels.

2.1.6. Adequate resources and capacities

Gender mainstreaming is only possible with adequate resources and capacities – both human and financial. Continuous training and capacity building for civil servants, for instance, is a useful method for developing and maintaining the necessary expertise in gender analysis required for gender mainstreaming and for supporting cross-agency capacity building for those involved in policy implementation, mid-cycle review and course correction. Designated gender units or gender focal points across departments, agencies and ministries endowed with appropriate levels of authority can also ensure accountability in gender mainstreaming and in-house support for civil servants. Sufficient financial resources – including an adequate budget for formal process and impact evaluation – are equally key to effective and impactful gender mainstreaming (EIGE, 2024[19]).

2.1.7. Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement can ensure that policy design options and implementation encompass a wide range of experience and viewpoints (Women's Democracy Network, 2020[20]). Indeed, stakeholder perspectives may be indispensable for understanding the success or failure of different policies and programmes; for filling data gaps; and for ensuring buy-in and shared ownership of gender equality strategies, priorities and objectives (OECD, 2019[9]). Indeed, in areas where quantitative data and evidence are particularly weak, qualitative data and evidence gathered through gender consultations with stakeholders can ensure that the voices of different groups of women and men are heard throughout the policy cycle.

To ensure that stakeholder consultation is most effective, governments can target different groups of stakeholders via different methods – e.g. online, on the phone, or in person – while offering adequate time to respond. Governments can also ensure that they engage with representatives external to government from the outset, such as women's and civil society organisations, academics and trade unions.

2.1.8. High-quality gender-sensitive data and evidence

Progress in all areas of gender mainstreaming requires good measurement, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of gender gaps, and increased efforts to collect gender-disaggregated data across all policy fields. Gender-disaggregated data should be collected and analysed regularly and repeatedly over several years, allowing governments to track progress against set benchmarks or targets. Ideally, data should be collected to assess the effectiveness of specific policy interventions, for example through (randomised) experimental or quasi-experimental design and pre- and post-implementation assessment of a policy.

The capacity of governments to use such data is equally important. Governments can improve the quality and specificity of gender equality strategies, gender impact assessments, stakeholder engagement tools and accountability and transparency mechanisms by investing in training and capacity building (see Section 2.1.6).

According to the 2021 Gender Mainstreaming and Governance Survey, some OECD countries are taking key steps to produce more gender-disaggregated data, with 19 out of 33 countries reporting legal or binding requirements for the collection and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data. At the same time, however, only 7 of 17 countries include explicit commitments or actions relating to data disaggregated by gender and/or other relevant characteristics within their strategic framework for data and statistics at the national level (OECD, 2023[7]).

To continue to promote the availability and accessibility of gender-disaggregated data and gender mainstreaming, countries are increasingly turning toward publicly-available online data tools (Box 2.2). Indeed, according to EIGE's 2021 Gender Mainstreaming Survey, 14 EU countries have a website or a

section of a website to disseminate statistics disaggregated by gender. The most common approach is a special section of the national statistical office's website dedicated to gender, but some countries have a website dedicated specifically to gender statistics (EIGE, 2023[15]).

OECD databases, reports, briefs and working papers also support the increasing availability and dissemination of gender-disaggregated data and research (Box 2.3 and Box 2.7).

Box 2.2. National government efforts to improve availability and accessibility of gender-disaggregated data

Luxembourg launched an observatory for gender equality in 2023 with more than 500 indicators across seven different domains, including the areas of domestic violence, employment, decision-making, work-life balance, education, income and health. These indicators are available by gender but also incorporate intersectionality by disaggregating according to age, nationality, education level and more.

In **Sweden**, an online tool was launched in 2024, titled *Statistik i arbete med jämställdhetsintegrering* (Statistics in gender mainstreaming work). Hosted by Statistics Sweden, this tool presents statistics disaggregated by gender and other identity characteristics and is targeted to agencies and other organisations that undertake intersectional analyses in their implementation of gender mainstreaming.

In 2019, **Portugal** launched the National Statistics System on Gender Equality to review, update and enhance the content and coverage of its Gender Database and offer a more comprehensive system of gender statistics on (in)equality between women and men.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Box 2.3. International efforts to improve gender gender-disaggregated data and evidence

The **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps** (www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/gender-dashboard.html), redesigned and relaunched in 2024, provides a snapshot of gender equality policies and outcomes across five key domains: Education and skills; Employment, entrepreneurship and trade; Public life and policy tools; Technology, knowledge and resources; and Health and well-being. Indicators are available over time and across countries, and serve to support reporting on progress toward the implementation of the OECD gender recommendations.

Harvard University's **Gender Action Portal (GAP)** (https://gap.hks.harvard.edu/) collects evidence-based insights from research focused on gender equality. The portal aims to translate research into action to better support policy and decision-making through a deeper understanding of the impacts of policies, strategies and organisational practices. As of September 2024, 320 studies aiming to close gender gaps had been assessed and entered into the portal.

The **World Bank** Gender Data Availability Portal (https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/data-availability) summarises the availability of more than 1 000 indicators from a global and regional perspective, a country-specific perspective, a topic-based perspective and an indicator perspective.

The **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database** (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs) contains a wealth of information on gender equality across several thematic areas, including work and labour, demography, fertility, research, health, time use, education, decision-making and leadership, gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming. Data supporting the Beijing Platform for Action and EIGE's Gender Equality Index are also available.

2.1.9. Comprehensive monitoring and evaluation with a gender lens

Considering monitoring requirements – such as a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan that includes a results framework and associated gender data strategies – at the policy design stage can support transparency and accountability. Stakeholders, including those directly impacted by policies, can be engaged in the design of the M&E plan to ensure a variety of perspectives are included in M&E efforts (see Section 2.1.7).

In the context of results frameworks, gender-transformative indicators, measures and benchmarks can reflect short-, medium- and long-term perspectives and can include a mix of *process* indicators and *impact* indicators. Using both can help to show which policy settings are working well and what needs to be adjusted and can ensure policies and policy combinations are on track to achieve longer-term outcomes, in line with a theory of change (see Box 2.10).

To ensure follow through on monitoring requirements, at the policy design stage, countries can identify individuals responsible for policy delivery and reporting and establish an appropriate infrastructure, such as online reporting portals and regular co-ordination meetings. Clearly specifying and publicly announcing time periods and dates for monitoring and review as part of the policy design can help ensure the gendered impacts of the policy are monitored and assessed in a timely and transparent way.

Indeed, in order to understand whether a policy has been effective, policies can firstly be designed in such a way that enables countries to measure whether their policy goals have been met. For example, when policy objectives are SMART-formulated, that is, they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound, countries can more easily show what activities were carried out, at what cost, and what concrete results were achieved at both individual and system-wide levels (see Box 2.4 for a country example of the use of SMART-formulated objectives in the Netherlands).

Monitoring and assessment can also examine whether there are negative externalities, barriers to access and/or implementation or unintended consequences. Consider, as an example, that many key policies and programmes that support gender equality (e.g. paternity leave, flexible working arrangements) are already in place in most EU and OECD countries, but take-up and use lag as a result of barriers to access and/or gender norms and stereotypes. This suggests that there may be ways to improve the implementation or effectiveness of existing policies, either through adjustment to policy parameters or targeted low-cost complementary initiatives (e.g. increased awareness, information dissemination, administrative support).

But, without high-quality gender-sensitive data and evidence, monitoring and evaluation is complex – if not impossible. For this reason, it is critical for governments to implement a gender data strategy that identifies gender and intersectional data gaps and provides a plan to fill these gaps, assigns roles to key gender data stakeholders, establishes a regular co-ordination mechanism, elaborates publication and dissemination strategies and identifies gender data analysis capacity-building opportunities (see Section 2.1.8). International organisations can play a crucial role in supporting governments as they implement gender data strategies, such as by offering guidance on data collection methods and the design of national surveys, censuses, and administrative data systems with gender-specific indicators; by encouraging the use of data to analyse gender gaps in areas like education, health, labour markets, and political participation; by providing training for statisticians, government officials and data scientists on gender analysis, data collection, and interpretation; by offering workshops, conferences, and forums where countries can learn from each other's successes and challenges; and by supporting governments in conducting gender audits and assessments to identify data gaps and areas needing investment.

> **Box 2.4. Impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation**
>
> **Gender impact evaluation in the Netherlands**
>
> The Netherlands undertook a gender impact evaluation of their National Gender Equality Framework 2011-14, focusing on the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy framework and whether it achieved its stated objectives. While the evaluation found that meaningful results had been achieved at the project level, the evaluation concluded that the large variety of stand-alone projects with little policy weight and limited structural anchoring into regular government policy posed risks to the effectiveness of the overall framework and objectives. The evaluation also found that it was difficult to determine the degree to which the framework directly led to outcome changes. This was because a) the original goals were not SMART-formulated, b) some aspects of policy responsibility were held by other government departments over which the lead department had limited control and c) a range of external social factors may have influenced outcomes. Nonetheless, the evaluation concluded that the Policy did contribute to achieving positive on the ground changes given its limited budget.
>
> In response to the evaluation, the government of the Netherlands adjusted its approach as part of the redevelopment of the policy framework post-2014, focusing on greater overall coherence and sustainability of policy measures. This has meant that the Netherlands has focused its funding on larger-scale projects of longer duration rather than on smaller-scale, short-term projects.
>
> **Monitoring gender equality performance in Iceland**
>
> **Iceland** has an online dashboard to track progress toward the implementation of the "Action Plan for Gender Equality 2020-23." The Action Plan is divided into six domains featuring 29 policy and programme actions. Various ministries are tasked with delivering on each of these policy and programme actions. An overall progress tracker is available with progress broken down by ministry and domain. As of May 2024, 69% of the policy and programme actions were completed and 31% were well on their way. Progress remained in the area of sexual and gender-based violence; equality, education, culture, sports and youth work; and international work. A new action plan is being prepared for the years 2025-28.
>
> Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, State Audit Office of the Netherlands (2014[21]), Kavanagh et al. (2023[22]) and Allen (2023[23]).

2.2. In focus: Strategic planning as a tool for designing policy combinations

Strategic planning helps prioritise issues, co-ordinate efforts, and allocate limited resources across policy areas. In the context of supporting gender equality-enhancing policy combinations, this prioritisation process is essential as it can bring focus and clarity to the sheer scope of the policy areas involved – gender gaps exist in education, employment, health, digitalisation, agriculture, climate change and environment, violence, leadership and more.

In most EU and OECD countries, strategic planning for gender equality typically involves the development of a strategy, framework or action plan (hereafter, strategy) devoted to promoting gender equality (see Section 2.2.1), but it may also involve the integration of gender equality considerations into broader national strategic and sectoral plans (see Section 2.2.2). Indeed, stand-alone national gender equality strategies *combined* with the integration of gender equality objectives within sector-specific strategies and broader national strategies can help accelerate progress toward gender equality.

2.2.1. Implementing, designing and evaluating gender equality strategies

Gender equality strategies set clear objectives; foster systematic and co-ordinated approaches; transparently demonstrate governmental commitments; contribute to setting new standards and expectations; and serve as benchmarks for tracking, measuring, and communicating progress (OECD, 2023[8]; 2023[7]). An increasing number of EU and OECD countries have adopted gender equality strategies, with 31 out of 41 EU and OECD countries with available data using such approaches, and another three EU and OECD countries in the process of developing such approaches (Figure 2.2).

Box 2.5 provides examples of gender equality strategies in EU and OECD countries, Box 2.6 describes the gender equality strategy of the European Union and Box 2.7 highlights the OECD Gender Equality Strategy.

Figure 2.2. Most countries have a strategy for the promotion of gender equality

Number of countries with a standalone, dedicated strategic framework in place for the promotion of gender equality, 2024
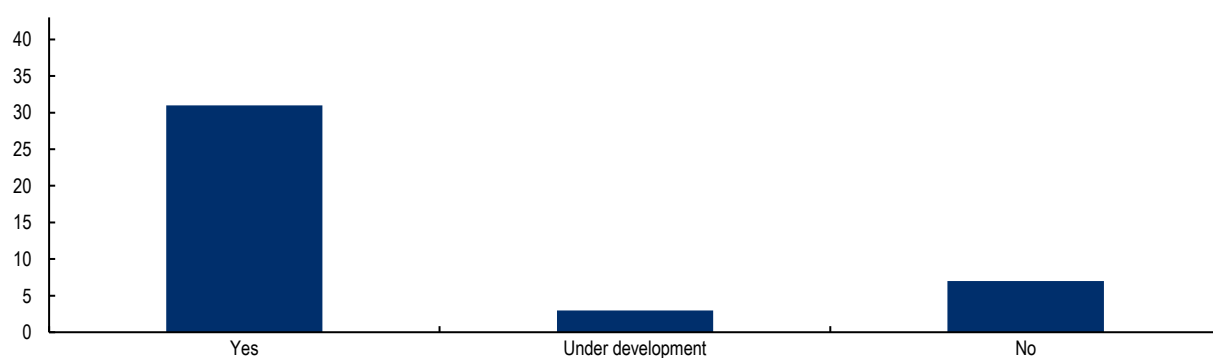
Note: Countries were asked "Does your country have a standalone, dedicated strategic framework (e.g. a national gender equality strategy or a national action plan for gender equality) in place for the promotion of gender equality?" Response options were "Yes" or "No." Follow-up questions included the name of the strategic framework, the weblink to the framework, the year the framework was introduced, the year the framework will expire (if any), and the presence of any plans to renew. "Under development" is a category added based on open-ended responses. Data were available for 41 out of 43 EU and OECD countries. Data are mostly based on the OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality but responses for Austria, Estonia, Ireland and Italy were imputed based on European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) country profiles.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and EIGE (2022[24]; 2022[25]; 2022[26]; 2022[27]).

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> **Box 2.5. Closing gender gaps and promoting horizontal co-ordination using dedicated gender equality strategies**
>
> **Czechia's** Gender Equality Strategy 2021-30 defines a medium-term framework for the promotion of gender equality. The Strategy was developed to meet the necessary basic conditions related to the utilisation of certain EU funds and to respond to a Senate Resolution for a "comprehensive long-term strategy for the gradual reduction of income inequality between women and men in both productive and retirement age" (Office of the Government of Czechia, 2021[28]). The is the second strategy supporting gender equality policy in Czechia, following behind the Strategy for Gender Equality in Czechia for 2014-20. Across the eight identified key policy areas, there are a total of 26 strategic objectives and 434 measures.
>
> In 2021, the Federal Council of **Switzerland** adopted the Gender Equality Strategy 2030. Designed in close collaboration with cantons, cities and communes, as well as various stakeholder groups, there are four key priority areas, including promoting equality in the workplace; improving work-life balance; preventing violence; and fighting discrimination. Each of these priority areas is tied to a series of measures to be implemented or adopted, with specific measures tagged for implementation by 2023 and other measures tagged for implementation at a later stage. Switzerland plans to undertake an interim review of the Gender Equality Strategy in 2025.
>
> **Malta** recently adopted its first-ever gender equality strategy, the Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan 2022-27 (GEMSAP). This strategy includes efforts to promote and ensure gender equality across several areas, such as healthcare, education, leadership and decision-making, economic security, and justice systems, among others.
>
> In **Cyprus**, the Commissioner for Gender Equality presides over an Interministerial Committee composed of gender focal points from Ministries. The Council of Ministers mandated the Commissioner for Gender Equality to draft, co-ordinate, monitor and evaluate the new Gender Equality Strategy, in co-operation with all Ministries and Deputy Ministries. The strategy was a result of a wide consultation process with Ministries, Deputy Ministries, the National Machinery for Woman's Rights, civil society, trade unions and higher education institutions. The Strategy was approved by the Council of Ministers and all Ministries and Deputy Ministries were called to draft a yearly action plan on gender equality.
>
> Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

The large number of EU and OECD countries that have adopted gender equality strategies shows an increasing commitment towards closing gender gaps. Yet, operational challenges imply that in some cases these plans fall short of their potential. According to the 2021 Gender Mainstreaming and Governance (GMG) Survey, the biggest obstacles to impactful gender equality strategies (and to gender mainstreaming overall) are limited enforceability of strategic frameworks for gender equality, the absence of data and resources, limited involvement from line ministries, and funding shortfalls against the approved action plan or strategy (OECD, 2022[11]).

In the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, similar results emerged in the responses to the open-ended question on barriers to effective implementation of gender equality strategies, with many countries highlighting insufficient human and financial resources, especially under tight budgets and slow economic growth; inadequate institutional capacity; limited availability of gender-disaggregated data and research; and resistance to change, especially to the application of gender mainstreaming and institutional frameworks and mechanisms to promote gender equality. Other barriers cited in responses to this open-ended question include lack of political will and changes in policy priorities;

challenges with negotiations in decentralised or tripartite contexts; gender equality fatigue, lack of awareness about gender equality issues in various policy fields, including active prejudices against gender issues and deeply rooted gender stereotypes; lack of co-ordination between national and subnational governments and across different programme areas; and inadequate incentives and compliance mechanisms for effective policy execution.

Box 2.6. Closing gender gaps with the European Union Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25

The European Union (EU) Gender Strategy 2020-25 (hereafter, the Strategy) attempts to address myriad issues in gender equality through policy and legislative actions, as well as through integration into EU funding mechanisms. To do so, the Gender Equality Strategy uses a dual approach of gender mainstreaming: systematically including a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external; and strategically identifying targeted actions across six key objectives, namely: 1) ending gender-based violence; 2) challenging gender stereotypes; 3) closing gender gaps in the labour market; 4) achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy; 5) addressing the gender pay and pension gaps; and 6) closing the gender care gap and achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics. In both prongs of the dual approach, intersectionality is an important cross-cutting principle in the Strategy.

Since its implementation, the European Commission has published three annual reports on gender equality to track progress against these objectives and highlight recent key initiatives at the level of the EU and across EU countries. Key information on the state of gender equality in the EU is provided alongside these updates. These annual reports provide Member States with an opportunity for peer learning and support the development of a more unified approach to tackling gender equality. The Strategy has also helped to enhance co-ordination across Member States by providing a bastion against which EU countries can align their national efforts and gender equality strategies.

The European Commission, led by the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, has supported EU countries by providing tools, guidance, and reporting frameworks, while the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has played a key role in supporting EU countries by providing research, data and tools to monitor progress and assist in policy making. At the national level, each country is expected to appoint a gender equality focal point – or similar structure – to liaise with the European Commission and provide updates on national-level initiatives.

Source: European Commission (2024[29]; 2020[30]).

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Box 2.7. OECD Gender Equality Strategy

The OECD has been working on gender for many years. In 2010, the Organisation launched the OECD Gender Initiative with the aim of strengthening the evidence base for, and improving policies that target, gender equality in OECD countries (OECD, 2012[31]). The Initiative formed the basis for a series of cross-cutting reports and data activities and contributed to the development of the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship (OECD, 2017[32]). In 2023, the OECD advanced its work on gender equality when Ministers welcomed a formal gender strategy at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting in June 2023, titled "OECD Contribution to Promoting Gender Equality" (OECD, 2023[33]). This strategy sets out opportunities for the OECD to boost its actions in support of gender equality, structured around four main pillars: data, mainstreaming, policy and outreach. An important part of the Gender Strategy is that it focuses on mainstreaming gender throughout the OECD, including in Directorates that have not traditionally worked on gender.

</div>

Intersectionality in focus: Age is the most common intersectional factor included in gender equality strategies

Overlapping social identities – such as gender, race, and socio-economic status – create unique disadvantages and complex systems of inequalities that may require targeted policy responses. Indeed, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) notes that women experience discrimination differently based on the intersection of various identities, such as race, ethnicity, class, and disability, and that policies and laws must reflect the diversity of women's experiences and address the key factors driving gender inequality in a more holistic way (UNHR, 1979[34]).

For this reason, many countries have embedded intersectionality considerations into gender mainstreaming efforts and their gender equality strategies. According to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, for instance, of the 31 EU and OECD countries with a gender equality strategy, 24 report that their strategy embeds an intersectional perspective.

The most common intersectional identity factor included in gender equality strategies is age (19 respondents), followed by disability status (16 respondents), race or ethnicity (16 respondents) and immigrant status (16 respondents) (Figure 2.3). Several respondents also highlight that other intersectional aspects are covered, including sexual orientation and/or gender identity (e.g. Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Japan, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain), Indigenous identity (e.g. Canada), family or motherhood status (e.g. Cyprus, Hungary), nationality (e.g. Luxembourg) and religion or belief (e.g. Malta).

With growing interest in intersectionality considerations and discrimination faced by diverse groups of women and men, data disaggregated by gender *and* other identity factors becomes essential for assessing policy interventions (see Section 2.1.8).

In responses to the OECD's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, countries noted that intersectionality considerations in gender equality strategies have multiple functions: they act as an overarching guiding principle, represent a basis for the formulation of policies targeting specific groups, and serve as a tool to collect gender-disaggregated data, among others. In most cases, these functions work together to ensure that a thorough understanding of gender inequality and its intersections with other forms of inequality and identity-based discrimination translate into supportive policy and programme action. Box 2.8 provides examples of intersectional perspectives in gender equality strategies in EU and OECD countries.

Figure 2.3. The most common intersectional factor included in gender equality strategies is age

Number of countries with a standalone, dedicated strategic framework, sorted by intersectionality aspects covered by that framework, 2024
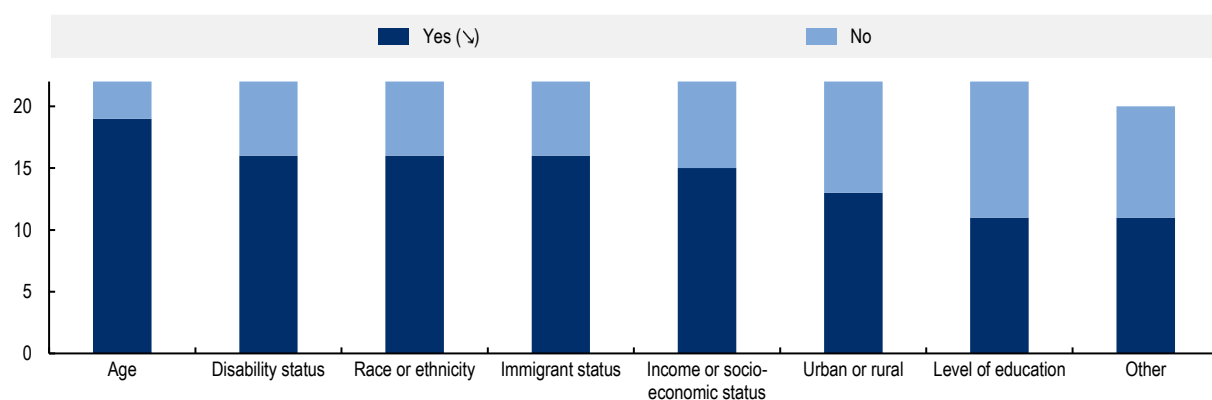
Note: If countries responded that they have a gender equality strategy in the OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, they were subsequently asked "Does the strategy/plan explicitly embed intersectionality?" Response options included "Yes" and "No." If they responded "Yes," a follow-up question asked "What intersectionality aspects are covered? Please select all that apply." Response options included "Age," "Race or ethnicity," "Urban or rural," "Migrant status," "Level of education," "Disability status," and "Income or socio-economic status." Countries were also given the option to add other intersectionality characteristics in a list. Although 24 countries indicated that their strategy includes an intersectional perspective, only 22 countries provided details on the types of intersectionality considerations covered. The overall response rate to the questionnaire was 36 out of 43 EU and OECD countries, but some countries left this question unanswered and some countries do not have a gender equality strategy.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Box 2.8. Building intersectional perspectives into gender equality strategies

In the Fourth Equality Plan between Women and Men 2018-30, **Chile** uses an intersectional approach to better understand how gender inequalities differ across social groups. Structurally, in the Equality Plan, intersectionality is explicitly acknowledged in the strategic and specific objectives, which are themselves matched with identifiable indicators and clearly defined responsible actors to track progress and ensure accountability.

On 18 June 2024, **Latvia** approved the Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-27. The Plan includes different interventions to promote equal rights and opportunities in the labour market and education, reduce harmful gender-based stereotypes and better integrate gender mainstreaming in the policy planning process. The plan recognises the importance of using an intersectionality approach, including offering solutions for particularly vulnerable persons who may face multiple discriminations based on gender, race or ethnicity, age, social status or disability. The Plan places special emphasis on implementing measures to strengthen the capacity of Roma women to participate in all areas of life.

In the **Slovak Republic's** Strategy for Gender Equality, a separate chapter on the inclusion of vulnerable groups and the multiple discrimination of women and girls ensures that an intersectional perspective is considered. Many intersecting identity characteristics, such as age, level of education, race and ethnicity, disability status and income, are also embedded into key operational goals. Examples include the elimination of segregation of Roma girls in the education system and the provision of equal access to quality

education at all levels for all girls, including girls from marginalised groups and low-income families. At the same time, the Strategy acknowledges that issues of multiple discrimination and equal opportunities are only partially covered and systematically addressing such issues requires a separate strategic document.

Mexico's National Programme for Equality between Women and Men 2020-24 (PROIGUALDAD) recognises that although all women face limitations, gaps and discrimination, some women have greater restrictions derived from additional factors of exclusion, social disadvantage or discrimination. In view of this, PROIGUALDAD incorporates intersectional and multicultural approaches across its six strategic objectives, spanning economic autonomy; care work; well-being and health; violence against women and girls; and leadership and representation.

In **Australia**, *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* incorporates an intersectional perspective by recognising that gender inequality is shaped by other factors such as race, disability, and socio-economic status. It emphasises tailored approaches to address the diverse needs of women from different backgrounds, ensuring that policies reach women facing multiple layers of disadvantage. The strategy also promotes inclusivity by considering how different identities and experiences impact women's access to opportunities and resources in the workplace and beyond.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Priority setting: Paid and unpaid work and leadership are common priorities in gender equality strategies

In developing effective gender equality strategies, setting clear priorities can help to ensure impactful and sustainable progress. Clearly defined objectives linked to these priorities is key for further targeting resources and can be particularly useful in the context of gender budgeting, accountability and auditing.

According to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, most gender equality strategies are organised according to a set of specific themes or topics – often around 4-6 policy areas, although some can include more than ten policy areas. Box 2.9 provides examples of the priority areas laid out in gender equality strategies in EU and OECD countries.

Box 2.9. Priority setting as seen in selected gender equality strategies

Germany introduced "Towards a stronger future – The federal government's gender equality strategy" in 2020. The strategy includes nine goals, namely: 1) ensuring economic independence for everyone; 2) establishing care professions as attractive career paths; 3) setting standards for the digital world; 4) making paid work and unpaid care work reconcilable; 5) bringing more women into economic leadership positions; 6) establishing equal participation in democracy; 7) eliminating stereotypes in culture and science; 8) strengthening gender equality in public administration; and (9) making gender equality a task for the entire government. Each area is matched to specific interventions and indicators, with indicators monitored at least once every 4 years, but often more frequently (EIGE, 2022[35]).

The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality in **Japan** was decided by Cabinet on 25 December 2020 and is composed of 11 policy areas, which cover traditional themes – such as decision-making, income, work-life balance, health and gender-based violence – and less traditional themes – such as disaster prevention, environmental issues and social protection systems. For each area, the Plan outlines the current situation within and outside Japan using indicators, puts forward targets for some of these indicators and outlines key initiatives to support progress against these targets.

Slovenia's "National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030," adopted in

> 2023, outlines general goals and objectives across six areas, including employment, education, health; violence against women; decision-making; and foreign policy. Periodic plans set out concrete actions alongside defined implementation methods.
>
> Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Based on a bottom-up categorisation, key themes for policy action in gender equality strategies typically include paid and unpaid work and leadership and representation (Figure 2.4). This reflects that gender gaps in paid and unpaid work (and household responsibilities) and in leadership and representation (especially in politics and business) have been a central focus of much of the policy conversation around gender equality for many years.

Figure 2.4. Countries most frequently include paid and unpaid work considerations in gender equality strategies, while other key issues may be overlooked

Number of countries with indicators, goals, targets or themes related to specific areas of gender equality, 2024
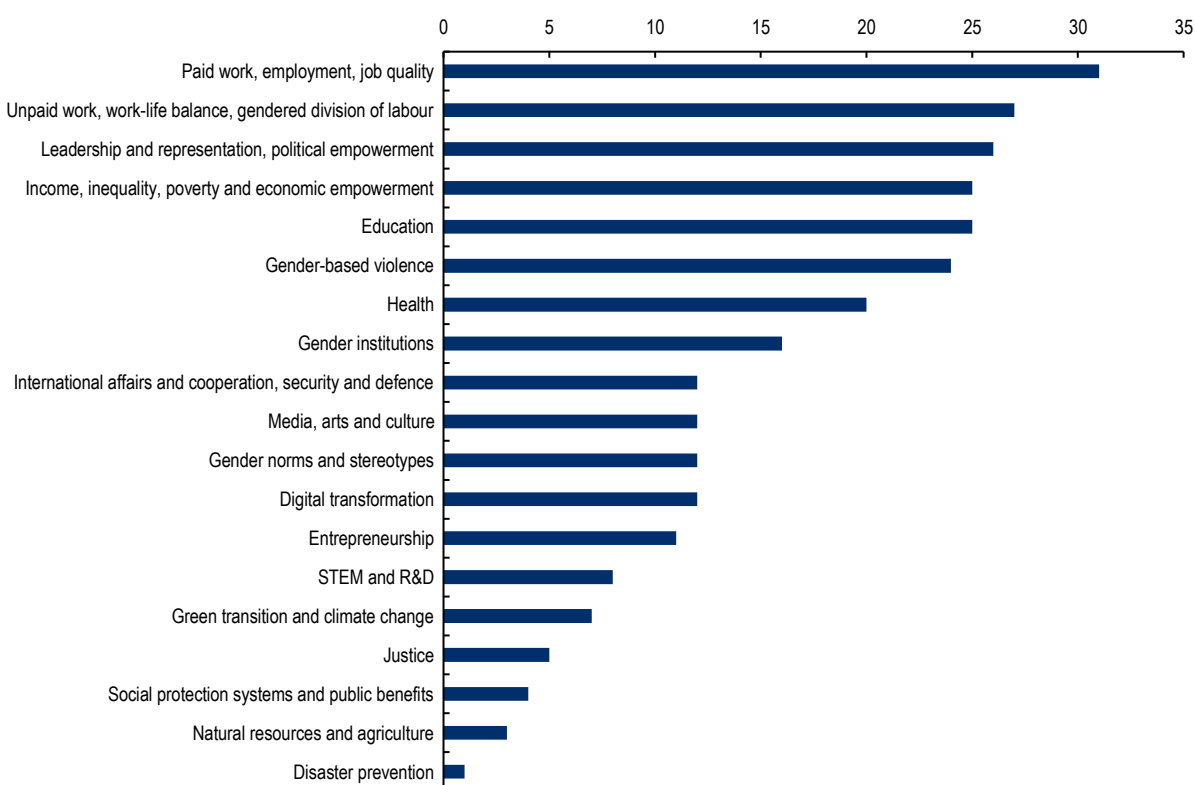
Note: Countries were asked what specify their strategy/plan's main policy areas (e.g. education, employment, trade, health, environment, defense, agriculture); key strategic priorities (e.g. girls in STEM, gender balance in paid and unpaid work, women in leadership); key targets for each strategic priority (e.g. 40% of leadership positions held by women in 2030); and key policy measures to achieve those targets (e.g. voluntary targets, incentives to companies); as well as any policy feedback and lessons learned from past experiences (e.g. conclusions from relevant evaluation exercises) and main barriers to implementation and effectiveness. Based on country responses, the OECD Secretariat defined policy areas using a bottom-up approach to flag whether a country's gender equality strategy includes mention of certain policy areas or topics as a theme, indicator, goal or target. The figure is based on responses from 31 out of 43 EU and OECD countries.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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By contrast, disaster prevention, social protection systems, natural resources and agriculture, and justice feature less frequently in these strategic documents – reflecting that these policy areas are often less associated with gender equality. But, if governments wish to eliminate persistent gender gaps between women and men, it will be essential to mainstream gender into policy areas less commonly associated with gender equality. Beyond expanding gender equality strategies to cover more topics and policy areas, governments can also embed gender equality into sector-specific strategies and broader national strategies (see Section 2.2.2).

Box 2.10. Designing a good theory of change for gender equality

Governments can consider using a theory of change when designing gender equality strategies, especially the underlying policy objectives, targets and goals. This can help to sustain medium to long-term funding and maintain support for policy interventions. Indeed, by setting out clear pathways between goals and interventions, a theory of change supports transparency and consensus building.

A theory of change typically starts with an explanation of the problem (including the different ways in which women, men and gender diverse people are affected and how) and then proceeds to the identification of a set of realistic short, medium and long-term goals that address the drivers and manifestations of the problem. Once the desired goals have been agreed upon, policy makers can begin mapping the range of interconnected change processes that are intended to address the problem (Taplin et al., 2013[36]).

In terms of ideal characteristics, a good theory of change:

- recognises that system-wide change is not linear and therefore forms part of a learn-as-you-go approach to policy design (Goldsworthy, Kathryn, 2021[37]);
- ensures a more realistic expectation for change over the long-term and highlights the importance of collective action across policy areas;
- leverages stakeholder and practitioner views about how to address a given problem, drawing from on-the-ground experiences in delivering policies and programmes (Taplin et al., 2013[36]); and
- strengthens countries' ability to monitor and evaluate which actions best achieve intended outcomes.

Indeed, when designed with the above characteristics, a theory of change can form a foundational step for future monitoring and evaluation and can enable course correction over time. Recognising the importance of using a theory of change to support the design, implementation and monitoring of government policies and programmes, Australia developed a Theory of Change 2022-32 under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32 (Government of Australia, 2023[38]).

2.2.2. Sectoral plans: Gender equality considerations are rarely systematically embedded into national strategic or sectoral plans

A stand-alone national gender equality strategy combined with the integration of gender equality objectives within sector-specific strategies (e.g. education, health, environment, etc.) and broader national strategies (e.g. data, foresight, disaster management, recovery and resilience, etc.) can help accelerate the implementation of gender equality objectives (OECD, 2016[6]).

According to the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, 7 out of 28 EU and OECD countries report mainstreaming gender into all or most national strategic or sectoral plans (Figure 2.5), while 18 countries report gender is mainstreamed into less than half of all such plans. Such results are not surprising given that only some countries report having specific mandates or requirements to advance gender equality priorities in national development plans (e.g. Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czechia, Lithuania, Mexico and Spain) (OECD, 2023[7]). In Spain, for example, gender impact assessments are mandated for all draft plans of special economic, social, cultural and artistic relevance (EIGE, 2022[39]).

Figure 2.5. Gender mainstreaming in national strategic or sectoral plans remains limited

Distribution of countries according to the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in national strategic and sectoral plans, 2024
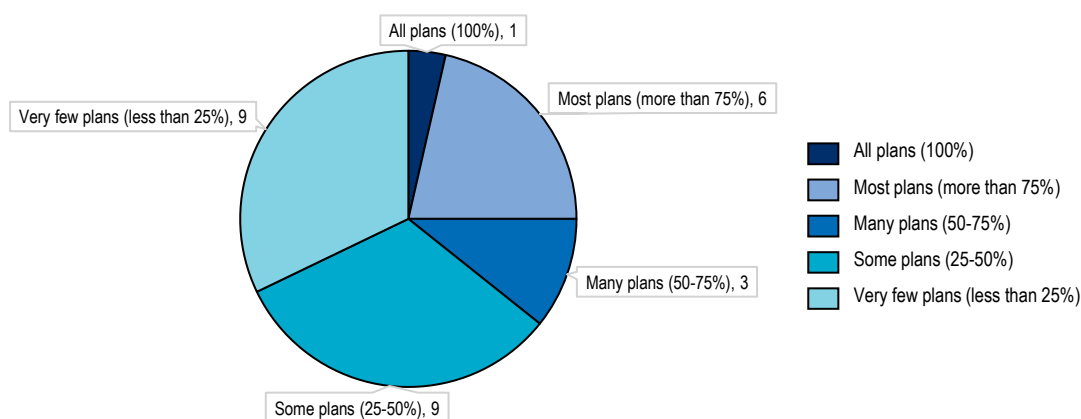
Note: Countries were asked "Approximately how often is gender mainstreamed in national strategic and sectoral plans (e.g. National Transport Strategy, Poverty Reduction Strategy, etc.)? Please consider all plans that are active as of 1 January 2024." Response options were "All plans (100%)," "Most plans (more than 75%)," "Many plans (50-75%)," "Some plans (25-50%)," "and "Very few plans (less than 25%)." This figure includes responses from 28 out of 43 EU and OECD countries. Note that there may be comparability issues across countries as there were differences in the extent to which countries co-ordinated their responses across ministries.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Priority areas: Gender is most often integrated into national strategic or sectoral plans on human rights, international co-operation and science and technology

National strategic or sectoral plans, by definition, are nearly always tied to clear policy areas or topics, such as climate change or health. According to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, there are notable patterns across policy areas in the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in strategic or sectoral plans. Gender aspects are, for example, more likely to be strongly considered in plans related to minority populations, human rights, disability and discrimination; international affairs and co-operation, security and defence; and STEM and R&D and digital transformation (Figure 2.6). By contrast, gender is more weakly integrated into national strategic or sectoral plans related to housing, education and justice.

Box 2.11 provides examples of national strategic and sectoral plans in EU and OECD countries that embed gender equality considerations to varying degrees.

Figure 2.6. Gender mainstreaming is most common in national strategic and sectoral plans relating to human rights, international affairs and STEM

Number of countries mentioning at least one national strategic or sectoral plan that embeds a gender dimension, by policy area and extent of gender mainstreaming, 2024
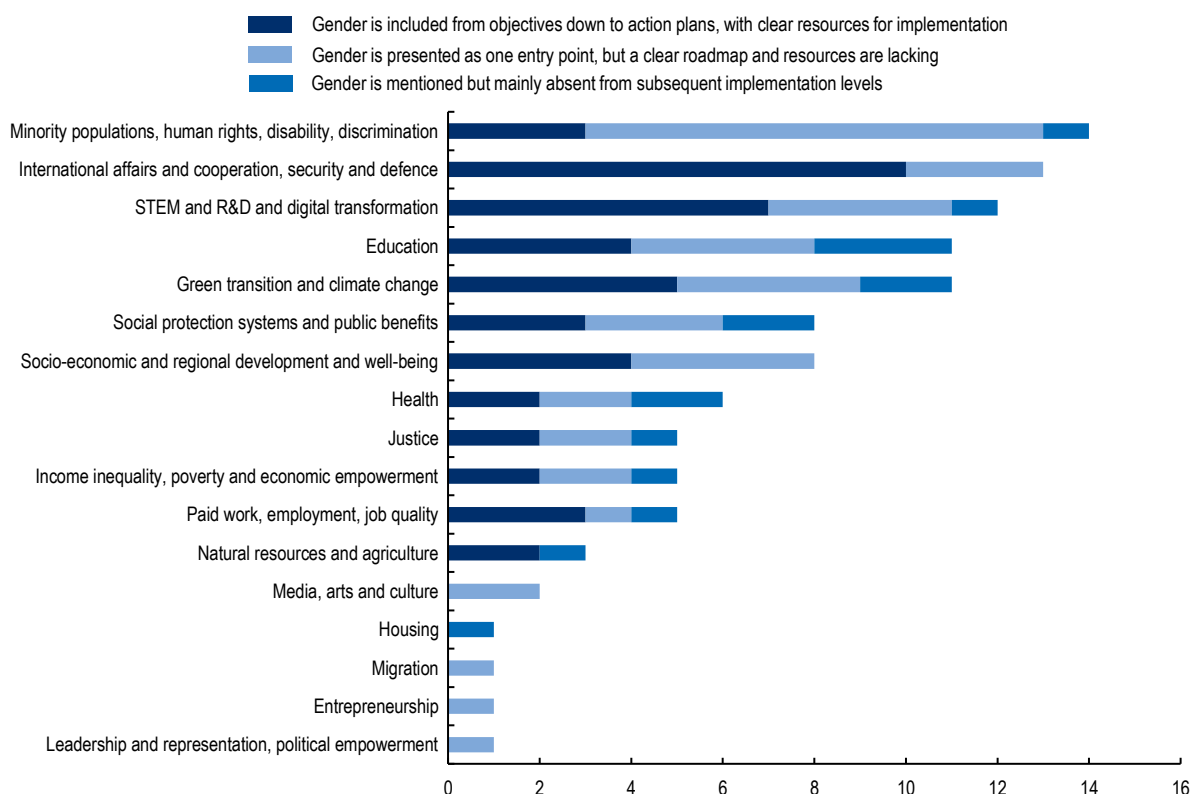
Note: Countries were asked to list strategic and sectoral plans that embed a gender dimension, identifying specifically how gender is embedded in the plan: "Gender is included in the document from objectives down to action plans, with clear resources identified for implementation," "Gender is presented as one relevant entry point in relation to the main objectives of the plan, but a clear roadmap and resources for implementation are lacking" and "Gender is mentioned but mainly absent from subsequent implementation levels." Based on country responses, the OECD Secretariat defined policy areas using a bottom-up approach. The figure refers to 118 national strategic or sectoral plans from 26 out of 43 EU and OECD countries. Plans pertaining to gender mainstreaming, gender equality and family policy were excluded from counts.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Box 2.11. Gender considerations in national strategic and sectoral plans

Costa Rica's National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Climate Action 2023-25 articulates multisectoral actions to reduce the gendered impacts of the climate crisis, especially for women in the most vulnerable sectors and in strategic sectors, through employment and economic autonomy by strengthening innovation and improving risk management.

The STEM Action Plan 2022-28 in **Germany** is a strategic umbrella for measures to strengthen STEM education. Run by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research, the Plan promotes measures across the entire education continuum from kindergarten to university. The goal of the Plan is to foster and maintain interest in STEM subjects, enhance STEM knowledge and skills, bolster the STEM workforce, and cultivate a society open to technological change. The Plan recognises that increasing the presence of girls and women in STEM is a cross-sectional task, with gender considerations embedded in objectives down to implementation plans.

In **Norway**, the National Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security (2023-30) follows up on the UN Security Council Resolution 1 325 and associated resolutions, as well as the wider agenda for women, peace and security. The Plan includes three priority areas with 35 measures and uses a cross-sectoral approach involving six ministries and their subordinate agencies.

The Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Agriculture and Fisheries 2030 in **Poland** aims to improve economic development in the countryside, to ensure national food security, to increase the added value from agriculture, and to sustainably increase the income of rural residents, while simultaneously minimising economic, social and territorial stratification and improving the environment. Within the strategy, the objective "Developing entrepreneurship, non-agricultural jobs and an active society" has several goals and activities relating specifically to women, such as the creation of attractive jobs for women through the promotion of flexible work and the professional activation of women through support and care for children and young people and support in starting businesses.

Türkiye's National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-25 is composed of 316 interventions and serves as the implementation tool of the 2030 Barrier-Free Vision. One of the objectives of the Plan is protecting persons with disabilities from exploitation, violence, torture, degrading treatment and punishment. Under this objective, two interventions and actions relate specifically to women: provision of information and referral services on combating neglect, abuse, exploitation and violence against women and materials related to these services in accessible formats and strengthening the accessibility of women's shelters.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

2.3. In focus: Co-ordinating gender equality policy combinations

Co-ordinating bodies support government institutions by helping to overcome silos and enable communication and collaboration across policy areas. Given that many key challenges in gender are horizontal in nature and require the involvement of a variety of domains, actors and interests, co-ordinating bodies are a necessary condition for the design, development and implementation of policy combinations to advance gender equality.

This section discusses the co-ordination mechanisms that are used in EU and OECD countries to support horizontal co-ordination across ministries (see Section 2.3.1) and vertical co-ordination across levels of government (see Section 2.3.2).

2.3.1. Horizontal co-ordination: Most EU and OECD countries have a formal co-ordination system for gender-related policies and programmes

Across EU and OECD countries, there is no standard approach for co-ordinating gender equality policies nor for the composition of stakeholders that should be involved. These co-ordinating bodies, for example, may include senior management or working-level analysts across government institutions. They may take the form of committees, gender focal points, advisory councils or working groups, but could also be entire units within a ministry or a separate ministry entirely (OECD, 2023[8]). Some of these co-ordinating bodies are set up temporarily as inter-ministerial commissions tasked with promoting a specific issue relating to gender equality (e.g. gender-based violence), while others have a more permanent status and may be tasked with the broader agenda of promoting gender equality (see Section 2.1.5).

Across EU and OECD countries, gender equality co-ordinating bodies are quite common. In the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, 26 out of 33 EU and OECD countries reported that they have a formal co-ordination system for gender-related policies and programmes that is regularly applied, and of these 26 countries, 18 specified that this formal co-ordination system involves all ministries (Figure 2.7). Box 2.12 provides examples of the horizontal co-ordination mechanisms or institutions used in EU and OECD countries.

Figure 2.7. Formal co-ordination systems for gender-related policies and programmes are regularly applied in many EU and OECD countries

Number of countries according to the existence, type and coverage of co-ordination systems for gender-related policies and programmes across government ministries, 2024
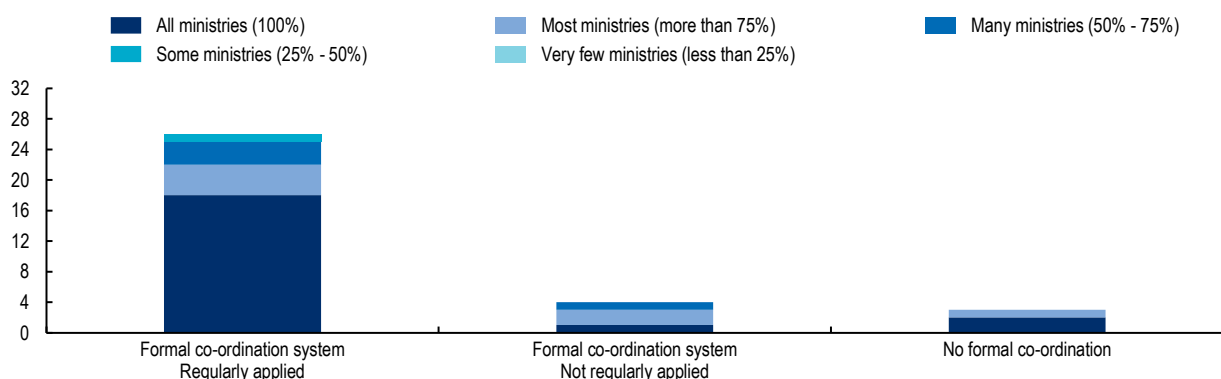
Note: Countries were asked "Is there a formal co-ordination mechanism or set of formalised practices to co-ordinate gender-related policies and programmes across government ministries?" Response options included "There is a formal co-ordination system, and it is regularly applied," "There is a formal co-ordination system, but it is not regularly applied," "A formal co-ordination system does not exist but there is some form of informal co-ordination," and "There is no formal nor informal co-ordination." Countries were also asked to specify approximately the proportion of ministries covered by the co-ordination mechanism. Response options included "All ministries (100%)," "Most ministries (more than 75%)," "Many ministries (50%-75%)," "Some ministries (25%-50%)," and "Very few ministries (less than 25%)." This figure includes responses from 33 out of 43 EU and OECD countries.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Given that co-ordinating bodies can have different shapes and structures, there may be advantages to having more than one co-ordinating body or mechanism operating simultaneously (e.g. co-existence of focal points and thematic inter-ministerial working groups with a central gender institution). Whether there

is one body or many bodies, it is critical that roles and responsibilities are clear and accountable from the outset.

Ensuring the right level of representation and the right level of resources is also crucial. Inter-ministerial commissions responsible for promoting gender equality, for example, may require cabinet-level representation and dedicated human resources to appropriately and effectively influence broader policy and priority setting or to translate decisions into concrete follow-up actions (OECD, 2023[8]).

Although an increasing number of EU and OECD countries have adopted and applied formal co-ordination systems, several implementation challenges remain, including competing priorities, a lack of interest at the central level and insufficient funding, capacities and expertise of policy makers (OECD, 2023[7]; 2019[9]). These challenges can limit the ability of co-ordination bodies and systems to facilitate gender mainstreaming across the government (OECD, 2019[9]; 2022[11]).

Box 2.12. Horizontal co-ordination of gender equality policies and programmes

Since 2012, each ministry in **France** appoints a Senior Equal Rights Official (HFED) to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of policy in favour of equality between women and men within ministries and in public policies. This network of HFEDs is also an important lever for inter-ministerial exchange and collaboration and plays a central role in monitoring the implementation of the Inter-ministerial Plan for Equality between Women and Men 2023-27. The Ministry for Gender Equality is in charge of co-ordinating this network and gathers them on a regular basis.

In **Lithuania**, the Gender Equality Committee – which has active involvement from state agencies, line ministries and NGOs – makes proposals for setting priorities and supports and monitors the implementation of gender equality policies across various sectors. Operating simultaneously is the Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. From the perspective of equal opportunities for women and men, this Commission monitors and analyses the implementation of policies and programmes; provides information necessary for the preparation of Lithuanian reports to international organisations; examines EU and international legislation and documents; considers nominations submitted by state institutions; and co-operates and exchanges information and experiences with the Office of the Equal Opportunities Controller, other state and municipal institutions, non-governmental and international organisations and state institutions of foreign countries. The Commission includes the ministries of Social Security and Labor (Chair); Economy and Innovation; Finance; Health Protection; Education, Science and Sports; Internal Affairs; Foreign Affairs; and the government Office.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

2.3.2. Vertical co-ordination: Many countries use formal systems to co-ordinate gender equality priorities and policies between national and subnational governments

In all EU and OECD countries, subnational governments have the ability to develop, design and implement policies and programmes in at least some policy areas. The exact policy areas that are devolved to subnational governments is highly country dependent: in some countries, for example, healthcare is more decentralised, with the majority of expenditure at the subnational level (e.g. Canada), while in other countries, healthcare is more centralised, with subnational governments accounting for only a minority of total public health spending (e.g. Greece, Ireland) (Beazley et al., 2019[40]). No matter the extent or the area of devolution or decentralisation, vertical co-ordination on gender equality issues can ensure that

efforts are not duplicated by multiple levels of government and that key concerns are not accidentally overlooked through a lack of communication or collaboration.

Of the 34 EU and OECD countries who responded to the vertical co-ordination question in the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, 21 countries reported having a regularly-applied formal system to co-ordinate gender-related policies and programmes across different levels of government (Figure 2.8). Box 2.13 provides examples of vertical co-ordination mechanisms or institutions used in EU and OECD countries.

Figure 2.8. Vertical co-ordination of gender-related policies and programmes is reported in many EU and OECD countries

Distribution of countries according to the type of co-ordination system for gender-related policies and programmes that exists between national and subnational governments, 2024
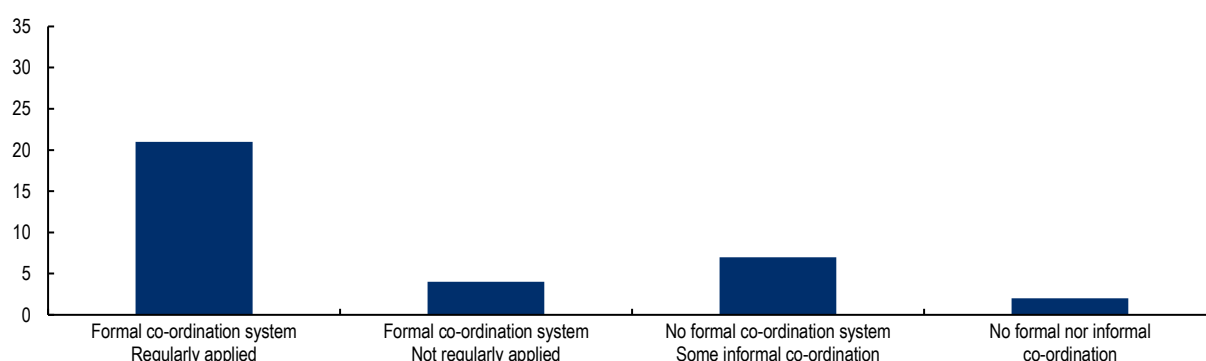
Note: Countries were asked "Is there a formal co-ordination mechanism or set of formalised practices to co-ordinate gender-related policies and programmes across different levels of government?" Response options included "There is a formal co-ordination system, and it is regularly applied," "There is a formal co-ordination system, but it is not regularly applied," "A formal co-ordination system does not exist, but there is some form of informal co-ordination," and "No, there is no formal nor informal co-ordination." This figure includes responses from 34 out of 43 EU and OECD countries.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Although many EU and OECD countries have some type of structure to co-ordinate policies and programmes across levels of government, in the 2021 OECD Survey on Gender Mainstreaming and Governance, 7 OECD countries identified the lack of appropriate structures for co-ordination as a major obstacle to the co-ordination of gender-related policies and programmes. Several other gaps to effective vertical co-ordination were also identified, including insufficient funding and resources for co-ordination and the lack of a policy or strategic framework for the engagement of subnational governments (OECD, 2023[7]). These results highlight that "reinforcing institutions with sufficient resources, capacities and co-ordination mechanisms is vital to make progress in the area of gender equality" (OECD, 2023[7]).

Box 2.13. Vertical co-ordination of gender equality policies and programmes

In **Bulgaria**, there are co-ordinators on equality between women and men at the national and regional level, as stipulated by the *Act on Equality between Women and Men*. Central and regional executive bodies designate officers who function as such co-ordinators and who co-operate with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Currently, there are 87 employees designated as co-ordinators within central bodies of the executive power and regional administrations, including 37 at the regional and 50 at the national level.

A Gender Equality Forum is convened every two years in **Iceland** to discuss gender equality issues. The Forum is open to all, with invitations sent to members of the Althingi, representatives of national and municipal government institutions, including their gender equality representatives, and representatives of social partners and civil society organisations with gender equality issues on their agenda.

In **Mexico,** the National System for Equality between Women and Men (SNIMH) is a fundamental mechanism for co-ordinating the National Policy on Equality among the agencies and entities of the Federal Public Administration, the organisations of the various social groups and the authorities of the States, Mexico City and the Municipalities. Since the first session of SNIMH on 9 October 2013, 32 sessions have been held, contributing to the National Policy on Equality between Women and Men.

In **Romania**, in each county and in Bucharest municipality, there are Commissions in the Field of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (COJES). These are formed of representatives from public services and of other specialised bodies of the local public administration, local administrative authorities, trade unions and employer's organisations and ONGs. At quarterly meetings, the National Commission in the Field of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (NCEO) reviews the reports sent by the COJES to decide on the measures necessary to eliminate short comings in certain fields of activity.

Sweden's Gender Equality Agency is a government agency under the Ministry of Employment created to contribute to effective implementation of Swedish gender equality policy. The work of the Agency requires close co-operation with other government agencies including County Administrative Boards, municipalities and regions and civil society.

In **France**, there is a decentralised network dedicated to women's rights, with over 150 representatives of the Ministry for Gender Equality at the local level. They are positioned at the regional and departmental government level. This decentralised network represents and is co-ordinated by the Ministry for Gender Equality at the central level.

Vertically co-ordinating gender equality policies – for example, policies relating to STEM co-ordinated between national and subnational ministries of education – is only one piece of the puzzle. To make progress on gender equality, subnational governments (e.g. provincial, state, municipal, regional) can also consider implementing gender mainstreaming practices across their areas of responsibility (e.g. gender mainstreaming in urban planning and infrastructure development, such as public transit).

According to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, only 12 out of 28 EU and OECD countries report that gender mainstreaming is performed by all or most jurisdictions at the subnational level (Figure 2.9).

Box 2.14 provides good practice examples of gender mainstreaming at the subnational level. Section 2.3 explores the use of horizontal and vertical co-ordination mechanisms in EU and OECD countries in more detail, including barriers to their effective implementation.

Figure 2.9. Few countries report gender mainstreaming by all or most subnational governments

Distribution of countries according to the extent to which gender is mainstreamed at the subnational level, 2024
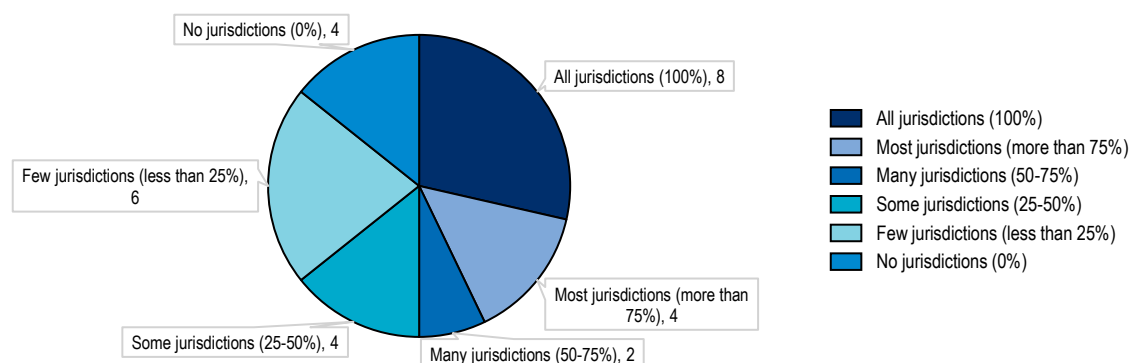
Note: Countries were asked "To what extent is gender mainstreaming (e.g. gender budgeting, gender impact assessments) used at the subnational level, approximately?" Response options included "All jurisdictions (100%)," "Most jurisdictions (more than 75%)," "Many jurisdictions (50-75%)," "Some jurisdictions (25-50%)," "Few jurisdictions (less than 25%)," and "No jurisdictions (0%)." This figure includes responses from 28 countries.
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Although it is important to ensure that gender mainstreaming is happening at all levels of government, it is equally important to avoid any potential duplication of efforts and unnecessary costs. This reinforces the need for strong collaboration and co-ordination across levels of government, including the sharing of resources, expertise and information on a regular basis.

Box 2.14. Good practice examples of gender mainstreaming at the subnational level

Gender mainstreaming in **Bulgaria** is enshrined in the *Act on Equality between Women and Men*. The *Act* stipulates that when exercising their powers, the central government and local self-government, public authorities, and economic operators implement the principles of the state policy on gender equality in legislation, as well as in all national, regional and local policies, strategies, programmes and plans.

Denmark's *Act on Gender Equality* specifies that regions and municipalities are obligated to work toward equality within their area and incorporate equality in all planning and administration.

Local governments in **Korea** conduct gender impact assessments of certain policies with the support of Gender Impact Assessment Centers (GIACs). There are 16 local GIACs and one central GIAC. The centres help local governments prepare gender-responsive budget statements, which are overseen by the Ministry of the Interior and Safety.

The *Gender Equality Act* in **Croatia** prescribes the existence of County Committees, the members of which are educated on the issues of gender equality and are expected to draw up action plans for various policy areas related to their local community.

Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Annex 2.A. List of gender equality strategies in EU and OECD countries

Annex Table 2.A.1. Gender equality strategies exist in most EU and OECD countries

Name and year of most recent gender equality strategy or action plan in EU and OECD countries

	Name of most recent gender equality strategy or action plan	Year introduced
Australia	Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality	2024
Bulgaria	Национална Стратегия За Насърчаване На Равнопоставеността На Жените И Мъжете 2021-30 English name: National Strategy for the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men 2021-30	2021
Canada	Gender Results Framework	2018
Chile	4º Plan Nacional de Igualdad Entre mujeres y hombres 2018-30 English name: 4th National Plan of Equality between Women and Men 2018-30	2018
Colombia	Política Pública de Equidad de Género para las Mujeres: Hacia el Desarrollo Sostenible del País (CONPES 4080) English name: Public Policy on Gender Equity for Women: Towards the Sustainable Development of the Country	2022
Costa Rica	Política Nacional para la igualdad efectiva entre mujeres y hombres 2018-30 (PIEG) English name: National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2018-30	2018
Croatia	Nacionalni Plan Za Ravnopravnost Spolova Za Razdoblje Do 2027 English name: National Plan for Gender Equality for the Period until 2027	2023
Cyprus	Εθνική Στρατηγική για την Ισότητα των Φύλων 2024-26 English name: National Strategy for Gender Equality 2024-26	2024
Czechia	Gender Equality Strategy for 2021-30	2021
Denmark	Redegørelse/perspektivog handlingsplan for ligestilling 2024 English name: Annual National Perspective and Action Plan for Gender Equality	2024
Finland	Valtioneuvoston tasa-arvopoliittinen selonteko English: Gender Equality Policy Report	2022
France	Toutes et tous égaux – Plan interministériel pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes English name: All Equal – Interministerial Plan for Equality between Women and Men	2023
Germany	Gleichstellungsstrategie der Bundesregierung English name: Federal Government Gender Equality Strategy	2020
Greece	English name: National Action Plan for Gender Equality	2021
Hungary	A nők szerepének erősítése a családban és a társadalomban (2021−30) akcióterv English name: Strengthening the Role of Women in the Family and Society (2021-30) Action Plan	2020
Iceland	English name: Parliamentary Resolution on a Gender Equality Action Programme for 2020-23	2020
Italy	Strategia nazionale per la parità di genere 2021-26 English name: National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-26	2021
Japan	English name: The Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality	2020

	Name of most recent gender equality strategy or action plan	Year introduced
Korea	제3차 양성평등정책 기본계획 (2023-27) English name: Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policy (2023-27)	2023
Latvia	Par Sieviešu un vīriešu vienlīdzīgu tiesību un iespēju veicināšanas plānu 2024-27 gadam English name: Plan on the Promotion of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men 2024-27	2024
Lithuania	Dėl Moterų Ir Vyrų Lygių Galimybių 2023-25 Metų Veiksmų Plano Patvirtinimo English name: Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2023-25 Action Plan	2023
Luxembourg	Plan d'action national pour une égalité entre les femmes et les hommes English name: National Action Plan for Gender Equality	2020
Malta	The Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan (GEMSAP)	2022
Mexico	Programa Nacional para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres 2020-24 English name: National Programme for Equality between Women and Men 2020-24	2020
Portugal	Estratégia Nacional para a Igualdade e a Não Discriminação 2018-30 English name: National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination – Portugal + Equal 2018-30 (ENIND)	2018
Romania	Strategiei naţionale privind promovarea egalităţii de şanse şi de tratament între femei şi bărbaţi şi prevenirea şi combaterea violenţei domestice pentru perioada 2022-27 English name: National Strategy in the Field of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men Promoting and Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women	2022
Slovak Republic	Celoštátna Stratégia Rovnosti Žien A Mužov A Rovnosti Príležitostí V Slovenskej Republike Na Roky 2021-27 English name: National Strategy for Equality of Women and Men and Equal Opportunities in the Slovak Republic for 2021-27	2021
Slovenia	Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023-30 English name: Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030	2023
Spain	El III Plan Estratégico para la Igualdad Entre Mujeres y Hombres (PEIEMH) recoge la agenda política en materia de igualdad para los años 2022-25 English name: Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men 2022-25	
Sweden	Jämställdhetsintegrering i Regeringskansliet 2025-29 English name: Gender Mainstreaming in Government Offices 2025-29	2025
Switzerland	Gender Equality Strategy 2030	2021
Türkiye	Kadinin Güçlenmesi Strateji Belgesi Ve Eylem Plani 2024-28 English name: Women's Empowerment Strategy Paper and Action Plan 2024-28	2024

Note: Data for Italy are from EIGE (2022[27]).
Source: OECD Secretariat 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

3 Conceptual framework for promoting gender equality through policy combinations

This chapter puts forth a conceptual framework consisting of six priority considerations to help policy makers build and assess impactful policy combinations to advance gender equality. A self-assessment tool is proposed at the end of the chapter as an example to operationalise selected priority considerations.

Governments are increasingly shifting toward addressing priority challenges through comprehensive solutions that combine various policies and programmes – also known as policy combinations. Policy makers operate in a complex environment where competing priorities, limited budgets, and political factors shape decision-making. Both financial and human resources are finite, and governments must balance gender equality objectives with broader economic, social and political priorities.

This report identifies key policy actions adopted or recommended for EU and OECD countries, ranging from addressing gender-based violence to tackling gender gaps in paid and unpaid work. These policy actions should not be viewed in isolation; rather, they form an integrated, cross-sectoral approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

Building on the policies identified in this report, this chapter provides a conceptual framework to guide policy makers in:

- designing and implementing co-ordinated policy combinations;
- assessing whether these policies are achieving gender equality outcomes; and
- identifying opportunities for policy improvement.

The primary objective of this conceptual framework is to ensure gender equality policies are coherent, results-driven and effectively leveraged across public administrations. Specifically, the framework fosters strategic alignment on gender equality across relevant ministries. It offers flexible, actionable guidance that policy makers can tailor based on their context, resources and priorities without being prescriptive. This approach aims to strengthen accountability, legitimise public funds, facilitate policy learning and cultivate transparency toward internal and external stakeholders.

The framework is built around six priority considerations for assessing the impacts of gender equality policy combinations, including:

1. defining what gender equality progress looks like;
2. clarifying scope and sequencing;
3. identifying the range of cross-portfolio policy and programme combinations (e.g. based on the various policy measures identified in this report);
4. establishing baseline measures through a gender audit or programme evaluation planning;
5. understanding and measuring gender equality impacts; and
6. interpreting and reporting results and using assessments to inform future strategies.

Many EU and OECD countries already have gender mainstreaming infrastructure in place (see Chapter 2), which provides a solid foundation for building effective policy combinations. According to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, 26 out of 33 countries report having a formal co-ordination system for gender-related policies that is regularly applied, and 18 of these involve all ministries. These structures can be crucial at key decision-making moments ensuring that gender equality objectives are pursued in a co-ordinated way – including when designing or evaluating national gender strategies, developing new policies, allocating budgets or setting administrative procedures for incoming governments after elections.

Assessments of policy combinations can complement individual policy evaluations and gender impact assessments (GIAs) (see Chapter 2). While ministries monitor outputs internally, impact evaluation is best undertaken by independent individuals or teams, separate from those responsible for implementation.

This framework builds on concepts from Chapter 2 and the evidence in this report, *Gender equality in a changing world: Taking stock and moving forward*. A sample self-assessment tool covering priority considerations 2 and 5 is provided in Table 3.2.

3.1. Priority consideration 1: Defining what gender equality progress looks like

Before beginning an assessment, it is useful to define a set of stated goals or anticipated results to measure success. This is best elaborated as part of a results framework that includes gender equality goals. Taking the policy objective of increasing women's participation in STEM jobs as an example, governments can consider developing a set of short, medium and long-term goals related to the representation of women (e.g. share of women in ICT occupations), retention of women (e.g. share of women who started and remained in STEM after 5 years) and experiences of women in STEM (e.g. share of women in STEM who feel welcome in the workplace). Given that every country is at a different starting point in their journey toward gender equality, defining indicators of progress can enable governments to assess whether they are on track to achieve the goals set out in their short, medium and long-term results frameworks. Table 3.1 provides an overview of key characteristics of a results framework.

Table 3.1. Key characteristics of a results framework

Includes short, medium and long-term indicators and measures of success

Aligns with international standards and results frameworks

Includes a mix of process and impact indicators

Provides for regular impact assessment and review periods

Provides for provisional targets sequenced over time

Is published alongside gender strategies (wherever possible)

Prioritises plain language and easily accessible concepts

Is published and publicly available

Is connected to an online repository or database for regular reporting

Integrates a diverse range of perspectives, including from civil society and academia

Includes indicators relating to gender mainstreaming in institutional settings

Source: Developed by the OECD Secretariat.

3.2. Priority consideration 2: Clarifying scope and sequencing

Policy makers can start their assessment with a targeted scope, focusing on a small number of themes, population groups or sectors. This approach helps identify data and consultation needs, while testing and refining the data collection methodology (see priority consideration 3.5). To ensure the versatility of the chosen method for assessing gender equality impacts across policy areas, governments can consider topics that are directly related to gender equality (e.g. women in STEM), but also those that are targeting other priorities (e.g. climate change, poverty). Once the methodology is validated, the assessment can be scaled up to the whole-of-government level. Starting with pilot studies or small-scale randomised controlled trials can help identify policy levers contributing to short- and medium-term outcomes. Engaging external experts for independent advice on course corrections and scaling options is also recommended.

3.3. Priority consideration 3: Identifying the range of cross-portfolio policy and programme combinations

Since gender inequalities are cross-cutting, cross-sectoral policies can directly and indirectly advance gender equality. To assess gender equality impacts, it is therefore crucial to identify the range of cross-portfolio policies and programmes (or policy combinations) addressing systemic gender inequalities. For example, when identifying policies and programmes designed to increase women's participation in STEM jobs, governments may want to consider policies and programmes relating to employment (e.g. non-discrimination laws, pay transparency policies, unconscious bias in recruitment), educational attainment and skills (e.g. changes to the national curriculum to reduce or eliminate harmful gender stereotypes), leadership and representation (e.g. policies supporting gender-balance in senior leadership in STEM roles), social protection (e.g. parental leave and childcare) and gender-based violence (e.g. preventing sexual harassment in the workplace). The self-assessment tool in Table 3.2 provides a detailed example.

To assess the contributing impact of these policy combinations, governments can start by identifying:

- the range of cross-portfolio policies and programmes that may be contributing to gender equality outcomes, including those outside of traditional gender equality frameworks;
- the challenges and barriers these policies are designed to address; and
- their policy goals (this could include goals for how policies are implemented and/or measured as well as their interlinkages with national frameworks, in addition to policy outcomes).

3.4. Priority consideration 4: Establishing the state and nature of (intersectional) gender equality through a gender audit

Establishing the baseline state and nature of (intersectional) gender inequality through a gender audit can provide important reference points against which to measure progress and support the assessment of the impact of policy combinations on gender equality outcomes.

The first step in undertaking a gender audit is to collect a mix of *qualitative* and *quantitative* gender-disaggregated data against a set of gender indicators which will enable governments to measure subsequent trends and variations over time.

- Quantitative evidence can be collected from a variety of sources, including administrative data and surveys. Such evidence may be available through national or subnational agencies, national statistical organisations, civil society, international organisations and more.
- Qualitative evidence can be collected from various stakeholders both internal and external to government, including government departments, civil society organisations, service providers, service recipients and experts. Such evidence can establish the lived experiences of target groups at the start of policy or programme implementation and can provide insights into whether a policy or programme is operating as intended, what is working well, what needs to be improved, whether targets are being met and how implementation may be adjusted to be more effective. Casting a wide net during stakeholder consultations can ensure that any differential impacts across different groups of people are understood.

The gender audit can also reflect intersectionality. This means considering how gender inequality may be compounded by the impacts of disadvantage or discrimination that someone might experience based on other factors such as age, disability or ethnicity.

> **Box 3.1. Assessing effectiveness through randomised or quasi-random evaluation methods**
>
> Some of the strongest evidence for effectiveness can be obtained through the use of randomised or quasi-random evaluation methods which exploit random or near-random variation in exposure to the policy or programme to estimate causal impacts on measurable socio-economic outcomes, including the extent to which impacts differ across groups of people.
>
> (Quasi)-random exposure to a policy or programme is sometimes inherent to an intervention but not always. As a result, governments can (and should) explicitly design policies and programmes with a random or quasi-random component *from the outset.* This enables the subsequent estimation of causal impacts and a deeper understanding of "what works" on the ground, and for whom. Such assessments can also help identify which levers within a policy combination are contributing to change, enabling governments to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of public investments, supporting future budget allocations. Small-scale pilots or trials that show positive gains across a range of measures can then be scaled-up to accelerate outcomes.
>
> Governments can consider engaging external experts and researchers to support these exercises and to provide independent advice on policy course correction and options for scaling up randomised controlled trials and pilot studies.

3.5. Priority consideration 5: Understanding gender equality impacts

To measure gender equality impacts against a results framework, governments can a mix of data collection and impact evaluation methodologies, considering key questions such as:

- To what extent has the policy or programmed achieved planned objectives?
- What are the direct impacts on the target group or population?
- What are the indirect impacts on public opinion, norms and attitudes?
- How might women, men and gender diverse people from different backgrounds or abilities be differently impacted, considering potential disadvantage caused by social norms and historical discrimination?
- Are there negative unintended consequences for certain groups of people? If so, how could these be redressed?
- What feedback do stakeholders have?

For more information about how to undertake gender impact assessments of individual policies, refer to the OECD Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality.

As part of the assessment of individual policies and programmes, governments must consider the implementation context – including potential interactions with other policies and programmes. This might require the use of complementary evidence – including both quantitative and qualitative data. Some key questions might include:

- What are the key contextual factors, both domestic and international, that may have impacted effectiveness?
- Are policies in this or other areas operating in a mutually supportive way or are they hindering progress, and why (e.g. due to unintentional design flaws or unforeseen barriers to access)?
- How might cross-portfolio co-ordination and collaboration be improved for more effective implementation?

Similar questions can be asked when assessing a set of policies and programmes (i.e. policy combinations) or entire gender equality strategies, keeping in mind that impacts of a specific combination of policies or programmes may not be simply the sum of the individual parts. Interactions between the policies and programmes might enhance or reduce effectiveness. As it is likely difficult, if not impossible, to assess the impact of a whole set of policies or a gender equality strategy through randomised or quasi-random evaluation methods, governments must rely on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

Gender impacts can be classified according to different categories. The "gender equality continuum" (Figure 3.1) is a useful tool for assessing whether a policy or policy combination is contributing to transformative change, identifying the specific type of impact it may have on gender equality (OECD, 2022[1]). The continuum categorises gender equality objectives and impacts on a scale going from gender "negative" or "exploitative" (causing harm, implying a risk) to gender "blind," "neutral" or "accommodating" (ignoring and working around existing gender inequalities, but possibly perpetuating them), gender "sensitive" or "aware" (considering gender inequalities), gender "responsive" or "positive" (strengthening gender equality) and gender "transformative" (changing gender norms and power relations).

Caution should be applied when selecting an appropriate category to avoid inaccurate assessment. For example, a policy that considers gender equality but does not include specific actions to address it would be considered gender-neutral or gender-sensitive. Further, while a single policy may be gender-sensitive, it is unlikely to be considered gender-responsive unless it is operating as part of a combination of policies operating in parallel to address the multiple drivers and consequences of gender inequalities.

It can take time for policies and policy combinations to achieve gender-responsive outcomes. Regular assessments of effectiveness and progress under the results framework combined with course correction can support governments to move from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative policies and policy combinations.

Figure 3.1. Gender equality continuum
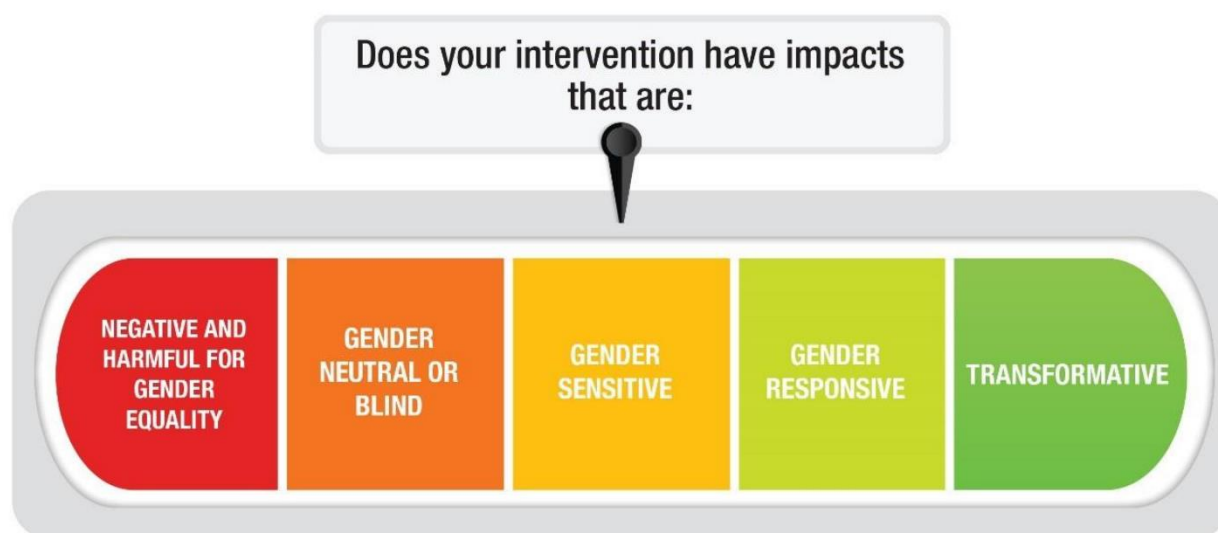
> **Box 3.2. Ensuring adequate resources for assessing gender equality impacts**
>
> Beyond assessing the impacts of an individual policy or programme or set of policies and programmes (e.g. policy combination, gender equality strategies), governments can also assess whether adequate and sufficient resources are provided for implementation, assessment, monitoring and evaluation. Some key questions include:
>
> - Are there adequate human and financial resources for implementation, review and course correction?
> - Is the budget for evaluations sufficient to adequately assess outcomes and allow for programme scale up, as needed?
> - Are there relevant qualitative and quantitative gender-disaggregated data to adequately monitor impacts by gender? Are these data disaggregated by gender and other factors (e.g. age, disability, socio-economic status)?
>
> For more information, refer to the *OECD Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality* (OECD, 2023[3]).

3.6. Priority consideration 6: Interpreting and reporting results and using assessments to inform future strategies

Governments can use the results of these assessments in several ways, including to inform future budget allocations, adjust policy settings, introduce complementary policies, support stakeholder consultations and revise gender equality strategies, among others. For example, when assessments show unintended consequences, governments can consider redressing inequities or imbalances through complementary initiatives. In addition, assessments can highlight gender and intersectional data gaps that can shape (future) gender data strategies – tools that help fill data gaps, assign roles to key gender data stakeholders, establish regular co-ordination mechanisms, elaborate data publication and dissemination strategies and identify gender data analysis capacity building opportunities.

Such assessments also support transparency and accountability, especially when made publicly available, updated regularly, published through a centralised, accessible location and tied to identified policy goals and results frameworks. When made publicly available, assessments should be easy for the public to interpret. In some cases, this may mean accompanying assessments with careful explanations to avoid misinterpretation. Consider, for example, that an increase in workplace sexual harassment complaints is likely to follow the introduction of policies intended to facilitate safe reporting.

Table 3.2. Sample tool for assessing gender equality impacts of policy combinations

This tool is an example of how to operationalise priority considerations. It presents hypothetical targets, policies and outcomes that should be tailored to national contexts.

Objectives and targets (from a hypothetical results framework)

- Increase the share of women in STEM occupations
- Increase the share of women who remain in STEM occupations after 5 years
- Increase the share of women in STEM occupations who feel welcome in the workplace

Barriers or challenges identified in the literature or in programme and policy evaluations

- Limited visibility of women in STEM occupations
- Some STEM occupations have been found to have toxic work environments
- High-performing girls are less likely to pick mathematics- and engineering-related occupations than high-performing boys
- Gender norms and stereotypes present in textbooks do not encourage girls to see themselves in STEM occupations
- Gender differences in unpaid work and a lack of adequate family supports (e.g. access to affordable, high-quality childcare) forces many women in STEM occupations to have extended career breaks, which may impede career advancement

Existing policies to overcome identified barriers and challenges by policy area (hypothetical)

Policy area 1: Employment	Policy A: Non-discrimination laws and regulations Policy B: Pay transparency policy
Policy area 2: Educational attainment and skills	Policy C: Changes to the national curriculum to eliminate or reduce on harmful gender stereotypes Policy D: STEM scholarship and mentoring programmes
Policy area 3: Leadership and representation	Policy E: Policies supporting gender-balance in private and public sector leadership in STEM fields Policy F: Policies that focus on addressing unconscious gender bias in STEM recruitment
Policy area 4: Gender-based violence	Policy G: Prevention of gender-based violence in the workplace including workplace sexual harassment
Policy area 5: Social protection	Policy H: Parental leave Policy I: Early childhood education and care policies and programmes

Direct outcomes (hypothetical)	Indirect outcomes (hypothetical)	Feedback, including consultation outcomes (hypothetical)
• Women now comprise 45% of public sector managerial positions in science and technology fields, compared to 39% last year. • The introduction of paid parental leave for fathers is associated with a 3% increase in the retention of women in the workplace in a quasi-experimental evaluation of causal impact. • Fathers and partners in participating workplaces reported feeling more confident to take up parental leave following the birth of their child after the introduction of flexible work and dedicated leave policies.	• In the latest national employee satisfaction survey, 60% of women working in science and technology fields responded yes to the question "in your organisation, are women equally likely to be promoted as men," which represents an increase of 8% compared to last year. • Policies have been connected to the national economic development plan.	• As part of consultation, women's organisations affirmed the importance of focusing on supporting fathers and partners to take parental leave, in addition to supports for mothers. • As part of consultation, civil society groups emphasised the importance of collecting gender data on time-use (i.e. paid and unpaid work hours), particularly how time use responds to policy changes like family leave or childcare availability.

Areas where further change or acceleration are required

- Policy A, B, G and H require the enhanced collection of data disaggregated by gender and by intersectionality factors for better monitoring. For example, surveys capturing the experiences of youth and gender diverse people in STEM and quantitative analysis breaking down firm gender pay gaps by intersectional factors.
- Evaluation of Policy C, D and F would benefit from greater qualitative and quantitative data to understand combined impacts, for example, via a randomised or quasi-experimental evaluation of casual impacts. A survey of youth in STEM could also highlight whether curriculum changes resulted in improvements in girls' ratings of the importance of STEM knowledge for their future employment and whether young girls are aware of the range of available scholarship programmes.
- The reporting threshold for Policy E (only those workplaces with >250 employees) does not adequately capture gender balance in leadership in medium-sized private sector technology firms. Lowering the reporting threshold to 50 employees or more may assist with capturing this information while also recognising the reporting burden on small enterprises.
- Implementation of Policy H and I would benefit from the publication of case studies showing how parents have benefitted from diverse parental leave arrangements and early childhood education and care programmes.
- The income thresholds for the childcare rebate contained in Policy I are inadvertently operating as a disincentive for mothers to return to work. Further research is required to understand how these policy settings should be changed to avoid this outcome.

Recommended actions

- Develop a gender and intersectional data strategy
- Include intersectional targets for all policies
- Pilot quasi-experimental evaluations for Policy B, C, D, F, H and I
- Consult on the reporting threshold for Policy E and make changes as relevant
- Develop and publish case studies for Policy H and I based on consultation
- Review Policy H to ensure parents are not penalised for returning to work after parental leave
- Review Policy I to ensure parents in regional and rural areas have adequate access to early childhood education and care supports

Source: Developed by the OECD Secretariat.

References

OECD (2023), *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/3ddef555-en. [3]

OECD (2022), *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: DAC Guidance for Development Partners*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/0bddfa8f-en. [2]

OECD (2022), *Stronger Open Democracies in a Globalised World: Embracing the Global Responsibilities of Governments and Building Resilience to Foreign Influence. Background note for the Meeting of the Public Governance Committee at Ministerial level*, OECD, Paris, https://one.oecd.org/document/GOV/PGC(2022)17/REV1/en/pdf. [1]

4 Gender gaps in educational attainment and outcomes remain

Using a life course approach, this chapter reviews key gender gaps in measured skills (e.g. reading, mathematics), career expectations, educational attainment, field of study and barriers to lifelong learning. Several key factors influencing these gender differences are presented. The chapter closes with policy options to reduce gender segregation in fields of study and ensure gender equality in lifelong learning and adult skills.

Key findings

- Gender gaps in educational attainment and skills arise in youth, reflecting gendered socialisation processes. Girls and boys, for instance, expect to pursue different careers, and their expectations largely reflect existing occupational segregation. Gender gaps in basic skills – including reading, mathematics and science – also appear relatively early.

- In nearly all EU and OECD countries, women have surpassed men in terms of educational attainment, reflecting several interrelated factors, such as perceived differences in labour market opportunities for women and men without tertiary education; changes in social norms and economic opportunities; and educational systems and occupational degree requirements; among others.

- Although women may be more likely to pursue tertiary education, notable segregation by field of study persists, with women far less likely to pursue studies in engineering, mathematics, information and technology.

- Gender gaps in literacy and numeracy evolve over the life course, reflecting that women and men use different skills at home, at school, and at work as a result of segregation by occupation and education and gender norms and stereotypes around paid and unpaid work.

- Women and men report similar levels of participation in adult education and training, but barriers to access differ by gender, with women much more likely than men to report that family responsibilities are preventing them from engaging in learning opportunities.

- Incorporating a gender angle into education policies is essential to ensure equitable access and opportunities for all. By considering gender, policies can promote inclusivity, challenge stereotypes, and create a learning environment where every student can thrive, regardless of their gender.

- To overcome gender segregation by field of study, governments have implemented a range of interventions, including gender sensitive learning materials, teacher training and career counselling, alongside dedicated career pathways, industry partnerships and targeted financial incentives. To close gender gaps in lifelong learning and adult skills, governments are turning toward flexible learning options and short-cycle programming at learning institutions, as well as policies and programmes that support a better balance between work, family and education.

Educational attainment and skills are strongly linked to labour market success, and women and men should be able to choose their educational paths without being constrained by gender norms or stereotypes. Yet, gender norms and stereotypes and attitudes toward gender roles have long influenced choices, and in some cases, policy environments have deliberately limited opportunities (e.g. some professions were historically not open to women).

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 4.1 reviews key gender gaps in educational attainment and skills for girls and boys and women and men over the life course, as well as some of the key factors behind gender differences in interests, career expectations and educational outcomes. Section 4.2 explores policy options to reduce gender segregation in fields of study and ensure gender equality in lifelong learning and adult skills.

4.1. Background: Gender gaps in key outcomes in educational attainment and skills

Starting in childhood and youth, this section looks at gender gaps in performance in reading, science and mathematics and in career expectations. This section then turns to young adulthood, highlighting gender differences in educational attainment and field of study. In the final part, this section investigates the evolution of measured skills and access to lifelong learning in middle and later adulthood. Key explanations for gender differences are put forth.

4.1.1. Childhood and youth: Gender stereotypes and norms start exerting an influence early

From the earliest ages, gender norms and stereotypes influence the expectations of girls and boys concerning their skills and career expectations.

Gender gaps in perceived and measured skills and abilities emerge in childhood and youth

Skills developed in childhood are the foundation for skills in later life. Once gaps emerge – whether the result of nature, nurture, socialisation, some combination of the above, or something else entirely – they can be difficult to close (OECD, 2020[1]), signalling the importance of early intervention.

From a gender perspective, differences in perceived and measured skills and abilities develop early (OECD, 2020[2]). International testing data, for example, show that at around age 10 years, gender gaps in reading favour girls, while gender gaps in mathematics and science favour boys (see Online Annex Figure 4-A1) (OECD, 2022[3]). And at age 15, boys continue to post higher scores than girls in mathematics in most EU and OECD countries and girls continue to outperform boys in reading in all EU and OECD countries (Figure 4.1). Although tackling gender gaps in measured skills in adolescence is important for ensuring improved gender equality in later life, it should be noted that gender gaps in reading, mathematics and science tend to be smaller than those found for other personal characteristics, such as socio-economic background (OECD, 2024[4]).

Figure 4.1. Boys tend to lag behind girls in reading, but girls tend to be behind boys in math

Gender gap (boys less girls) in average scores (points), 15-year-old students, 2022
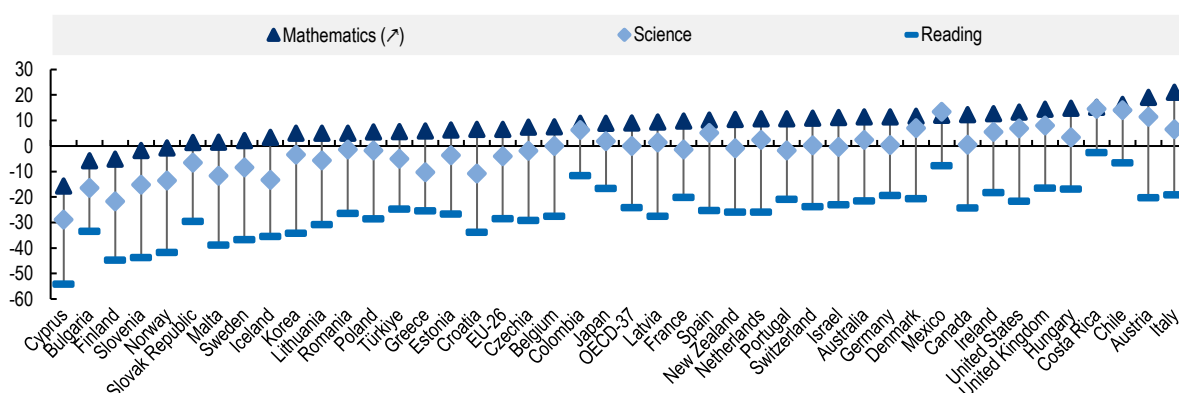
Note: EU-26 and OECD-37 averages reflect unweighted averages. ↗ indicates that the data is sorted according to this series in ascending order. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using publicly available microdata from the 2022 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2022-database.html#data).

These patterns and trends in gender gaps at the average do, however, mask important narratives across the score distribution (Figure 4.2). In mathematics and science, for example, gender gaps favour girls at the bottom of the distribution, but flip to favour boys at the top of the distribution. This change occurs at around the 50th percentile and gender gaps in favour of boys grow larger for higher percentiles in the distribution. This likely reflects deeply engrained associations – learned at a young age – between high-level intellectual abilities and men. By age six years, for instance, evidence finds that "girls are less likely than boys to believe that members of their gender are "really, really smart" and begin to avoid activities said to be for children who are "really, really smart" (Bian, Leslie and Cimpian, 2017[5]).

By contrast, for reading, gender gaps in performance favour girls across the distribution, although they are smaller at the top. Since reading is a foundational skill that underpins learning and competence in all areas, boys' underperformance in this area may be contributing to early school leaving and lower tertiary enrolment (see Section 4.1.2).

Figure 4.2. Gender gaps favouring boys in mathematics and science only emerge at the top of the test score distribution

Gender gap (boys less girls) in average scores (points) for selected percentiles of the score distribution, 15-year-old students, 2022
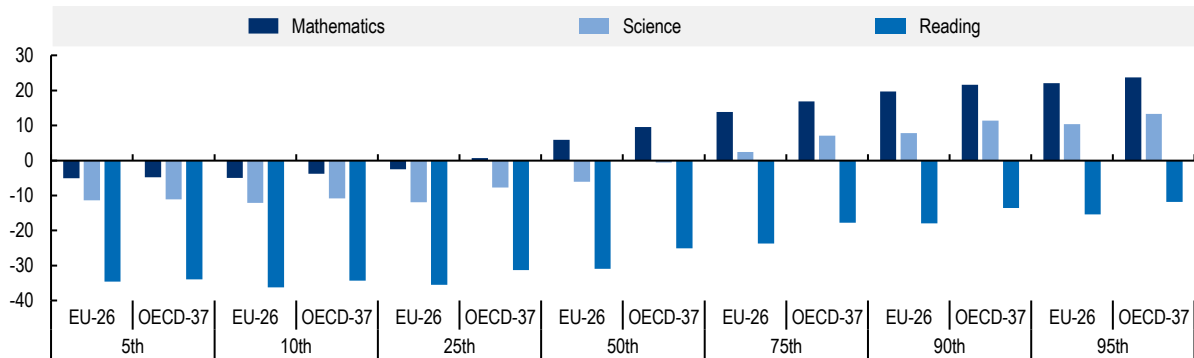
Note: EU-26 and OECD-37 averages reflect unweighted averages. Data for Luxembourg are missing. The 95th percentile refers to the highest scorers and the 5th percentile to the lowest scorers. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using publicly available microdata from the 2022 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2022-database.html#data).

Box 4.1. Spotlight on intersectionality: Student skills and migrant status

Gender and migrant status may interact in important and unique ways across countries (see Online Annex Figure 4-A2) (OECD, 2024[6]). In **Austria**, first-generation girls score 28 points lower in mathematics than first-generation boys and second-generation girls score 26 points lower than second-generation boys. This compares to a gender gap of only 15 points for native-born students. By comparison, in **Switzerland**, gender gaps in mathematics favouring boys are smaller for first-generation students (4 points) than for second-generation (13 points) and native-born (12 points) students. Differences across countries in gender gaps in skills by migrant status highlight how social, cultural, economic, political and institutional factors can interact with gender to influence the outcomes of girls and boys, regardless of place of birth. It is for this reason that policies and programmes to close gender gaps and support children's skills

> development cannot always be generalised across countries and must, instead, reflect country-level circumstances.
>
> Source: OECD calculations using 2022 OECD PISA.

Explaining gender gaps in mathematics and reading

No single explanation can capture the many nuances relating gender and academic achievement across all subjects, topics, ability levels or population groups (Cobb-Clark and Moschion, 2017[7]), but the gendered socialisation process is likely to play a key role.

Parents, teachers and peers may, for example, have biases – whether known or unknown, conscious or unconscious – that affect interactions (e.g. time spent assisting with homework), investments (e.g. extracurricular activities, personalised tutoring) and expectations (e.g. math ability, tertiary attainment). These differences in interactions, investments and expectations may themselves lead to disparities in interests, learning motivation and educational outcomes, contributing to later life differences in field of study and occupation (OECD, 2019[8]; Carrell, Page and West, 2010[9]; Dee, 2007[10]; Gevrek, Gevrek and Neumeier, 2020[11]; Bian, Leslie and Cimpian, 2017[5]; Carlana, 2019[12]; Baker and Milligan, 2016[13]; Lavy and Sand, 2018[14]). Indeed, evidence suggests that gender-based stereotypes about interest in technical fields emerge in children as early as six years of age (Master, Meltzoff and Cheryan, 2021[15]).

Gender biases (held by parents, teachers and peers) regarding interest in and aptitude for certain areas of work or fields of study reflect not only gender norms and stereotypes around skills and abilities, but also gendered expectations of educational and economic opportunities (Nollenberger, Rodríguez-Planas and Sevilla, 2016[16]; van Hek, Kraaykamp and Wolbers, 2016[17]; Rodríguez-Planas and Nollenberger, 2018[18]; Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]). For example, girls may put less personal effort into the study of mathematics, as current patterns of occupational segregation may lead them to aspire to and expect to work in careers that do not require high levels of mathematics. Parents and teachers, observing the same patterns, may expect less of girls than of boys and encourage them less in the study of mathematics (Gevrek, Gevrek and Neumeier, 2020[11]). Indeed, research finds that parents are less likely to expect their daughters to work in a STEM field (OECD, 2015[20]). Girls have also been found to have higher levels of math anxiety (Foley et al., 2017[21]), less confidence in their math abilities (OECD, 2015[20]), and a greater distaste for mathematics (Bharadwaj et al., 2016[22]). In fact, even when controlling for test scores, high school boys evaluate their math abilities as higher than girls, and boys' self-assessment is less likely to be impacted by receiving lower grades (Zander et al., 2020[23]). This is consistent with research that finds that men generally engage in more self-promotion than women (Exley and Kessler, 2022[24]).

Boys, on the other hand, have been found to be less interested in or motivated by reading (Marinak and Gambrell, 2010[25]). Boys may also eschew reading to build their "masculine" social identity and status among peers, since reading is viewed as more "feminine" (Espinoza and Strasser, 2020[26]), and stereotypically feminine (or less masculine) behaviour is often associated with lower status and/or the domestic sphere (Berdahl et al., 2018[27]; EIGE, 2020[28]). The belief that reading is not masculine may derive, in part, from the fact that boys are not exposed to reading early in their lives in the same way as girls. Fathers are, for example, less likely to read than mothers and fathers are less likely to read to sons than to daughters (Auxier et al., 2021[29]; Leavell et al., 2011[30]). Recognising that not enough fathers were reading to their children, in 1999, Sweden's national unions launched a project called *Las For Mej, Pappa* ("Read to Me, Dad"). Through this project, local union branches disseminate information about the programme and stock books of interest to both union members and their children. Each local union also organises "dad days," where a working-class author presents his book and a child-development expert discusses the importance of writing and reading, explaining to fathers how they can help to improve their child's reading habits (OECD, 2012[31]). Participants apply for leave under the *Study Leave Act* and tax-

free stipends are offered (Landsorganisationen i Sverige, 2025[32]). Still ongoing in 2025, thousands of fathers have participated in the programme (IF Metall, n.d.[33]; Landsorganisationen i Sverige, 2025[32]).

Poorer performance among boys than among girls across all three subjects at the bottom of the distribution may also be related to boys' greater likelihood of behaving in ways that are associated with poorer academic performance (e.g. arriving late at school, engaging in non-conformist and anti-social behaviour in the classroom, spending less time on homework) (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]; OECD, 2015[20]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]). Gender gaps in these behaviours may stem from several factors, including gender differences in personal preferences, gender differences in the prevalence of neurological disorders, structural factors and gendered socialisation processes (OECD, 2015[20]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]) (see Section 4.1.2).

Girls and boys often aspire and expect to work in different careers

There are clear and important differences in occupational expectations and aspirations that emerge at an early age, and these expectations largely reflect existing occupational segregation by gender. Recent work by the OECD, for example, finds that one in four of the top 30 most popular roles selected by 5-year-old girls are in traditionally women-dominated occupations, while more than 1 in 2 of the top 30 most popular roles selected by 5-year-old boys are in traditionally men-dominated occupations (OECD, 2021[35]). This is corroborated by *Drawing the Future*, a survey of over 20 000 children aged 7 to 11 years old, which finds that girls' and boys' career choices were clearly shaped by gender-specific ideas about jobs, with boys choosing jobs in traditionally men-dominated spaces and girls choosing jobs in traditionally women-dominated spaces (Chambers et al., 2018[36]). Similar findings emerge in more specific draw-a-scientist studies, where girls are shown to increasingly draw scientists as men as they age from childhood into adolescence (Miller et al., 2018[37]).

These gendered career aspirations and expectations persist through to adolescence. According to the 2022 OECD PISA, girls are overrepresented among those expecting to work in currently women-dominated occupations, including in personal care, health and teaching, while girls are underrepresented among those expecting to work in currently men-dominated occupations, including in information and communication technologies and the trades (Figure 4.3). Indeed, there is a striking overlap between current levels of occupational segregation and occupational segregation as measured by adolescent career expectations. Although these may only be career expectations among students at age 15 years, evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that adolescents' expectations are a good predictor of future jobs (Mann et al., 2020[38]).

It is worth noting, however, that despite the clear persistence of occupational segregation in many areas, there are several potentially promising developments for science and engineering professionals and protective service workers (e.g. firefighters, police officers) (see Online Annex Figure 4-A3). For example, according to the 2022 PISA, 44% of 15-year-old students who expect to work in careers as science and engineering professionals are girls. This is higher than in 2015, when girls accounted for only 35% of students who expected to work in such careers. It is also higher than the current share of science and engineering professionals who are women, which sits at 32% (Figure 4.3). There are similar improvements among protective service workers.

These improvements may reflect recent governmental efforts to introduce policies and programmes aimed at increasing girls' and young women's interest and enrolment in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and the introduction of recruitment campaigns and programmes in police services specifically targeting women. For example, in the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, 17 out of 35 EU and OECD countries mentioned that they have included STEM-related goals in their gender equality strategies, have embedded gender equality considerations into their national strategies on STEM and/or have introduced specific policies and programmes aimed at encouraging girls and women to study STEM fields and enter STEM careers.

Figure 4.3. Occupational segregation in career expectations among adolescents mirrors occupational segregation among adults in the labour market

Share (%) of 15-year-old students reporting career expectations for selected occupations who are girls compared to share (%) of employed persons (15-64) in selected occupations who are women, EU-25 countries, 2022
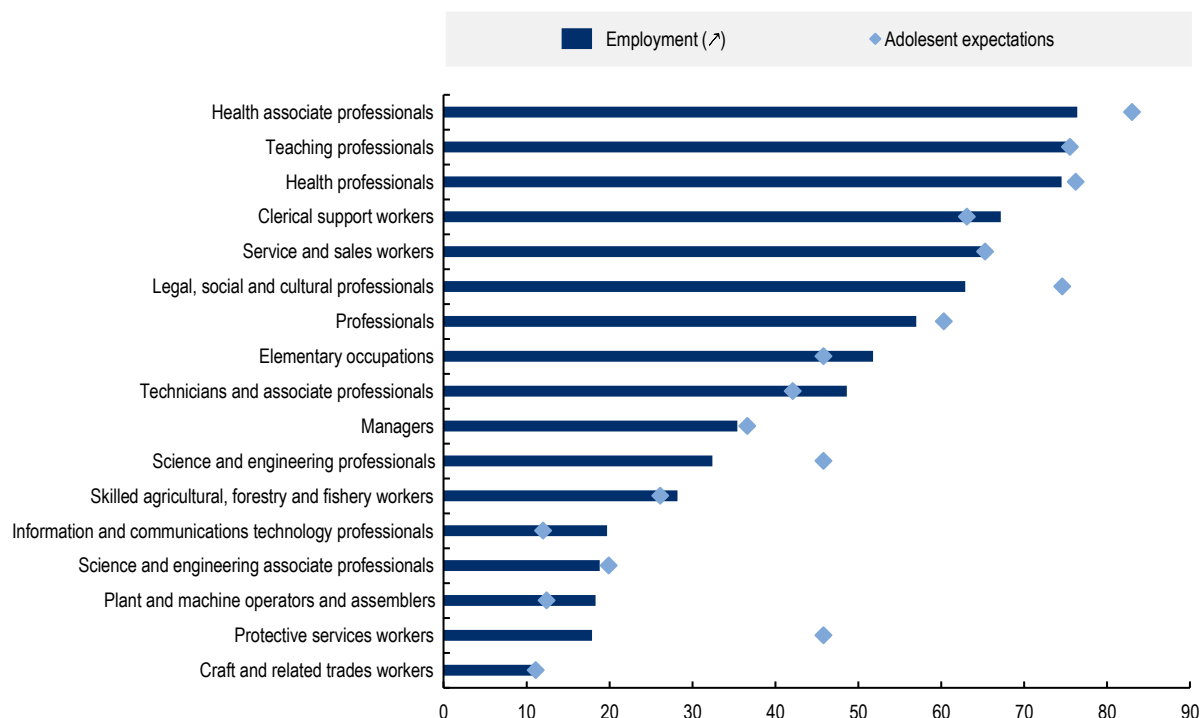
Note: Data refer to unweighted averages across EU countries. Occupations refer to ISCO-08 classifications. For data on employment and adolescent career expectations, estimates represent unweighted averages for EU-25 countries, excluding Luxembourg and Cyprus. Some countries are missing data on employment by sex for certain occupations. To ensure data reliability, country-occupation-gender cells for adolescent career expectations are only included when cell size is larger than five observations. As a result, some countries are missing data on adolescent career expectations. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.

Source: Eurostat "Employed persons by detailed occupation (ISCO-08 two-digit level)" (https://doi.org/0.2908/LFSA_EGAI2D) combined with OECD Secretariat calculations using publicly available microdata from the 2022 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2022-database.html#data).

Explaining gender differences in career expectations

As with gender gaps in skills, gender differences in career expectations are largely driven by gender stereotypes and norms which are learned through a gendered socialisation process that starts at birth. Indeed, no matter how old, children are exposed to the gendered environment around them, including at home (e.g. gendered toys), in public spaces (e.g. more women supervising children in parks), in semi-public spaces (e.g. predominantly women working in childcare centres), in the media (e.g. gendered characters in TV and film) and in educational resources (e.g. books conveying gender stereotypes and norms). And through observation of their environment, children are absorbing gender norms and stereotypes regarding behaviour, occupations, attitudes and activities.

These observations are then reinforced through learning and socialisation. Parents and teachers may relate to and interact with girls and boys in different ways and may believe – consciously or unconsciously – that girls and boys have different interests, skills and abilities, contributing to or creating gender differences in assessments, outcomes, and expectations (Nollenberger, Rodríguez-Planas and Sevilla,

2016[16]; Rodríguez-Planas and Nollenberger, 2018[18]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]; OECD, 2019[8]). Classmates and communities may knowingly or unknowingly police gender norms and stereotypes, with children experiencing "disapproval and social penalties" in the event of deviations from expected behaviours and interests (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores, 2019[39]).

Books, TV and films – important elements of culture – also present children and adolescents with a gendered view of the future. In 2024, for example, of over 2 000 characters appearing in films, only 38% of women characters had an identifiable job or occupation, compared to 62% of men characters (Lauzen, 2025[40]). In this same study, only 37% of characters that were portrayed as leaders were women. This is problematic since children can absorb many gender norms and stereotypes, including those around different career paths, through media. Indeed, in a survey of over 13 000 children aged 7 to 11 years old in the United Kingdom, 39% of children drew a "dream" job performed by someone they knew, who was typically their parent, guardian or an extended family member. Of the 61% who did not know someone who did their dream job, almost half reported that they had heard about the job through TV, film or radio (Chambers et al., 2018[36]). This suggests two things. First, it suggests that role models may be important for girls and boys. Short-term exposure to role models may only temporarily change stereotypical beliefs, but longer- or long-term. Second, it also suggests that policies must work toward ensuring that all media types are regularly challenging and dismantling stereotypical representations of girls and boys and women and men.

Tackling gender norms and stereotypes that uphold gender differences in career expectations can be a challenge since such beliefs can often be self-reinforcing (Makarova, Aeschlimann and Herzog, 2019[41]). If women and girls, for example, choose not to enter STEM fields because they are "for men and boys," there will be fewer women and girls in these fields, which ultimately bolsters the viewpoint that these fields are "for men and boys." At the same time, however, gender norms and stereotypes may not be the sole culprit for gender differences in career aspirations and eventual field of study. Recent evidence suggests that (top performing) girls may choose not to study fields related to science and mathematics because they (feel they) are even better at reading. Indeed, even when girls are top performances in mathematics, they are more likely to hold an "intra-individual strength" in reading. This comparative advantage for girls in reading may be contributing to gendered self-selection across fields of study (Breda and Napp, 2019[42]; Stoet and Geary, 2018[43]).

4.1.2. Young adulthood: Gender norms and stereotypes translate into gendered career paths and life choices

Gender norms and stereotypes learned through socialisation processes at a young age combine with economic, structural and behavioural factors to translate into gendered choices regarding field of study and level of education. This ultimately affects career paths.

Women are more likely to obtain a tertiary education, while men are more likely to leave school early

Across the 15 OECD countries with available data, only 15% of women aged 25-64 years had a tertiary education in the 1981-89 period, compared to 19% of men. Over time, these shares have continuously increased for both women and men, although the increase has been larger for women. By the 2020-23 period for this same set of 15 countries, 46% of women had a tertiary education, compared to 39% of men (see Online Annex Figure 4-A4).

Higher levels of educational attainment for women relative to men is now essentially the norm across all OECD countries, with only 5 countries showing the opposite pattern, namely Mexico, Türkiye, Germany, Switzerland and Korea. (Figure 4.4). Even in these cases, however, gender gaps remain quite small, sitting

at 3 percentage points, on average. By comparison, in those EU and OECD countries where gender gaps favour women, gaps are, on average, three times larger (9 percentage points).

Figure 4.4. Women are more likely to have completed a tertiary education than men

Share (%) of women and men (25-64) whose highest level of educational attainment is tertiary, 2023 or latest
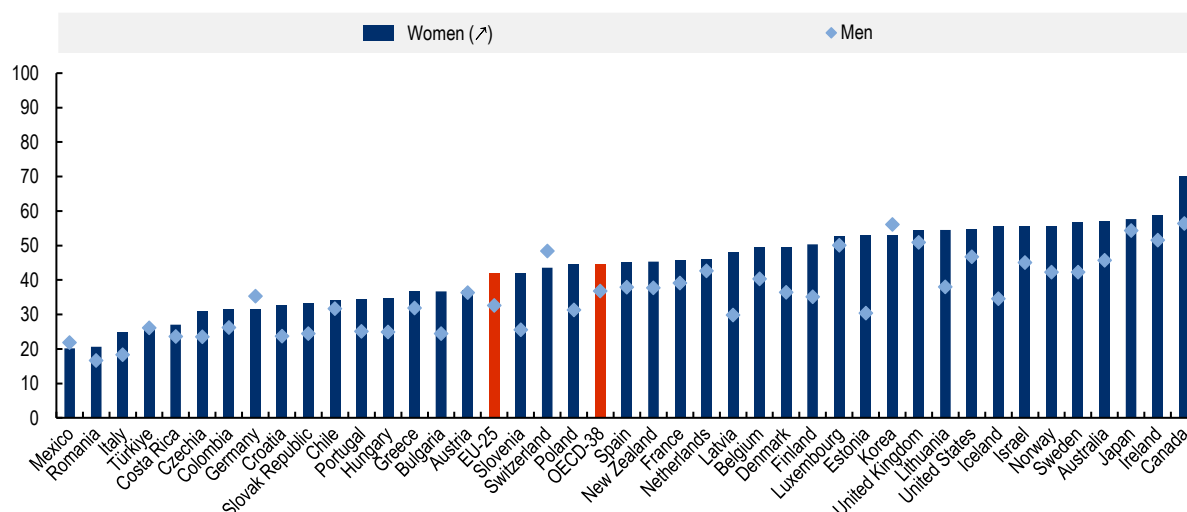
Note: EU-25 and OECD-38 averages are unweighted. Data for Chile are from 2022. Tertiary education refers to ISCED 2011 Levels 5-8, and includes short-cycle tertiary, Bachelor's or equivalent, Master's or equivalent, and Doctorate or equivalent. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Adults' educational attainment distribution, by age group and gender" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16o).

Higher levels of tertiary educational attainment among women are partly driven by higher rates of early school leaving among men. In 2023, among OECD countries, 20% of men aged 25-64 had left formal education without having completed an upper secondary degree (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[44]).[1] By comparison, 18% of women report having less than an upper secondary education. Gender gaps are of a similar size among those aged 25-34 years, but drop-out rates are lower for both women (12%) and men (15%), reflecting increasing educational attainment among EU and OECD populations.

Box 4.2. Spotlight on intersectionality: Ethnicity and race and educational attainment

Gender gaps in educational attainment often vary across racial and ethnic groups (see Online Annex Figure 4-A5). In **Canada**, for instance, women who identify as Inuk, First Nations, Métis, Southeast Asian, Filipino, and Latin American are *more* likely to have a Bachelor's degree than similar men. By contrast, women who identify as Black, Arab, South Asian, Chinese, West Asian and Korean are *less* likely than similar men to have a Bachelor's degree. Gender gaps range from 1 to 5 percentage points when favouring men and 1 to 10 percentage points when favouring women. In **New Zealand**, gender gaps favour women for all racial and ethnic groups, ranging from a gap of 2 percentage points to 8 percentage points. In most EU and OECD countries, such analyses are not possible as data on ethnicity and race are lacking, and in some EU and OECD countries, collecting data on ethnicity and race is not legal. This makes it impossible to assess differences in outcomes and limits the capacity for governments to implement (targeted) interventions.

Source: Statistics Canada Table 98-10-0330-01 "Visible minority by occupation, highest level of education and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories" and Table 98-10-0413-01 "Highest level of education by census year, Indigenous identity and Registered Indian status: Canada, provinces and territories" and Statistics New Zealand Aotearoa Data Explorer "Highest qualification and ethnic group (grouped total responses) by age group and sex, for the census usually resident population count aged 15 years and over, 2006, 2013, and 2018 Censuses (RC, TA, SA2, DHB)."

Explaining gender differences in educational attainment

Gender gaps in tertiary educational attainment can be linked to several key factors that are economic, social, structural and behavioural in nature.

- **Labour market opportunities and occupational segregation**: Due to occupational segregation, men have had (and still have) different career goals and more, better and/or different employment opportunities without formal upper secondary or tertiary educational credentials than women (Welmond and Gregory, 2021[45]; OECD, 2023[46]; Bonnet and Murtin, 2023[47]; Borgna and Struffolino, 2017[48]; OECD, 2022[49]). These findings are corroborated by a Pew Research Center survey in which 26% of men without a tertiary education reported that the reason they did not pursue further education was because they did not need higher education for the job or career they desired. This compares to only 20% of women (Parker, 2021[50]).

- **Social norms and economic opportunities**: In the last century, beliefs about the roles of women and men in society and in the household have undergone a rapid shift, with younger generations of women less likely than older generations of women to believe that the most important role for a woman is to take care of her home and family (see Online Annex Figure 4-A6) (Eurobarometer, 2024[51]). This has allowed women to enter the labour market in ever greater numbers. At the same time that norms around gender roles have been changing, the economic benefits that accrue to people with higher levels of education have increased and there has been strong "demand for labour in service professions" (Hadjar et al., 2014[34]). Combined together, the increasing acceptance of women in the labour market, greater opportunities for women in the labour market, and rising returns to education explain much of the increasing educational attainment of women (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]). Indeed, as proposed by Becker (1964[52]), for women, investing in education only made sense when women could use that education to earn an income or gain status in the labour market.

- **Parental expectations**: Parental expectations can exert an important influence on educational outcomes, and parents of girls are slightly more likely to report that they expect their child to complete tertiary education than parents of boys. Indeed, in the 22 OECD countries with available data, 76% of parents expect their sons to complete tertiary education, compared to 80% for

daughters (see Online Annex Figure 4-A7) (OECD, 2022[3]). Although such gaps are small, a simple correlation exercise between gender gaps in parental expectations and gender gaps in tertiary educational attainment for the population aged 25-64 years across the 24 EU and OECD countries with available data reveals a positive correlation coefficient above 0.60. This means that countries with larger gender gaps in tertiary educational attainment (measured as the share of women aged 25-64 years with tertiary less the share of men aged 25-64 years with tertiary) also have larger gender gaps in parental expectations (measured as the share of girls with parents who expect them to go to university minus the share of boys with parents who expect them to go to university). Different expectations for sons and daughters may reflect that "parents still harbour stereotypical notions of what women and men excel at and the career they can pursue when they enter the labour market," which is itself related to existing occupational segregation (OECD, 2015[20]).

- **Educational systems**: The characteristics of educational systems can play an important role in shaping the size and direction of gender gaps in outcomes. Consider first *highly stratified education systems* (also known as early tracking systems). These systems place students in different types of programmes (e.g. academic, vocational) to provide them with different skills (and sometimes with different credentials) (Hadjar et al., 2014[34]). In some cases, stratification is so extreme that placement in certain programmes does not provide direct access to tertiary education, limiting a student's options after completion of compulsory school (OECD, 2021[53]). But even when pathways are open in theory, there may be significant barriers to access to these pathways in practice and graduates from vocational education and training (VET) programmes are not always set up for success in post-secondary education. While tertiary attainment should not be the goal for everyone and many technical and vocational education programmes have very strong outcomes, limiting access to tertiary education hinders the opportunities for graduates from these programmes to engage in further learning. In many highly stratified systems, boys are more likely than girls to be placed into or oriented towards VET programmes (OECD, 2015[20]). This early gendered sorting by programme not only reinforces gender inequality in future career options and educational attainment, but it has also been shown to lead to gender gaps in measured skills (van Hek, Buchmann and Kraaykamp, 2019[54]; Lorenz and Schneebaum, 2023[55]). Alongside gender norms and stereotypes, some of the reasons for gendered differences in enrolment by programme type (including into VET programmes) include overall lower achievement among boys (with low achievers overrepresented in VET programmes); greater awareness of the need to prepare for labour market entry among boys (given that men are more likely to be in occupations requiring technical or vocational skills); and a greater enjoyment and interest in the content of VET programmes among boys. Consider also the *level of standardisation in curricula*, i.e. the extent to which teachers and schools have the ability to adjust course offerings, course content, and learning materials, such as textbooks. In a recent study, higher levels of standardisation were found to lead to lower overall reading performance for both girls and boys, but with a stronger negative association for boys than for girls, contributing to increased gender gaps in performance (van Hek, Buchmann and Kraaykamp, 2019[54]). Consider, too, *testing conditions*. Although more research is needed, evidence suggests that gender differences in achievement on school-based tests and assignments may reflect not only "differences in cognitive skills but also (and crucially) differences in engagement with and motivation for school-based tests" (Borgonovi, Ferrara and Maghnouj, 2018[56]; Borgonovi, 2022[57]). This suggests that changes in the tools and methods used to assess skills and competences could help narrow gender gaps. Other educational system characteristics may also matter for gender gaps in outcomes, but more research is needed, including on the underlying mechanisms and channels driving these relationships.

- **Degree requirements**: Specific occupations have changed degree requirements in recent years, which has served to reinforce higher rates of tertiary education among women. For example, in nursing in many OECD countries, there has been a shift from a requirement for a vocational

credential to a requirement for a tertiary qualification. Alongside other factors mentioned here, given the predominance of women in nursing, this change in degree requirements may have contributed to the relatively larger increase in the share of women with tertiary degrees compared to men (OECD, 2021[53]).

- **Impact of low socio-economic status on academic achievement**: Compared to girls, research suggests that boys' academic performance is particularly affected by low socio-economic status (DiPrete and Buchmann, 2013[58]; Autor and Wasserman, 2013[59]; Welmond and Gregory, 2021[45]; Autor et al., 2023[60]), potentially contributing to their overrepresentation among low achievers. Evidence suggests that this gender difference is not the result of family environment (as measured by initial allocation to family types and health at birth), and that only a small portion is accounted for by environmental factors (e.g. schools and neighbourhoods) (Autor et al., 2023[60]). Instead, gender differences seem to be mostly driven by a differential sensitivity to household inputs. For example, compared to girls, "having a mother who is married at birth – a proxy for men role models in the home – confers additional benefits to boys relative to girls, particularly at the lower tails of the outcome distribution" (Autor et al., 2023[60]). Boys may also be "differentially vulnerable to a scarcity of parental time, emotional and financial resources due to gender differences in non-cognitive skills, including boys' lower rates of socio-emotional skills and lesser ability to delay gratification" (Autor et al., 2023[60]).

- **Over-representation of women in education professions**: In the OECD, women represented 96% of teachers in early childhood education and 83% of teachers at the primary level (see Online Annex Figure 4-A8). It has been suggested that the over-representation of women in education has contributed to boys' poor academic performance (Hadjar et al., 2014[34]), but there is no consensus in the literature on the impact of teacher-student gender matches on either boys or girls (Viarengo, 2021[61]). Whether teacher-student gender matches have an impact or not, a better balance between women and men teachers in education and across subject matters could benefit all students by challenging gender norms and stereotypes and biased views of teachers and specific fields of study (OECD, 2023[46]). The over-representation of women in teaching is likely driven by many factors, including gender stereotypes that mean teaching is perceived as a woman's profession; greater use and availability of flexible working arrangements, which make teaching attractive for working mothers; and differences in relative wages between women and men, which make teaching financially less appealing to men than to women (OECD, 2022[62]). Recent research from an audit study also suggests that men applicants may face gender bias in hiring, particularly for entry-level positions (Fullard, 2025[63]).

- **Sense of belonging and achievement in academic environments**: Students who perform poorly at school are difficult to motivate and are at greater risk of early school leaving (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]). They may also feel disconnected or alienated from school, leading them to "build an identity based on rebellion against school and formal education," increasing their risk of early leaving (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]). Compared to girls, boys are more likely to report that they feel alienated at school and more likely to perform poorly (Hadjar et al., 2014[34]; OECD, 2023[46]).

- **Behaviours associated with educational success**: Across a range of indicators related to educational success – e.g. on-time arrival at school, engagement in non-conformist and anti-social behaviour in the classroom, time spent on homework, regular attendance at school, enjoyment of reading, etc. – boys do worse than girls (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]; OECD, 2015[20]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]). These gender gaps may stem from several factors. Boys are, for example, less likely than girls to have an interest in and be motivated by school (Hadjar et al., 2014[34]; Parker, 2021[50]). Structural factors within education systems may also be contributing to boys' lack of engagement as "learning environments, pedagogical practices and curricula" are less likely to "relate to and engage the interest and dispositions of many teenage boys" (OECD, 2015[20]).

Neurological disorders – which are more prevalent among boys (see Chapter 7) – could equally be playing a role in gender gaps in behaviours associated with educational success, particularly in engagement in non-conformist and anti-social behaviour in the classroom. Layered on top of these factors is a gendered socialisation process that teaches boys that being interested in schoolwork and displaying characteristics important for educational success – e.g. conformity, co-operation, submission – is not aligned with "masculine" ideals – e.g. indifference toward formal achievement and disregard of authority (OECD, 2015[20]; Hadjar et al., 2014[34]).

Box 4.3. Higher levels of tertiary education have lower shares of women

On average, women account for 57% of those aged 25-34 years with a Bachelor's degree, compared to 49% of those with a Doctorate in OECD countries (see Online Annex Figure 4-A9). The decline in the share of women among credential holders at higher levels of educational attainment suggests that women are not continuing on the academic track at the same rate as men.

One important factor that may be preventing women from continuing on to further levels of education is the lack of supportive family policy. In some OECD countries, for example, higher education students may not have (e.g. Australia) or only recently gained access to (paid) family leave (e.g. Poland) (OECD STIP, 2023[64]; Universities Australia, 2024[65]). Higher education students may also not be able to access affordable high-quality – and crucially – flexible childcare on campus, without which it may be difficult to continue on or complete their studies (Reichlin Cruse et al., 2021[66]). Suitable and affordable (family) housing may also be more difficult to find (Manze, Watnick and Freudenberg, 2021[67]).

Another important factor that may limit women's pursuit of higher levels of education may be discrimination and harassment, especially in men-dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) (OECD, 2022[68]).

Box 4.4. Women victims/survivors of violence may experience barriers to education

Gender-based violence is pervasive (see Chapter 8) and women victims/survivors may face barriers to education or challenges within academic settings. Perpetrators may, for example, prevent their partners from studying (e.g. physical violence or stalking at university, disruption of academic efforts, destroying homework or school supplies). These obstacles may lead to lower academic success and, if women victims/survivors are forced to abandon or delay their studies, lower levels of educational attainment. Indeed, in a recent study in Australia, women victims/survivors of domestic violence were less likely to attain a university degree compared to women who had not experienced domestic violence, with the gap in attainment reaching 15% by age 25 years.

Source: Summers, Shortridge and Sobeck (2025[69]), *The Cost of Domestic Violence to Women's Employment and Education*.

Gender differences in fields of study stem from gender norms and stereotypes

Gender segregation by field of study exists within VET programmes and within tertiary. In the context of VET programmes, girls are more likely to be enrolled in health and social care, while boys are more likely to be enrolled in energy-, industry- and building- and construction-related programmes (e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers (2022[70])). In the context of tertiary education, a similar picture emerges, with women more likely to enrol in education, health and welfare and men more likely to enrol in information and

communication technologies (ICTs) and engineering, manufacturing and construction (Figure 4.5). These gaps are partly the consequence of gendered career expectations and gendered performance across subject matters (see Section 4.1.1), which are both a product of gender stereotypes and norms (Encinas-Martín and Cherian, 2023[19]).

Figure 4.5. Gender segregation in fields of study persists

Share (%) of graduates for selected fields of education at the tertiary level who are women, 2022
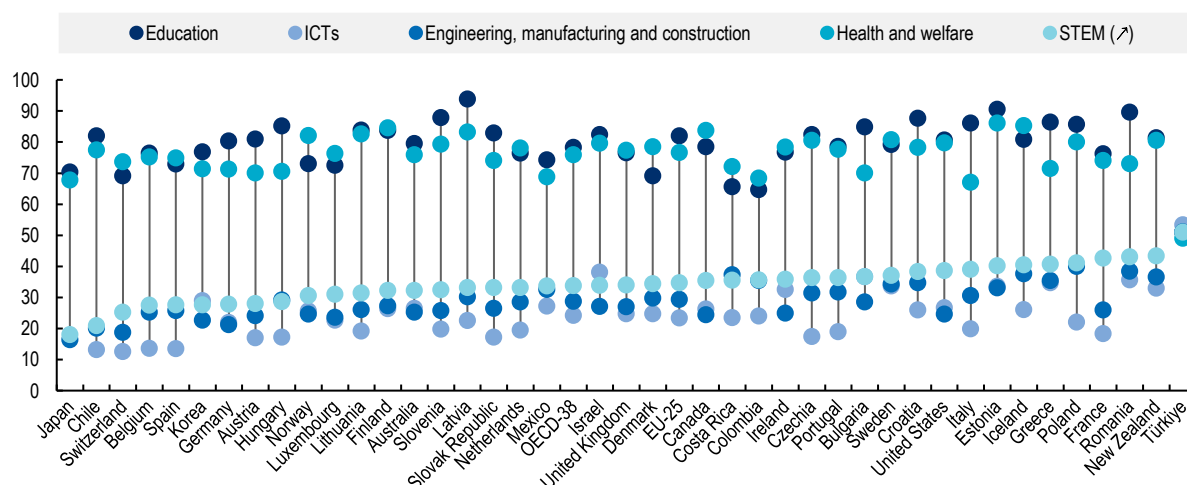
Note: EU-25 and OECD-36 averages are unweighted. Data for Japan for information and communication technologies (ICTs) is not available. All levels of tertiary are included. In Türkiye, shares hover around 50% for all five subjects presented. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.

Source: OECD Data Explorer "Number of enrolled students, graduates and new entrants by field of education" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/p1).

4.1.3. Middle and older adulthood: Gender gaps in adult skills and lifelong learning

Skill acquisition does not cease upon completing secondary or tertiary education. Instead, skill acquisition continues through various channels, such as on-the-job training and short course programming. This section explores gender differences in skills in adulthood, as well as use of and barriers to adult learning and training.

Gender gaps in measured skills evolve over the life course

Literacy and numeracy skills evolve over the life course, reflecting differences in individual use of such skills at work and at home and later life investment in training and continuing education. Gender gaps in numeracy, for example, grow larger and increasingly favour boys and men as individuals age. By contrast, gender gaps in literacy – which favour girls and women – peak during adolescence and are smaller for young adults, creating an inverted-U shape (OECD, 2020[2]; Borgonovi, Choi and Paccagnella, 2018[71]). Recent results combining the 2022 PISA and the 2023 Survey of Adult Skills uphold these findings, with smaller gender gaps in literacy and larger gender gaps in numeracy among older age groups (OECD, 2024[72]).

This evolution of skills over the life course is related to segregation by education, field of study and occupation and to gender norms and stereotypes around paid and unpaid work. Indeed, segregation by field of study, industry and occupation means that women and men do not have the same opportunities to learn, practice and maintain their level of proficiency in different types of skills and abilities (Encinas-Martín

and Cherian, 2023[19]). Men, for instance, are more likely to specialise in fields of study and occupations that use math and numeracy more intensively, which may contribute to growing gaps as people age. By contrast, literacy is a skill used across all fields of study and occupations and is key to success in education and in the labour market (OECD, 2020[2]; Borgonovi, Choi and Paccagnella, 2018[71]), which may contribute to shrinking gaps across the life course. To top it all off, women are more likely to step out of the labour market for caregiving reasons, which may further cause skills, such as literacy, numeracy and problem solving, to atrophy.

While it is difficult to separate cohort effects (i.e. different age groups are exposed to different social, economic and cultural institutions and norms, which may affect measured skills), cross-sectional results show that gender gaps in numeracy favour men across all ages, with gaps growing larger for older age groups. By contrast, gender gaps in literacy favour women, but the size of the gap is smallest for older women and men (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6. Gender gaps in numeracy scores favouring men increase across age groups, while gender gaps in literacy favouring women shrink

Gender gap (men minus women) in mean literacy and numeracy scores by age group, 2023
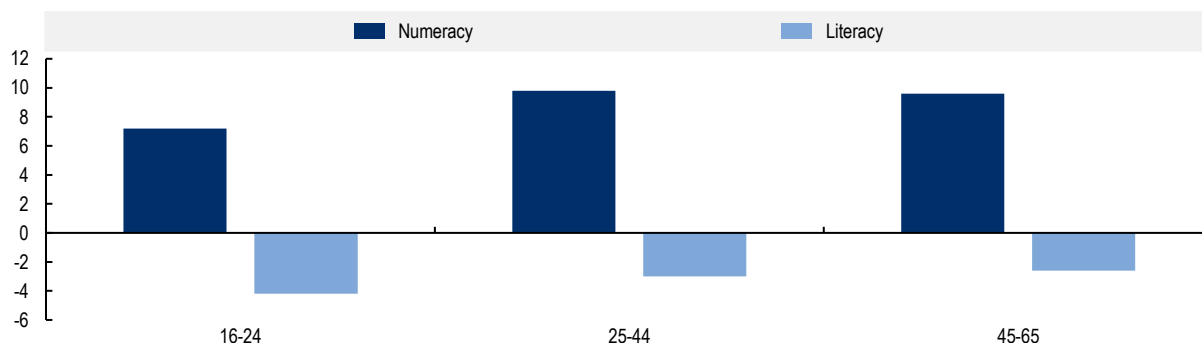
Note: OECD average is unweighted and includes 27 OECD countries plus England (United Kingdom) and the Flemish-speaking regions of Belgium. Results are based on the Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC) run in 2023. Gender gaps in mean scores in literacy and numeracy in the PIAAC cannot be directly compared to the gender gaps in mean scores in math, science and reading in the PISA (see Figure 4.1) because of differences in standard deviations. OECD (2024[72]) notes that when expressing gender gaps in the two surveys relative to their standard deviations, the gender gap in literacy among adults is smaller than the gender gap in reading for 15-year-old students, while the gender gap in numeracy is larger, suggesting a widening of the gap among adults. These findings are in line with previous studies that compared the proficiency of 15-year-olds in PISA with that of 27-year-olds in the first cycle of the Survey of Adult Skills (Borgonovi, Choi and Paccagnella, 2021[73]). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.
Source: OECD (2024[72]), *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, Table A.2.8 (L) and Table A.2.8 (N), https://stat.link/eb8dxq.

Family responsibilities are a major barrier to women's continued education and training

On average, across the OECD, there is little difference in the extent to which women and men are engaging in adult education and training (see Online Annex Figure 4-A10) (Eurostat, 2024[74]) and similar shares of women and men report barriers to access to education and training (18% of men versus 21% of women) (Eurostat, 2024[75]). Yet, gender differences emerge in the specific barriers cited. Compared to men, for instance, women are notably more likely to cite family obligations and responsibilities as a barrier to education and training (Figure 4.7). This finding is corroborated by the OECD Survey of Adults Skills, which finds that family obligations are a reason for non-participation for 27% of women with children compared to 4% of men with children (OECD, 2021[76]). As a barrier, family responsibilities are unique in their nature

since they prevent parents from developing adequate learning habits, cause parents to divert their attention from studying and decrease the overall productivity of learning and study processes (OECD, 2021[76]).

Figure 4.7. Women are more likely to report family reasons as a barrier to adult learning

Share (%) of women and men (25-64) not participating in education or training by reason for not participating, 2022
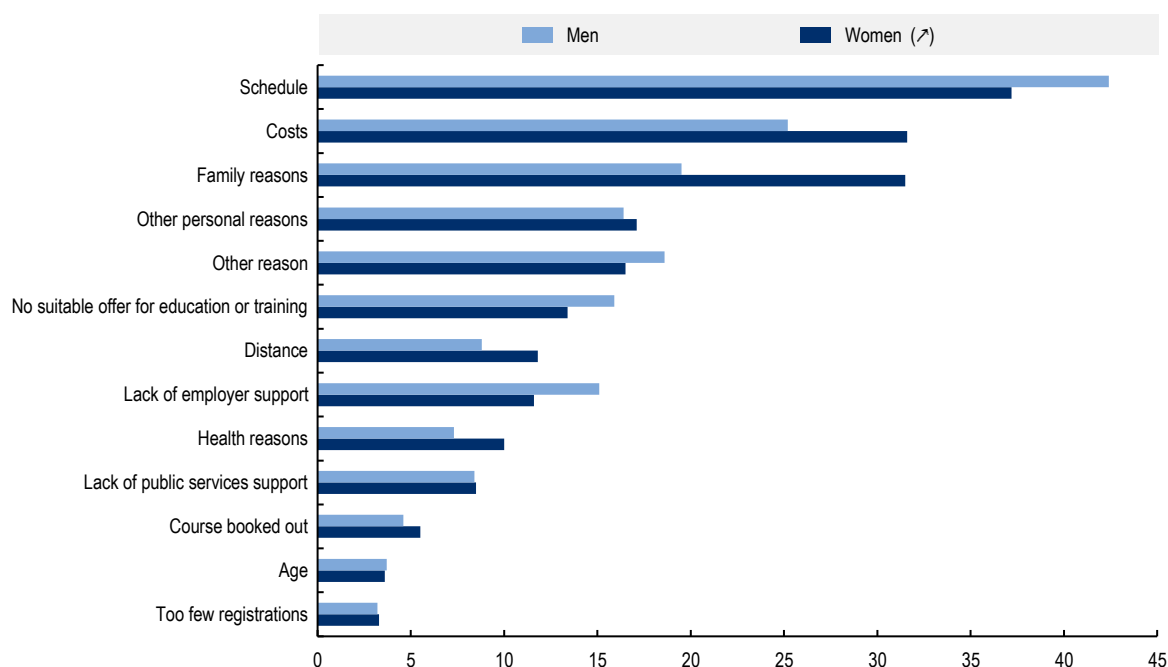
Note: EU-27 average is weighted. Reasons for not participating do not add to 100. "No response" is dropped from figure. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 4.A.
Source: Eurostat "Population wanting to participate in education and training, by reason for not participating and sex", https://doi.org/10.2908/TRNG_AES_176.

Box 4.5. Additional data sources on gender equality in educational attainment and skills

Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:

- **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps**: Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance and private and public leadership.
- **OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**: Features data on students' behaviours, experiences, expectations, and skills both at home and at school. Important social and demographic factors relating to the family and school are also included.
- **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database:** Contains information on gender equality in education, including participation in education and training, educational attainment, early school leaving, skills, and work experiences during school.
- **OECD Education at a Glance:** Provides authoritative information on the state of education around the world, including developments in gender gaps.

> - **OECD Skills Outlook:** Offers insights into ongoing and forthcoming issues related to changes in skills demands, skills supply and the implications of skills policies for economic and social well-being.

4.2. Policy combinations to advance gender equality in educational attainment and skills

Using Table 4.1, this section applies the **priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality in educational attainment and skills by exploring two **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1): tackling gender segregation in fields of study (Outcome A) and ensuring gender equality in lifelong learning and adult skills (Outcome B). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 4.1 and additional sources.

Table 4.1 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying cross-portfolio policy and programme combinations** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 4.1 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

Tackling **gender segregation in fields of study**, for example, requires a comprehensive life course approach, starting from combatting gender norms and stereotypes among youth around career aspirations and expectations. Policy interventions additionally need to ensure that women and men can choose any occupation or industry of interest to them – for instance, by encouraging workplaces to combat toxic masculinity in men-dominated occupations (e.g. STEM, trades) and by ensuring both women and men have access to fitted equipment that can keep them safe (e.g. steel-toed boots) (OECD, 2021[77]). In recent decades, policy has strongly focused on increasing the presence of women in men-dominated industries and occupations (see Section 4.2.2 for examples from Germany). Yet, to fully tackle gender segregation, investments must equally support and encourage men entering non-traditional fields, such as care and education (see Section 4.2.2 for examples from Norway).

In a similar way, ensuring **gender equality in lifelong learning and adult skills** demands for a comprehensive approach across domains – including education, unpaid work, earnings and income, and health. For instance, supporting the diverse needs of working-age women and men – e.g. balancing work, family, care and education – may require adapting learning provision (Stein, 2023[78]; OECD, 2023[46]), offering financial assistance for adults returning to education (OECD, 2017[79]), as well as complementary interventions such as childcare and long-term care to rebalance unpaid care responsibilities within households (OECD, 2021[80]).

Table 4.1 also highlights the important **feedback loops** between policy goals. Gender segregation in fields of study, for example, contributes to occupational and industrial segregation, which translates into gender differences in skill use and acquisition in the workplace, contributing to gender gaps in adult skills and learning opportunities. Occupational and industrial segregation and gender differences in skills can further contribute to gender differences in pay and pensions (see Chapter 5), in leadership and representation (see Chapter 6), and in the impacts of the green and digital transition (see Chapter 9).

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes** outlined in Table 4.1 varies across countries and across time. Continuous *monitoring and evaluation* that incorporates a gender perspective (priority consideration 5) is essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended

outcomes; identify strengths and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings.

For example, time-limited single-use interventions, such as brief exposure to role models, have been found to only temporarily changes the stereotypical beliefs of women and girls (Olsson and Martiny, 2018[81]). By contrast, long-term exposure – such as having a mother in a non-stereotypical occupation – is more likely to change gendered aspirations and expectations. This highlights the importance of role models for children, and the need for sustained efforts to challenge gender stereotypes across media, educational materials, and other interventions. Evidence also shows the potential of gender-neutral language, diverse role models, and teacher training to address gender bias and positively influence classroom dynamics and student outcomes (Brussino and McBrien, 2022[82]), and later-stage evidence confirms that teacher attitudes and role models significantly influence students' self-perceptions and educational choices, particularly in STEM (Carlana, 2019[12]; Breda et al., 2020[83]). Embedding gender equality in early childhood education through inclusive curricula and teacher training can additionally reshape expectations and reduce gender segregation in later study and career choices (UNICEF, 2022[84]). Recognising this, governments are increasingly adjusting curricula, revising textbooks and teaching materials and offering teacher training on gender sensitivity. Many governments are further introducing gender sensitive career counselling, industry partnerships, and targeted financial incentives.

4.2.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 4.1. Existing policy options to tackle gender segregation in fields of study (Outcome A) and gender gaps in lifelong learning and adult skills (Outcome B)

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
						Likely Ministries Involved					
Challenge gender stereotypes and norms											
A	Ensure **school curricula, textbooks and teaching materials** – including early learnings materials – challenge gender norms and stereotypes.	X	X							X	Many countries
A	Provide continuous **professional development** for all school staff – including early childhood educators, teachers, principals, counsellors, etc. – on gender sensitivity, inclusive teaching and counselling practices and unconscious bias.	X	X							X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
		Likely Ministries Involved									
A	Launch **campaigns** challenging gender norms and stereotypes regarding toys, activities, aspirations and expectations for girls and boys and/or encourage girls and boys to envision themselves in non-traditional occupations, including by highlighting **successful women and men**.	X	X			X	X			X	CRI, CYP, DEU, HRV, HUN, ISL, LUX, MLT, PRT, ROU
A, B	Introduce **gender-sensitive training**, encourage voluntary adoption of measures and/or enforce regulations that prevent **media and advertising** from perpetuating harmful stereotypes, sexist imagery and gender-based violence.	X		X						X	CZE, CYP, DEU, ESP, FRA, HRV, LUX
A	Develop policies that promote gender equality in higher education institutions, **gender diversity in academic departments** and/or **gender-sensitive research**.	X								X	CHE, CYP, CZE, DEU, GRC, ISL, JPN, LTU, PRT, ROU
A	Involve **children and young people** in defining solutions for **challenging and changing gender norms and stereotypes** and/or offer **gender equality courses and curricula** to youth.	X								X	DEU, FRA, ISL, JPN, KOR, LTU, LUX, LVA, ROU
A	Involve boys and men in initiatives that **challenge gender inequality, norms and stereotypes**.	X								X	CZE, DEU, LVA
Expand investments in non-traditional learning opportunities											
B	Offer **flexible learning schedules**, **part-time programmes**, and/or **online education** to accommodate diverse needs, including those of parents with unpaid care responsibilities and working professionals.	X								X	HUN, MLT
B	Provide (**re-)training and (re-)skilling** (e.g. short-course programming, grants for training), including for women and men who are unemployed or underemployed, credentialled or uncredentialled, especially those who never entered or exited the labour market for caregiving reasons.	X								X	DEU, GRC, IRL, NOR
Increase employer support of lifelong learning											
B	Encourage employers to provide **flexible working arrangements** to employees seeking continued education or training to ensure women and men, especially parents, can balance work, life and training.		X							X	GBR, NLD, PRT

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Incentivise selection into non-traditional fields											
A, B	Support girls and boys and women and men entering fields in which they are underrepresented through **career guidance**, **dedicated pathways**, **job placement**, **mentorships**, **networks**, **competitions** (e.g. hackathons), **industry partnerships** and/or targeted **financial supports** (e.g. tax credits, tax deductions, grants, subsidies, microfinance).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
A	Introduce legislation to ensure **equal pay** for work of equal value and/or introduce or enhance **pay transparency** regulations such that career aspirants may fairly assess potential wages.		X							X	Many countries
A	Encourage employers to **hire people from underrepresented or specific groups**, such as through subsidies, grants and additional government funding tied to hiring, gender equality targets, and/or paid internships and apprenticeships.		X							X	CHL, DEU, GRC, HUN, IRL, TUR
A	Encourage entry into non-traditional fields by improving **working conditions** e.g. in traditionally women-dominated fields (e.g. pay) and e.g. in traditionally men-dominated fields (e.g. occupational health and safety and harassment, sexual assault and toxic masculinity, flexibility).		X	X		X	X	X		X	CHE, DEU, ESP, EST
Build a strong and inclusive care and social protection system											
A, B	Provide high-quality flexible, accessible and affordable **childcare**, including out-of-school care, and **long-term and elderly care**, including independent living solutions.		X	X						X	Many countries
A, B	Invest in **childcare facilities** on campuses and near learning institutions and/or provide financial support for students to access childcare services.	X	X							X	CYP, HUN, JPN
A, B	**Promote shared caregiving responsibilities through various policies, including paid parental and paternity leave (see Chapter 5).**	X	X							X	Many countries
Foster safety and inclusion											
A, B	Establish policies and support systems to ensure **safe and inclusive learning environments** for learners, free from gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination and support victims/survivors of violence, including gender-based violence and violence against girls.	X	X	X				X		X	DEU, ESP, FRA, GBR, GRC, ITA

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
	Embed gender equality considerations into decision-making and leadership										
A, B	Promote **gender balance in leadership roles** within educational institutions, including primary, secondary education, higher and adult education, to ensure policies and practices reflect diverse perspectives (see Chapter 6).	X	X							X	JPN, LUX
	Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation										
A, B	Continue to close gender data, research and measurement gaps. Some examples include: • reasons for women's withdrawal from scientific work; • evolution of career expectations and skills over the life course; • relationship between career expectations and occupational and educational choices, as well as labour supply; • engagement in literacy and numeracy activities with parents and early childhood educators in early years; • educational attainment by gender intersected with ethnicity and disability status; • impact of environments, policies and programmes on gender norms and stereotypes relating to career expectations; and • access to and use of adult learning, re-skilling and re-training.										Many countries

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.
Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and OECD (2022[49]; 2021[85]), Government of Ireland (2022[86]), European Union (2015[87]; 2016[88]; 2017[89]; 2019[90]; 2021[91]) and European Union (2023[92]).

4.2.2. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to advance gender equality in educational attainment and skills. Case studies are provided below, alongside an example of building intersectionality considerations into policy combinations.

Reducing gender segregation in fields of study

• **Germany** addresses stereotypes in early childhood education through teacher training and grants to men entering the field, as well as through STEM-based extracurricular activities and campaigns to raise awareness around girls in STEM. For example, Girls' Day – Girls' Future Day takes place once a year and is sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women

and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. On this nationwide day of action, schoolgirls from fifth grade onwards are given an insight into professions and courses of study in which women have thus far been underrepresented. Several ministries also support "*Klischeefrei",* a coalition of over 600 members from various sectors advocating for gender-neutral career and study choices, providing resources, networking and support through a service centre and a portal. Other ministries contribute through a range of additional policies, such as grants to encourage women to enter the trades (Labour); investments in childcare in universities (Education and Research); grants to support later life transitions to in-demand occupations (Labour); investments in campus safety (Justice); grants to increase innovation in gender-specific safety equipment and standards (Labour); measures to increase women's representation in academic leadership positions in STEM (Education and Research), interventions with employers to ensure women have better access to STEM and innovation careers (Education and Research); and programmes to support women's networks in men-dominated fields (Culture).

Ensuring gender equality in lifelong learning and adult skills

- **Norway's** Ministry of Education and Research has developed a teacher recruitment programme that targets students from upper secondary schools and "folk colleges" to promote teacher education and diversity in the teaching profession and encourage entry into teaching by underrepresented groups. In another initiative, "Men in health," the Ministry of Health and Care Service supports later life learning in non-traditional occupations through the targeted recruitment of men in the healthcare sector. It facilitates an accelerated education course to certify as a healthcare worker for job-seeking men. Successful candidates are provided a "health recruit" title after completion of the course. The health recruits alternate between receiving social benefits and a salary. Since 2010, more than 800 men aged 25-55 years have obtained certificates as health professionals through this initiative. An evaluation of the project, ran in 2018, shows that approximately 9 out of 10 got a relevant job in the healthcare sector.

Box 4.6. Spotlight on intersectionality: People with disability

In the 2023 National Action Plan of **Greece's** Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports, there are five objectives relating to primary and secondary education, higher education, vocational education and training, religious freedom and lifelong learning. Within the objective on lifelong learning, "Preparation of a national strategy to strengthen lifelong learning," one of the specific actions is to design and implement targeted lifelong learning programmes for people with disability and especially for those who experience multiple discriminations, including young women and men, migrants and refugees with disabilities.

Source: OECD Secretariat using the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and Government of Greece (2022[93]).

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Annex 4.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 4.A.1. List of Chapter 4 Online Annex Figures

Figure no.	Figure title and subtitle
Figure 4-A1	**By age 10 years, gender gaps in reading, math and science have emerged** Share (%) of children around age 10 years who are top performers in mathematics and/or science and in reading, 2019 or latest
Figure 4-A2	**Gender gaps among migrants mirror gender gaps among non-migrants in mathematics, reading and science** Gender gap (boys less girls) in average scores (points) by migrant status, 15-year-old students, EU-19 and OECD-27 averages, 2022
Figure 4-A3	**Girls are increasingly likely to expect to be science and engineering professionals** Share (%) of 15-year-old students expecting to work in selected occupations who are girls, average of 34 OECD countries, 2015, 2018 and 2022
Figure 4-A4	**Women overtook men in terms of tertiary educational attainment in the early 2000s** Share (%) of women and men (25-64 and 25-34) with tertiary as highest level of educational attainment, average of 15 OECD countries, averages over 10-year intervals, 1980-2023
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Figure 4-A9	**Women are more represented among those with a Bachelor's degree than with a Doctorate** Share (%) with a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctorate level of educational attainment or equivalent (25-34) who are women, 2023
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Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 4 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink 🖵 https://stat.link/6lk825

Notes

[1] The European Commission measures the rate of early school leaving as the share of the population aged 18-24 years old who had completed, at most, a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training (in the 4 weeks before the survey) (European Commission, 2020[94]).

5 Persistent gender gaps in paid and unpaid work

This chapter presents an overview of key gender gaps in paid and unpaid work, including labour force participation, part-time employment and earnings, as well as key social, economic and institutional factors preventing gender equality in these areas. The chapter then proposes policy options to reduce gender gaps in labour supply; improve gender equality in entrepreneurship; and close gender pay gaps and gaps in pension earnings and income.

Key findings

- Across many indicators of labour market outcomes, women are worse off than men, including in lower labour force participation and employment rates. Women also dedicate fewer hours to paid work and are more likely to work part-time than men, which affects career prospects and eligibility for social protection (e.g. unemployment, family leave). Women, too, are less likely to be entrepreneurs than men, and even when they are self-employed, they are less likely to have employees than men. Women are also more likely to work in low-paid (likely undervalued) occupations than men. And, finally, women earn, on average, lower wages than men.

- Gender gaps in labour market outcomes accumulate throughout the life course to result in lower pension entitlements and lower pension income, which puts older women at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion in most OECD countries.

- The differences in men's and women's labour market outcomes reflect gender norms and stereotypes around paid and unpaid work, which are learned at an early age. Gender norms and stereotypes interact with social, policy and economic environments that disadvantage women in the labour market, including a lack of access to affordable, high-quality childcare and out-of-school care; a lack of access to long-term care for relatives; low pay in traditionally women-dominated sectors; the unequal distributions of family leave; and gendered tax-benefit systems that disadvantage second earners.

- To close gender gaps in paid and unpaid work, governments have implemented and continue to invest in work-life balance policies, including better access to high-quality affordable childcare and long-term care and better access to paid parental leave. In addition, governments have intervened to build entrepreneurship ecosystems that seek to support women entrepreneurs and improve the quality of their businesses, to encourage or mandate gender pay gap reporting by firms, and to offer (conditional) care credits to offset the negative impacts of care-related leave on pension entitlements and earnings.

Every person should be able to participate fully in the labour market. Employment supports financial independence and benefits the overall economy through increased economic growth and prosperity (Fluchtmann, Keese and Adema, 2024[1]). Yet starting at an early age, girls and boys are exposed to gender norms and stereotypes around paid and unpaid work – through various sources – that present a picture of women holding primary responsibility for unpaid work, such as care and household tasks, and men holding primary responsibility for paid work. As children age into adulthood, these internalised gender norms and stereotypes combine with social and policy environments, structural barriers, bias and harassment and discrimination to create, reinforce and widen gaps between women and men in labour market outcomes, including in the type, quality, quantity and remuneration of paid and unpaid work.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 5.1 provides an overview of key gender gaps in paid and unpaid work using a life course approach. It also highlights important social, economic and institutional factors preventing gender equality in paid and unpaid work. Section 5.2 explores policy options and policy combinations to reduce gender gaps in labour supply; improve gender equality in entrepreneurship; close gender pay gaps; and reduce gender gaps in pension earnings and income.

5.1. Background: Gender gaps in key outcomes in paid and unpaid work

Using a life course approach, this section describes and attempts to explain gender gaps in paid and unpaid work in childhood, youth and adulthood, focusing on labour force participation, hours worked, non-

standard employment, occupational segregation and earnings. Since gender gaps aggregate throughout the life course, including in earnings, it is useful to understand how inequalities compound over time and where public policy can help break the cycle.

5.1.1. Childhood and youth: Girls do more unpaid work than boys

Gender gaps in unpaid care and household responsibilities develop early. These gaps are learned through gendered socialisation processes around housework and caregiving, including the observation of parents' task assignments, but also directly through parents' beliefs and expectations regarding the role of their children inside and outside the household (see Chapter 4). According to a 2022 survey in the EU, for instance, only 68% of women and 52% of men aged 16-74 years *strongly* agree that boys have the same obligations to help with household chores as girls (EIGE, 2023[2]). Unsurprisingly, then, girls are found to engage in more housework than boys, with gender gaps growing as children grow older. Girls and boys also appear to do stereotypically gendered housework tasks. Girls are more likely to cook, clean, wash dishes and help with childcare, while boys are more likely to spend time gardening, taking out the trash and doing car maintenance (O'Reilly and Quayle, 2021[3]; Dotti Sani, 2016[4]; Álvarez and Miles-Touya, 2011[5]; Schulz, 2019[6]; Hofferth and Goldscheider, 2017[7]; Bonke, 2010[8]; Evertsson, 2006[9]; UNICEF, 2016[10]).

Box 5.1. Gender gaps in "earnings" start in childhood

Several national studies suggest that gender gaps in pay start in childhood. For example, one survey of 10 000 families using the chore app "BusyKid" found that the average boy received USD 13.80 weekly in allowances for doing chores, compared to USD 6.71 for girls (Miller, 2018[11]). Boys were also more likely to be paid to do personal hygiene (e.g. showering, brushing teeth), while girls were more likely to be paid for cleaning. Other surveys and research have found similar results, showing that boys are both more likely to get an allowance, and when they do, they are more likely to get a higher amount (Marcotte, 2014[12]; Leahy, 2022[13]).

5.1.2. Early and middle adulthood: Balancing work and family life creates challenges

Women's participation in paid work is lower than men's, especially for mothers

In all EU and OECD countries, women are less likely to be in the labour force than men (Figure 5.1). Gender gaps range from as little as two percentage points or less in Finland, Estonia and Lithuania to more than 25 percentage points in Costa Rica, Mexico and Türkiye.

Figure 5.1. Women participate in the labour market less than men

Labour force participation rates (%), women and men (15-64), 2023
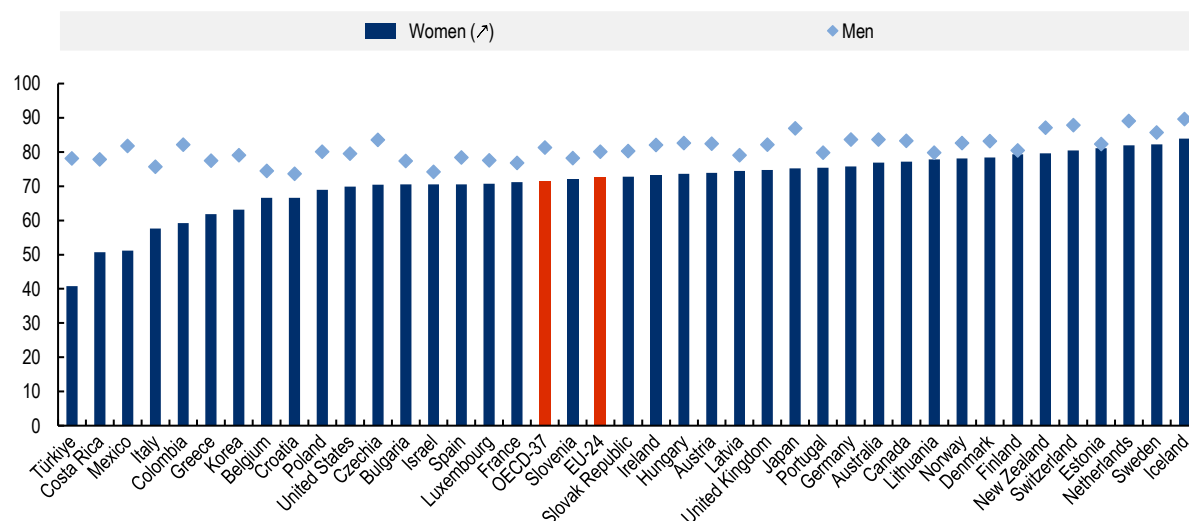
Note: EU-24 and OECD-37 refer to unweighted averages of the 24 EU and 37 OECD countries with available data for this indicator. ↗ indicates that the data is sorted according to this series in ascending order. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Labour force participation rate" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/zr).

Although many factors explain differences in labour market outcomes between women and men, the presence of dependent children is one key factor blocking women's progress in the labour market. Indeed, for women, the presence of dependent children (under the age of 15 years) decreases employment rates in nearly all EU and OECD countries. This is commonly referred to as one type of "motherhood penalty" or "child penalty" (Kleven, Landais and Leite-Mariante, 2023[14]; Lundborg, Plug and Rasmussen, 2024[15]). Although not a causal estimate of the impact of parenthood, a simple comparison of employment rates between women with and without children shows that gaps persist in OECD countries and that gaps have been closing only slowly over time (Figure 5.2). This same exercise for men shows the opposite. In causal studies, this impact is often referred to as the "fatherhood premium" (Yu and Hara, 2021[16]).

Average employment rates for mothers are lower when there are more children and when children are younger. For fathers, there is no discernible difference in employment rates by the number and age of children and employment rates are always larger than for mothers (see Online Annex Figure 5-A1). Even when looking at equally-qualified candidates in an audit study, motherhood penalties (and fatherhood premiums) are found to exist for perceived competence and recommended starting salary (Correll, Benard and Paik, 2007[17]). Importantly, these gender gaps emerge even though women's and men's labour force participation rates and earnings evolve in a similar way in most countries before children enter a home (Kleven, Landais and Leite-Mariante, 2023[14]; Kleven et al., 2019[18]).

Traditional economic models explain the gendered division of work within the household by identifying efficiency gains when the lower-earning opposite-sex partner (historically the wife) focuses on unpaid work, while the higher-earning opposite-sex partner (historically the husband) pursues paid employment (Becker, 1985[19]; Becker, 1991[20]). This rationale holds less explanatory power today. In a growing number of opposite-sex couples, the woman now has an equal or higher level of educational attainment than the man and may earn as much or more (OECD, 2023[21]). There are also an increasing number of families where the woman is the sole breadwinner (Kowalewska and Vitali, 2020[22]). Both of these facts challenge the traditional division of labour. Despite this, gender norms around which parent "should" stay home with the children are persistent. A recent EU survey, for example, finds that over 40% of respondents *disagree* that

a father should give up work to look after the children if his pay is lower than the mother's and the family wants a parent to stay home with the children (see Online Annex Figure 5-A2) (Eurobarometer, 2024[23]).

Figure 5.2. Children correspond to lower employment for women, but higher employment for men

Employment rate (%), women and men (25-54) with at least one child (0-14) and without children (0-14), OECD-21, 2006-21
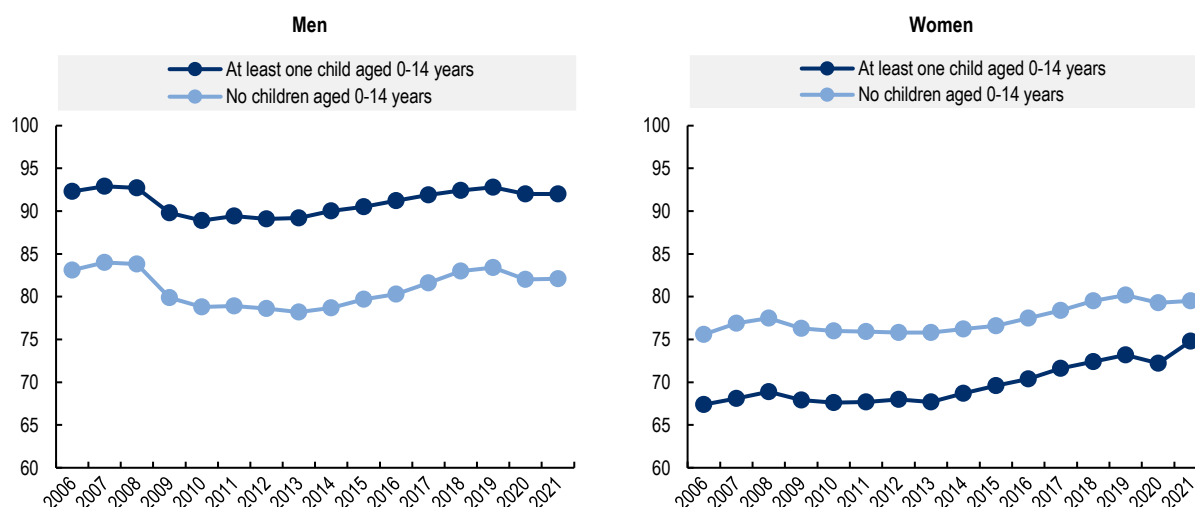
Note: OECD-21 is an unweighted average of 21 countries with comparable data between 2006 and 2021, including Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and the United States. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD secretariat calculations using microdata from the EU Labour Force Survey and the United States Current Population Survey.

Box 5.2. Spotlight on intersectionality: Women in non-metropolitan areas may experience greater barriers to labour force participation

On average, across OECD countries, gender gaps in labour force participation are smallest in the most remote regions, while they are largest in non-metropolitan areas close to small cities. The large gender gap in non-metropolitan areas close to small cities is partly driven by demographics. Suburban locations are close to jobs, have natural amenities and have larger homes, all of which are attractive attributes for large(r) young(er) families, where gender gaps in labour force participation are wide(r). Although families may choose to have one parent – typically the mother – stay at home, a lack of public services, infrastructure and family-friendly policies matters too. Indeed, in non-metropolitan areas close to small cities, a lack of access to childcare could be particularly important in driving gender gaps in labour force participation.

To address these challenges, local policies can focus on improving childcare access and affordability, supporting women's entrepreneurship and encouraging flexible work arrangements. Shared-service models for childcare may be particularly useful in non-metropolitan areas close to small cities, where multiple services can be offered together to reduce costs.

Source: Marshalian and Raderschall (2023[24]), *The final frontier: Why are women further from labour parity in some non-metropolitan areas?*.

Box 5.3. Spotlight on intersectionality: Migrant status and employment

Migrants often face disadvantages in the labour market and these disadvantages may interact with gender and the presence of children. OECD (2023[25]; 2020[26]), for example, find that children of migrants are less likely to participate in formal childcare than children of non-migrants, and that migrant mothers see availability and affordability as particularly acute obstacles to formal childcare. The impact of these obstacles likely contributes to gaps in employment rates. In EU-23 countries, non-migrant mothers with children aged 0-14 years face smaller gaps in employment than migrant mothers (see Online Annex Figure 5-A13).

Patterns in part-time work differ between women and men

In all EU and OECD countries, women in paid work are more likely to work part-time than men (see Online Annex Figure 5-A3), driven in part by women selecting into jobs or reducing their hours once they become mothers in order to meet disproportionate unpaid childcare responsibilities (OECD, 2019[27]; 2017[28]; 2023[21]). Indeed, as with employment rates and pay, there is a notable gap in hours worked between parents and non-parents in many EU and OECD countries (Figure 5.3). The correlation between motherhood (of dependent children) and lower hours worked is reinforced by survey evidence on reasons for part-time work: in 2018, for instance, 15% of women in the EU reported that childcare responsibilities reduced their overall working time, compared to only 3% of men (see Online Annex Figure 5-A4) (Eurostat, 2022[29]). There are also many other reasons for part-time work – such as an inability to find full-time work, own illness or disability, education or training and non-care family-related reasons. Some of these are considered "voluntary" (such as care work) and others "involuntary" (such as an inability to find full-time work). Measured as a share of employment, women were more than twice as likely as men to be working part-time involuntarily (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[30]), with occupational segregation an important factor explaining this gap (Pech, Klainot-Hess and Norris, 2020[31]).

Even in those countries where gender gaps in part-time employment rates are small (e.g. Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania), gender inequality in the labour market persists, with women much more likely than men to drop out of the labour force entirely when they become mothers. In addition to gender norms and workplace culture, this is partly explained by generous parental leaves – both in duration and in pay – as well as the relative lack of (well-paid) part-time employment opportunities (OECD, 2023[21]; 2022[32]; 2022[33]).

Figure 5.3. Women tend to work part-time more than men, with parenthood driving larger gaps

Difference in part-time employment rates between people with and without dependent children (parents minus non-parents), women and men (25-54), percentage points, 2021 or latest
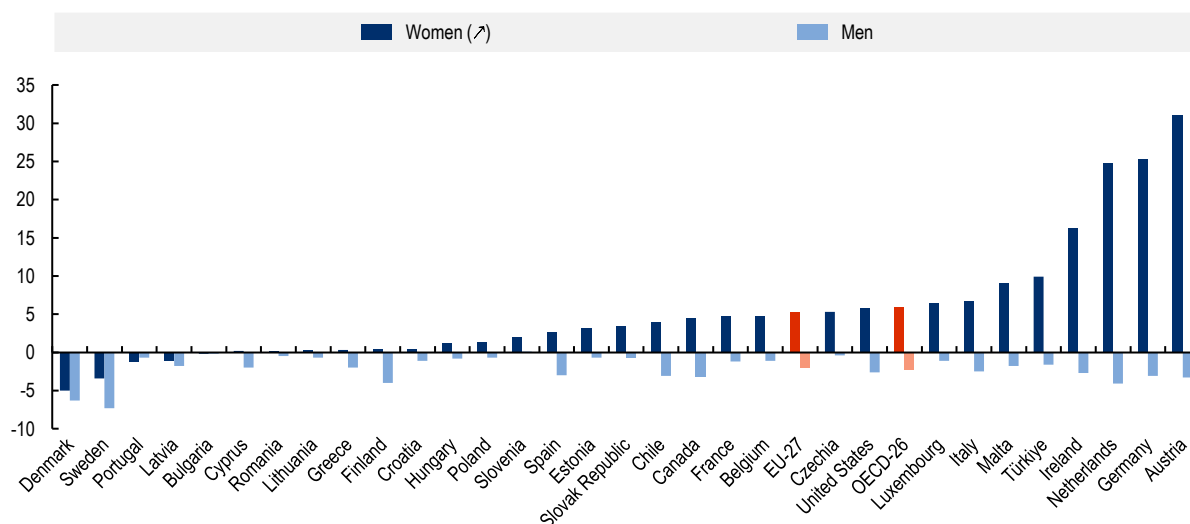
Note: EU-27 and OECD-26 averages are unweighted. Parents are defined as people with children aged 0-14 years. For Canada, Korea and the United States, children are aged 0-17 years. Data for Türkiye are from 2013. Data for Chile are from 2017. Data for Canada are from 2022. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD secretariat calculations using microdata from the EU Labour Force Survey, the Canadian Labour Force Survey, the Chilean Encuesta de Caracterización Socioeconómica Nacional (CASEN), the Turkish Household Labour Force Survey, and the United States Current Population Survey.

Gender gaps in temporary work are small, but impacts on women and men may differ

When it comes to temporary employment, gender gaps average about 2 percentage points, with 10% of women holding temporary jobs in 2023 in OECD-36 countries, compared to 8% of men (Figure 5.4). In specific cases where gender gaps are higher, higher temporary employment among women may, in some cases, be influenced by reforms that liberalised the use of fixed-term contracts with the express purpose of enhancing or facilitating women's labour force participation (ILO, 2017[34]). Indeed, there is "some anecdotal evidence that managers may be reluctant to hire [young women] on permanent contracts" due to the anticipated costs of maternity leave (ILO, 2017[34]).

Figure 5.4. Women are slightly more likely to work in temporary jobs than men

Gender gap (men minus women, percentage points) in temporary employment rates (%), women and men (25-54), dependent employment, 2023 or latest
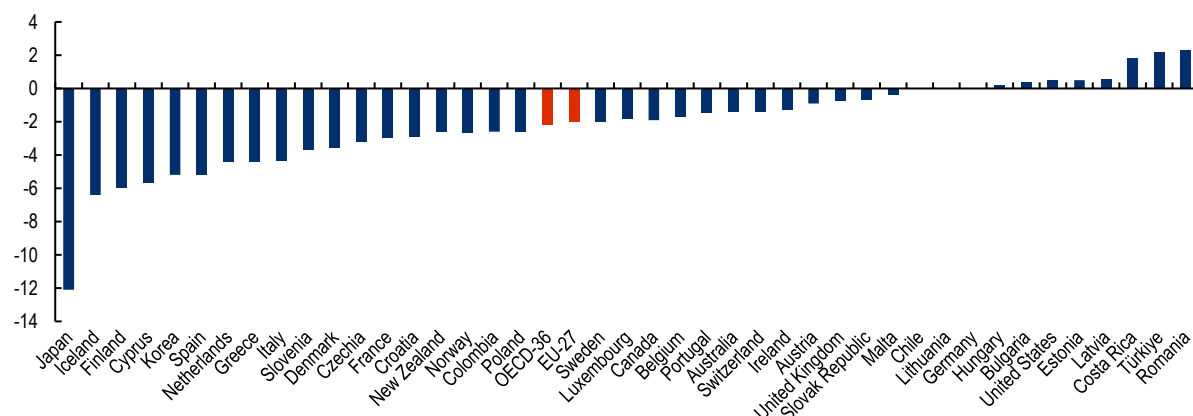
Note: EU-27 and OECD-36 averages are unweighted. Temporary employment rates are calculated by dividing the number of temporary employees of a specific gender by the total number of all employees of that same gender. Data on temporary employment for Australia and the United States are from 2017. Definitions of temporary employment vary considerably across countries. For more details, see OECD (2023[35]). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.

Source: OECD Data Explorer, "Employment by permanency of the job – Incidence" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/1mn).

Box 5.4. Looking beyond employment to unemployment

Gender gaps in unemployment and long-term unemployment rates are quite small in most EU and OECD countries, with the unemployment rate for women in EU-27 countries only 0.5 percentage points higher than that of men in 2023 (see Online Annex Figure 5-A5). However, unemployment is a fairly restrictive measure. To be considered unemployed, an individual must be jobless, have an interest in working, have been recently seeking work and be available to start work at short notice. Compared to men, women are less likely to meet these conditions due to their disproportionate share of unpaid care and housework responsibilities (ILO, 2019[36]; 2023[37]). Expanding the definition to include all of those who would like to work but who do not currently have a job, in EU-27 countries in 2022, 13% of women, compared to 10% of men, suffered from a job gap (ILO, 2024[38]). Unpacking the statistics shows that women tend to be excluded from unemployment because they are less likely to meet the availability and the search criteria required to be considered unemployed.

But these figures are from an unexceptional year, and unemployment is an indicator that exhibits more notably gendered patterns during crises. During the Great Recession, for example, men were more affected by unemployment than women (Pissarides, 2013[39]). By contrast, early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, women experienced greater job losses than men in many countries, leading the period to be called a "she-cession" (Bluedorn et al., 2023[40]; OECD, 2021[41]). Yet, in many countries, these "she-cessions" were short-lived (Bluedorn et al., 2023[40]) and women's employment recovered better and more quickly from the pandemic (OECD, 2023[21]; Queisser, 2021[42]).

There are also gendered perceptions of "entitlement" to jobs during periods of high unemployment. In the 2017-22 wave of the World Values Survey, for instance, nearly one in five people in EU and OECD countries responded that men have more of a right to work than women when jobs are scarce (see Online Annex Figure 5-A6) (WVS, 2023[43]). Indeed, Berniell et al. (2024[44]) use microdata from

the World Values Survey for a panel of 103 countries over the 1995-2021 period and find that "an increase in unemployment is associated with more conservative views about gender roles" in the labour market, and that the link is stronger in countries with "higher gender inequality" and lower labour force participation among women.

Women do more unpaid work than men

Unpaid work acts as a barrier to paid work for some women, keeping them out of the labour market. For many other women, unpaid work is a "second shift" after they return home from paid work (Hochschild and Machung, 1989[45]). When this "second shift" – or unpaid work – is combined with paid work, women work, on average, 24 minutes per day longer than men in OECD countries, or about 12 hours per month (OECD, 2024[46]). This is driven by the fact that women are doing almost twice as much unpaid work as men per day (Figure 5.5). Gaps between women and men vary significantly across countries. In Mexico, Portugal and Türkiye gender gaps in unpaid work are over 200 minutes per day, while in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, gender gaps in unpaid work are less than 60 minutes per day. Although large gender gaps persist (Figure 5.5), unpaid work hours have changed dramatically over time for both women and men, with evidence of some gender convergence (Pailhé, Solaz and Stanfors, 2021[47]).

Figure 5.5. Women do almost twice as much unpaid work as men per day

Number of minutes per day of unpaid work, women and men, 2022 or latest
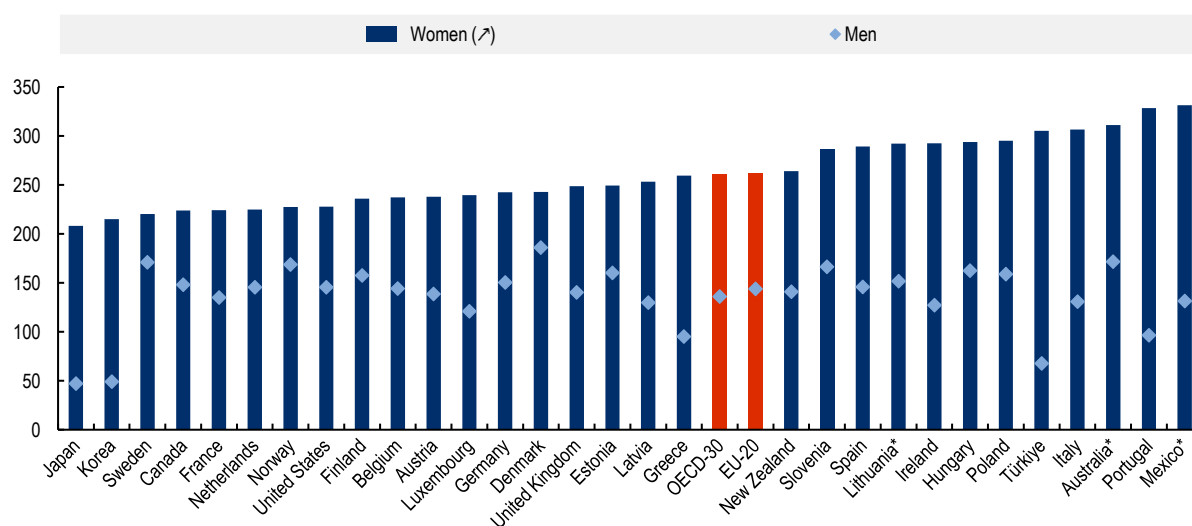
Note: Data for Portugal are from 1999, data for Slovenia are from 2000-01, data for Denmark are from 2001, data for Latvia and Lithuania are from 2003, data for Ireland are from 2005, data for Australia are from 2006, data for Estonia, Finland, France, New Zealand and Spain are from 2009-10, data for Hungary and Sweden are from 2010, data for Norway are from 2010-11, data for Germany are from 2012-13, data for Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg and Poland are from 2013, data for Italy are from 2013-14, data for Korea and Mexico are from 2014, data for Türkiye and the United Kingdom are from 2014-15, data for Canada are from 2015, data for the Netherlands are from 2015-16, data for Japan are from 2021, data for Austria are from 2021-22, and data for the United States are from 2022. Time spent in unpaid work includes routine housework; shopping; care for household members; childcare; adult care; care for non-household members; volunteering; travel related to household activities; and other unpaid activities. * indicates the definition differs. Most time-use data sets are large enough to generate reliable measures of time allocation over the full year, but the accuracy of these estimates as well as the methodology vary significantly from country to country. Differences in survey features, number of diary days sampled, and categorisation of activities may all affect the cross-country comparability of results. For more information on the exact categories used for each country and a detailed breakdown by sub-activity, see the methodology guidelines for the OECD Time Use Database (https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/OECD_1564_TUSupdatePortal.xlsx). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD Time Use Database (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/time-use-database.html).

Although estimated during the COVID-19 period when patterns of unpaid work hours were different and in many cases more intense for women (OECD, 2021[41]), similar results emerge in the EU among working women (Eurofound, 2022[48]). Gender gaps are particularly pronounced in the presence of children, where total hours worked reach 84 hours and above for women, compared to about 72-75 hours for men (see Online Annex Figure 5-A7) (Eurofound, 2022[48]).

Indeed, evidence from Australia shows that before the birth of a first child, the intra-household distribution of time spent on paid and unpaid work is relatively equal between women and men. Upon the birth of the first child, however, women take on markedly more unpaid work at the expense of paid work. And as the child grows older, this gendered division of labour does not appear to be renegotiated, suggesting that a first child is "a turning point in couples' division of labour towards a highly gendered, long-term pattern," reinforced in some cases by the "arrival of additional children, which stabilises the established pattern" (Wilkins et al., 2024[49]).

The "second shift" undertaken by women has been shown to contribute to higher levels of stress and lower levels of mental health, and limit the possibility of fully engaging and advancing in paid work (Dugan and Barnes-Farrell, 2018[50]; MacDonald, Phipps and Lethbridge, 2005[51]; Piovani and Aydiner-Avsar, 2021[52]; OECD, 2021[41]; 2023[21]).

Box 5.5. Valuing unpaid work

Unpaid household services (i.e. services for own use and/or consumption, such as childcare, cooking, cleaning) are not counted toward the measurement of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and often remain unmeasured entirely, masking a significant portion of economic activity. Better measuring (and valuing) of these activities could reshape understandings of household contributions to the economy. Indeed, although estimates vary greatly depending on the methodology used, provisional calculations show that extending the production boundary to include unpaid household services in G7 countries could significantly impact traditional macroeconomic aggregates – including not only GDP, but also household disposable income, household final consumption and investments. For example, estimates of the value of unpaid household activities range from 15% of GDP for Canada to 26% for Italy by replacement cost method, and from 44% for Japan to 69% for Germany by opportunity cost method (van de Ven, Zwijnenburg and De Queljoe, 2018[53]).

Yet, challenges persist in accurately valuing unpaid work using available data, such as the limited availability and frequency of time-use surveys (van de Ven, Zwijnenburg and De Queljoe, 2018[53]). OECD (2021[54]) provides methodological considerations on valuing unpaid housework activities as well as estimates of the economic contribution of non-care housework.

Recognising the importance of measuring unpaid work for gender equality, policy and decision-making, the System of National Accounts (SNA) recently underwent significant revisions to offer guidance on better capturing the economic value of unpaid work. Through the 2025 updates, the SNA encourages satellite (or thematic) accounts on unpaid work, allowing for the measurement and reporting of unpaid household services without altering the core production boundary and enhancing the visibility of unpaid work. The revisions to the SNA also encourage countries to conduct specialised time-use surveys to collect gender-disaggregated data on unpaid work – which is essential for developing policies that recognise and support unpaid labour and which can ultimately help to close gender gaps in both paid and unpaid work.

Note: The replacement cost method constructs an average post-tax, hourly wage, representative of the broad range of activities covered in the production of unpaid household services. The opportunity cost method takes the average post-tax hourly wage across the whole economy, thus trying to estimate the market income foregone as a result of spending time on unpaid household activities. See van de Ven, Zwijnenburg and De Queljoe (2018[53]) for more details.
Source: United Nations Statistics Division (2025[55]), Draft System of National Accounts 2025.

> **Box 5.6. Sandwich caregiving**
>
> In the face of demographic headwinds across EU and OECD countries, gender gaps in unpaid childcare are likely to be compounded by increasing unpaid care obligations for older relatives and relatives with disability (Frey, Hyee and Thomas, 2024[56]; OECD, 2023[57]). In a recent study in Canada, of the 13.4 million Canadians aged 15 years and over who provided unpaid care in the previous 12 months, 1.8 million (or 13%) reported providing care *both to* children and to adults with a long-term condition or disability (Statistics Canada, 2024[58]). This double burden is referred to as "sandwich caregiving." Of these sandwich caregivers, 62% were women and 38% were men, and women were more likely than men to report negative impacts of caregiving on health, well-being, finances and family relationships (Statistics Canada, 2024[59]). As population ageing continues, monitoring developments in sandwich caregiving, including its prevalence and impacts on work and life should be a priority. Governments should also carefully monitor changes in the impacts of sandwich caregiving on women's labour supply in response to changes in the accessibility and affordability of early learning and childcare and long-term care.

Explaining observed patterns in paid and unpaid work between women and men

Key factors behind gaps in employment between parents and non-parents and between women and men are explored below.

- **Gender norms and stereotypes**: Around the world, social norms put pressure on mothers to remain at home with their children during their early years. Indeed, although there has been progress over time, according to the 2017-22 wave of the World Values Survey, about one-third of both women and men in EU-23 and OECD-33 countries believe that when a mother works for pay, the children suffer (see Online Annex Figure 5-A8) (WVS, 2023[43]; OECD, 2023[60]). Similar results emerge from a 2022 survey in the EU, where only 43% of men and 57% of women strongly agree that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work (EIGE, 2023[2]). In the face of such beliefs, women may internalise that the only way to be a "good mother" is to forgo working when their child is young (Schmidt et al., 2022[61]). Other perspectives present a similar story. Consider, for example, caregiving responsibilities when a child is sick. In a 2019 survey, 45% of respondents reported that mothers should, in the first place, stay home from work to take care of sick children; 25% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 29% disagreed (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2021[62]). These results all come from deep-rooted cultural beliefs that women are better carers, that the "most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family" and that the "most important role of a man is to earn money" (see Online Annex Figure 5-A9) (European Union, 2017[63]; Eurobarometer, 2024[23]). To top this all off, nearly 50% of respondents to a recent EU survey believe that men are naturally less competent than women at household tasks (see Online Annex Figure 5-A10) (Eurobarometer, 2024[23]). Unsurprisingly, these perceptions and beliefs coalesce into a disproportionate share of unpaid care and housework being borne by women, with particularly pronounced gaps in the presence of children (see Online Annex Figure 5-A7) (Eurofound, 2022[48]).

- **Family leave**: Immediately after birth, women are more likely than men to take time off to care for young children, with women representing over 70% of users of publicly-administered paid parental leave across the OECD (OECD, 2024[64]). This gap widens further when considering the total number of days as opposed to individual users (see Online Annex Figure 5-A11) (OECD, 2024[64]). Time out of the labour market, especially in the early years of a career, can lead to sizeable negative impacts on labour market attachment and earnings, as well as create significant barriers

to promotion and advancement. These gender differences in the use of parental leave are strongly influenced by gender norms and stereotypes around caregiving, unpaid work and parenting (Agerström, Carlsson and Erenel, 2023[65]; Li, Knoester and Petts, 2021[66]; OECD, 2023[21]), but these gaps also emerge from the rules and incentives of maternity, paternity and parental leave systems. For instance, while an increasing number of EU and OECD countries offer fathers access to paid leave around childbirth, most of the leave available to parents still privileges mothers. And even when leave can be shared between parents, incentive structures (e.g. replacement rates, benefit generosity) may imply strong negative implications for household finances if the father goes on leave when the father earns more than the mother (Marynissen et al., 2019[67]; Kaufman, 2017[68]; OECD, 2023[21]; OECD, 2024[69]). On top of this, even when fathers have access to (dedicated) leave, incentive structures may play a role in dictating behaviours around leave use, particularly if paternity benefits are lower than maternity benefits.

- **Pre-school and childcare**: Without accessible and affordable high-quality childcare during a child's early years, one parent often needs or chooses to remain at home, and this parent is most often the mother. This is clearly evidenced by the trajectory of employment rates for women by age of youngest child (see Online Annex Figure 5-A1). Mothers' employment rates are notably higher after compulsory school starts at around 5 or 6 years of age (OECD, 2024[70]), and in many countries, enrollment in early learning and childcare is low for children under the age of three years (OECD, 2024[71]) in part due to a lack of affordable and accessible high-quality care (OECD, 2023[21]). Additional children in a household only makes the challenge of securing and affording childcare more difficult. This is evidence by women's reported reasons for inactivity. In the EU-27, for example, caregiving for children or incapacitated adults is reported by 47% of inactive women with a youngest child aged 0-2 years as the primary reason for remaining out of the labour market (see Online Annex Figure 5-A12). By the time children are 6-14 years old, this drops significantly to 20%. These gender gaps can also be experienced by grandparents (see Section 5.1.3), who may opt out of the labour market to care for grandchildren, and can be further exacerbated by other intersecting characteristics, such as migrant status (Box 5.3).

- **Out-of-school childcare:** Once children enter primary school, a lack of access to affordable high-quality out-of-school hours (OSH) care can continue to affect women's employment patterns. Consider, for example, a primary school day that runs from 8:30am until 12:00pm and from 1:00pm until 3:00pm. These school hours do not coincide easily with a regular working day of 9:00am to 6:00pm, making it difficult for parents to combine school pick-up and drop-off and after-school childcare with a full-time job. This has likely contributed to the entrenchment of the part-time work culture among working parents (OECD, 2019[27]). The summer months are no exception, as schools can be closed for weeks or even months at a time (OECD, 2023[72]). In the absence of affordable and available childcare services, these long summer holidays can negatively impact women's labour supply. In the United States, for example, Price and Wasserman (2023[73]) estimate that during the summer months the employment rate among women falls by 1.1 percentage points, hours worked fall by 9.8% and weekly earnings fall by 3.3%. For men, employment rates actually rise slightly over the summer months, hours worked fall by significantly less (only 3.6%) and weekly earnings fall by only 0.7% (about five time less than the decline experienced by women). Research from France also demonstrates the importance of school schedules for mothers' labour supply. A 2013 policy reform introduced morning classes on Wednesdays, when historically there had been no classes on Wednesdays at all. After the reform, mothers were more likely to work full-time Monday to Friday, with no change for fathers, and the gender wage gap decreased by 6% (Duchini and Van Effenterre, 2022[74]).

- **Tax-benefit systems**: The structure of tax-benefit systems can play an important role in advancing (or reducing) gender equality in the labour market. Some systems *directly* and *explicitly* treat women and men differently (OECD, 2023[21]). In a 2022 stocktaking, seven of 43 countries indicated cases of explicit gender bias in their tax systems (OECD, 2022[75]). But, even gender-

neutral tax-benefit systems may *indirectly* treat women and men differently as a result of the interaction of the features of such systems with differences in the underlying economic characteristics and behaviours of women and men. Tax systems, for example, can create traps that disincentivise second earners – who are most often women – from entering the labour force. Joint personal income taxation is a well-known source of such implicit bias. Under this type of system, the income of the family is taxed together as one unit (rather than taxed separately for each individual), leading second earners to pay a higher marginal tax rate, which can disincentivise participation in the labour market (OECD, 2023[21]; 2022[75]). In the same way, the progressivity of the tax system, together with the removal of tax credits and allowances when a part-time worker enters full-time work, can lead to high marginal effective tax rates that disincentivise such transitions (Harding, Paturot and Simon, 2022[76]; OECD, 2023[21]). Other taxes – such as capital taxes and consumption taxes – can also create gender inequalities (Box 5.7).

Many – if not all – of these factors stem back to parenthood in one way or another. But despite the apparent labour market advantages to *not* having children, working women without children may also face backlash at work and in society (Verniers, 2020[77]; Ashburn-Nardo, 2016[78]; Koropeckyj-Cox et al., 2015[79]; Vinson, Mollen and Smith, 2010[80]; McCutcheon, 2018[81]). Understanding the labour market experiences of both women with and women without children will be increasingly important as fertility patterns change and women in (most) OECD countries continue to have fewer children (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022[82]; Sobotka, 2021[83]; Provencher and Galbraith, 2024[84]; OECD, 2024[85]).

Box 5.7. Looking beyond income taxation to other forms of taxation

There are many types of taxes – including labour, capital, wealth and consumption taxes. Depending on their structure and their interactions with other social, economic and individual behaviours and characteristics, each of these taxes has the potential to directly or indirectly contribute to inequality between women and men across a variety of outcomes. Consider, for example, the lower taxation of capital income relative to labour income. Given that men are more likely to have capital income than women, this differential taxation disproportionately benefits men (Coelho et al., 2024[86]; OECD, 2023[21]). Consumption taxes, too, can create gender inequalities. Although single-rate value-added taxes (VATs) are likely to be gender-neutral, differences in rates across goods and services could create gender biases since consumption patterns can differ between women and men (Coelho et al., 2024[86]). Feminine hygiene products – as a necessity – and childcare services – as an enabler of labour force participation – have attracted significant attention in this regard.

Yet, compared to labour income taxes, there is much less research on the gendered impacts of capital, wealth and consumption taxes, suggesting the need for continued research, including investment in gender-disaggregated data and the development of methodologies for better assessing the distribution of capital, consumption, income and wealth within households (OECD, 2023[21]; Coelho et al., 2024[86]; OECD, 2022[75]).

Box 5.8. Gender-based violence (GBV) may act as a barrier to employment and contribute to occupational segregation

Many women experience GBV (see Chapter 8), and perpetrators may control or try to control a victim's employment situation, income or assets. In Australia, for instance, a 2022 study found that 84% of victims/survivors reported that domestic violence impacted their ability to do their job (McNicol, Fitz-Gibbon and Brewer, 2022[87]). Many women may also experience technology-facilitated GBV while at work, with perpetrators using technology to monitor and disrupt women at work from afar. The barriers and challenges faced by women victims/survivors of violence translate into both lower overall employment and lower part-time employment (Summers, Shortridge and Sobeck, 2025[88]). Research from Finland using administrative data and a matched-control event-study design comes to similar conclusions, and puts forth a model to rationalise the findings, a model in which "abusive men have an incentive to use economic suppression to sabotage women's outside options and their ability to later exit the relationship" (Adams et al., 2024[89]).

GBV may also contribute to occupational segregation and gender pay gaps, with women self-reporting more harassment in men-dominated workplaces where wages are high, and men self-reporting more harassment in women-dominated workplaces where wages are low (Folke and Rickne, 2022[90]). This suggests that GBV may discourage women and men from applying for jobs in workplaces where their gender is underrepresented. This conclusion is further supported by a survey experiment, in which respondents are "highly averse to accepting jobs in workplaces with a higher harassment risk for their own gender, but less averse when people of the opposite sex are at higher risk." GBV may also contribute to gender inequality in the labour market by making gender minorities leave for new jobs, a conclusion supported by assessments of workplace transitions showing that "women who self-report harassment are more likely to switch to new workplaces with more [women] colleagues and lower pay." This is supported by findings from linked administrative data in Finland, which shows that men-women violence causes a decline in the share of the employees at a firm who are women, driven by fewer new women hired and current women employees leaving (Adams-Prassl et al., 2023[91]). The aggregate results mask important nuance: only men-managed firms lose women and in women-managed firms, men perpetrators are less likely to remain employed after attacking their women colleagues.

These findings underscore the need for employer and government action, including more supportive workplace policies, such as workplace protections, flexible work options and better access to financial support for victims/survivors (see Chapter 8). The results also underscore the need to continue to push for increased representation of women in leadership across all industries and occupations in both the public and the private sector (see Chapter 6).

Men are more likely to be self-employed – but are also more likely to have employees

Across EU-17 countries, about 18% of men and 11% of women, on average, are self-employed (Figure 5.6). Self-employment may be a sign of entrepreneurship, but it may also be a sign of "precarious working conditions that may reduce job quality" (OECD, 2019[92]). This risk of precariousness is particularly elevated for self-employed workers without employees, also known as own-account workers or solo self-employed workers. Across EU and OECD countries, women who are self-employed are more likely to be solo self-employed than men (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6. Men are more likely to be self-employed and to have employees

Share (%) aged 15+ years who are self-employed (Panel A) and share (%) of self-employed workers who are solo self-employed (i.e. without employees) (Panel B), women and men, 2023 or latest
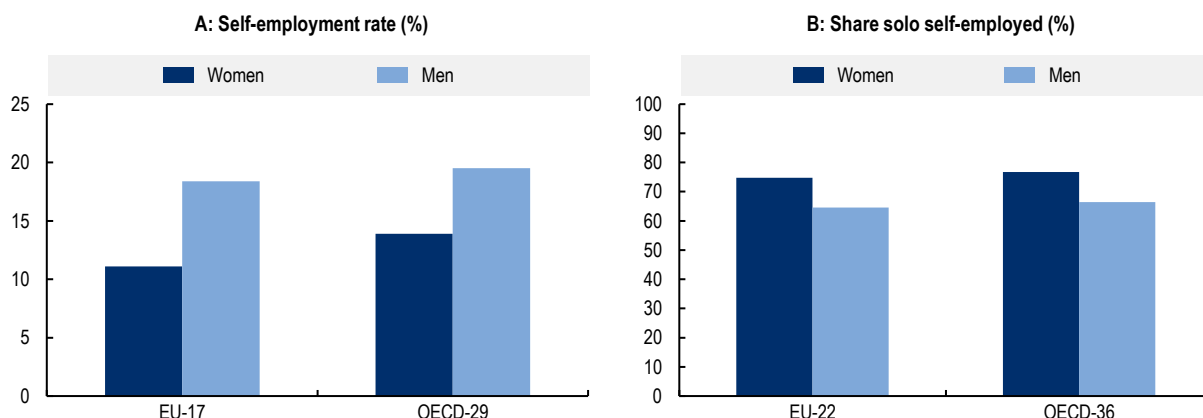
Note: Self-employed is defined as employers, workers who work for themselves, members of producers' co-operatives, and unpaid workers (i.e. those who lack a formal contract to receive a fixed amount of income at regular intervals, but who share in the income generated by the enterprise). Self-employments rates are calculated by dividing the number of self-employment workers of a specific gender by the total number of workers of that same gender. Solo self-employments rates are calculated by dividing the number of solo self-employment workers of a specific gender by the total number of self-employed workers of that same gender. In Panel A, EU-17 and OECD-29 averages are unweighted. Data for Germany are from 2021. Data for Türkiye are from 2020. All other countries are from 2023. In Panel B, EU-22 and OECD-36 averages are unweighted. Data for Canada, New Zealand and the United States are from 2022. Data for Japan are from 2021. Data for the United Kingdom are from 2019. Data for Australia, Chile, Korea and Mexico are from 2017. Data for Israel are from 2016. All other countries are from 2020. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Annual labour force survey, summary tables" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16p) and OECD Data Archive (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/10w).

Gender gaps in entrepreneurship and in outcomes among entrepreneurs (e.g. size, growth, financing) may reflect that, on average, women and men start different types of businesses in different sectors, with self-employed women over-represented in many service sectors (OECD/European Commission, 2023[93]). But, beyond gender segregation and traditional barriers to labour market access, there are additional factors that may be preventing women from pursuing entrepreneurship and/or growing their businesses.

- **Perceptions of risk**: Women are less likely than men to report being willing to take the risk of creating their own business (OECD, 2016[94]). Indeed, about 50% of women report that a fear of failure prevents them from starting a business, compared to 43% of men (OECD/European Commission, 2023[93]).

- **Perceptions of skills related to entrepreneurship**: Women are less likely than men to report that they have the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to start a business (OECD, 2016[94]; OECD/European Commission, 2023[93]). These sentiments reflect, in part, that entrepreneurship and self-employment are linked to masculinity (OECD, 2021[95]), with the notion of the male entrepreneur as the standard (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]). Women's lower perceptions of their skills may also reflect that women are less likely to engage in self-promotion and have lower levels of self-confidence than men, especially when pursuing "male"-typed tasks (Casale, 2020[97]; Exley and Kessler, 2022[98]; Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014[99]).

- **Barriers in access to finance**: Long-standing social and economic processes linking masculinity with entrepreneurship mean that women entrepreneurs are perceived as less legitimate, which affects their market position, their ability to mobilise critical resources, and consequently, their possibility to reach full entrepreneurial potential (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]). Access

to finance is a key obstacle to self-employment and entrepreneurship for both women and men, but women are more likely to see access to finance as a barrier (OECD, 2016[94]). Women entrepreneurs, for example, tend to have "lower levels of capitalisation and are more reliant on owner equity and insider financing than men" (OECD, 2021[95]). Women also tend to have "lower levels of entrepreneurial experience, [participate] in more marginal female-dominated sectors, [and face] gender-biased credit scoring and gender stereotyping in the lending process" (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]). Lower levels of basic financial knowledge, poorer financial literacy and weaker digital skills may further disadvantage women relative to men when seeking access to finance (OECD, 2023[21]). Women entrepreneurs may also be "discouraged borrowers," lacking self-confidence to seek external funding in the same amounts, at the same rate and/or in the same way as men (OECD, 2021[95]).

- **Entrepreneurship support programmes**: Biases in entrepreneurship support programmes may create challenges for women entrepreneurs. Support schemes, for example, often favour growth-oriented businesses, and women-owned business are less likely to fit this criterion (Halabisky, 2021[100]). For example, in OECD countries, new women entrepreneurs are significantly less likely than new men entrepreneurs to expect that they will create at least 19 jobs over the next five years (OECD/European Commission, 2023[93]). Women are also less likely to operate in sectors that are conducive to growth (for instance, they are overrepresented in personal services) and to use growth-oriented business strategies (such as exporting) (OECD, 2023[21]). Some of these differences reflect that women and men pursue self-employment for different reasons.

- **Motivations for entrepreneurship**: Women are more likely to go into self-employment for the flexible working hours, as a way to reconcile work and care commitments (OECD/European Union, 2019[101]; OECD, 2021[95]), even though these care commitments may limit the growth potential of women's enterprises. Indeed, although self-employed workers tend to work more hours than employed workers, on average, they have more flexibility in how these hours are distributed (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]).

- **Networks**: Compared to men entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs have smaller and less effective networks, which limits their ability to overcome the above-noted resource constraints (Halabisky, 2021[100]). Women's networks, for instance, tend to be less diverse and draw less on social capital from previous work experiences, which make these networks less effective than men's. Women also rely more on family members, friends and educators, as opposed to business service providers or other entrepreneurs (OECD, 2021[95]). This difference in composition partly reflects that women are less likely to have interacted with individuals who control critical resources in previous employment experiences due to the leaky pipeline and the glass ceiling. Indeed, men are more likely to have networks of contacts with greater "social and economic power, which can be advantageous in assisting in the gathering of information, resources and referrals" (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]).

- **Access to social protection:** Gendered differences in the rate of entrepreneurship may be partially a result of differences in access to social protection (e.g. family leave) between employees and self-employed individuals. Most social protection programmes – including maternity, paternity and parental leave – treat employees and self-employed individuals differently in terms of eligibility, qualifying criteria, contribution rates, and payment conditions (OECD/European Commission, 2017[96]). To ensure access to social programmes like family leave, women may be disincentivised to transition from employees into entrepreneurs (OECD, 2023[21]).

- **Challenges accessing foreign markets:** Trading can increase productivity as exporting can boost sales and lead to market expansion, while importing can reduce costs and improve technology (OECD, 2023[102]). In a survey of firms in OECD countries with a presence on Facebook, only 11% of women-led SMEs were engaged in exporting, compared to 19% of men-led firms in 2022. Importing was also more common among men-led firms (15%) than women-led firms (11%). Firm

size and sector explain part of these gender gaps, but other factors also play an important role, including attitudes toward entrepreneurship, barriers to access to finance and a perceived lack of entrepreneurship skills. To close gender gaps, policies and programmes can focus on supporting women-led firms with access to finance (e.g. facilitate connections between bank intermediaries and women-led enterprises, with a focus on export loans and guarantees) and on helping women-led firms become export ready (e.g. providing market information, branding, customer relations and business partners and assistance navigating foreign and domestic customs regulations) (OECD, 2023[102]).

Occupational and task segregation remains a key feature of labour markets

Occupational segregation – the unequal distribution of women and men across occupations and industries – is a feature of all EU and OECD labour markets. In most occupations, gender segregation is the norm, with only 7 out of 42 occupations in EU-27 countries in 2023 showing evidence of gender balance – defined here as a workforce composed of between 40% women and 60% women (Figure 5.7). Of the remaining 35 occupations that show a gender imbalance, 13 show extreme gender segregation – defined here as less than 20% women or more than 80% women. Extremely segregated occupations include many occupations related to the trades, which are men-dominated, and many occupations related to care, which are women-dominated. Since the occupations in which women are concentrated are more likely to be low paid and many have poor working conditions (OECD, 2019[103]; 2023[104]; World Economic Forum, 2023[105]), occupational segregation is an important factor contributing to the gender pay gap (see below) and to other gender inequities in the labour market.

Figure 5.7. Occupational segregation persists in EU and OECD countries

Share (%) of workers (15-64) who are women by two-digit occupational category (ISCO-08), EU-27 average, 2013 and 2023
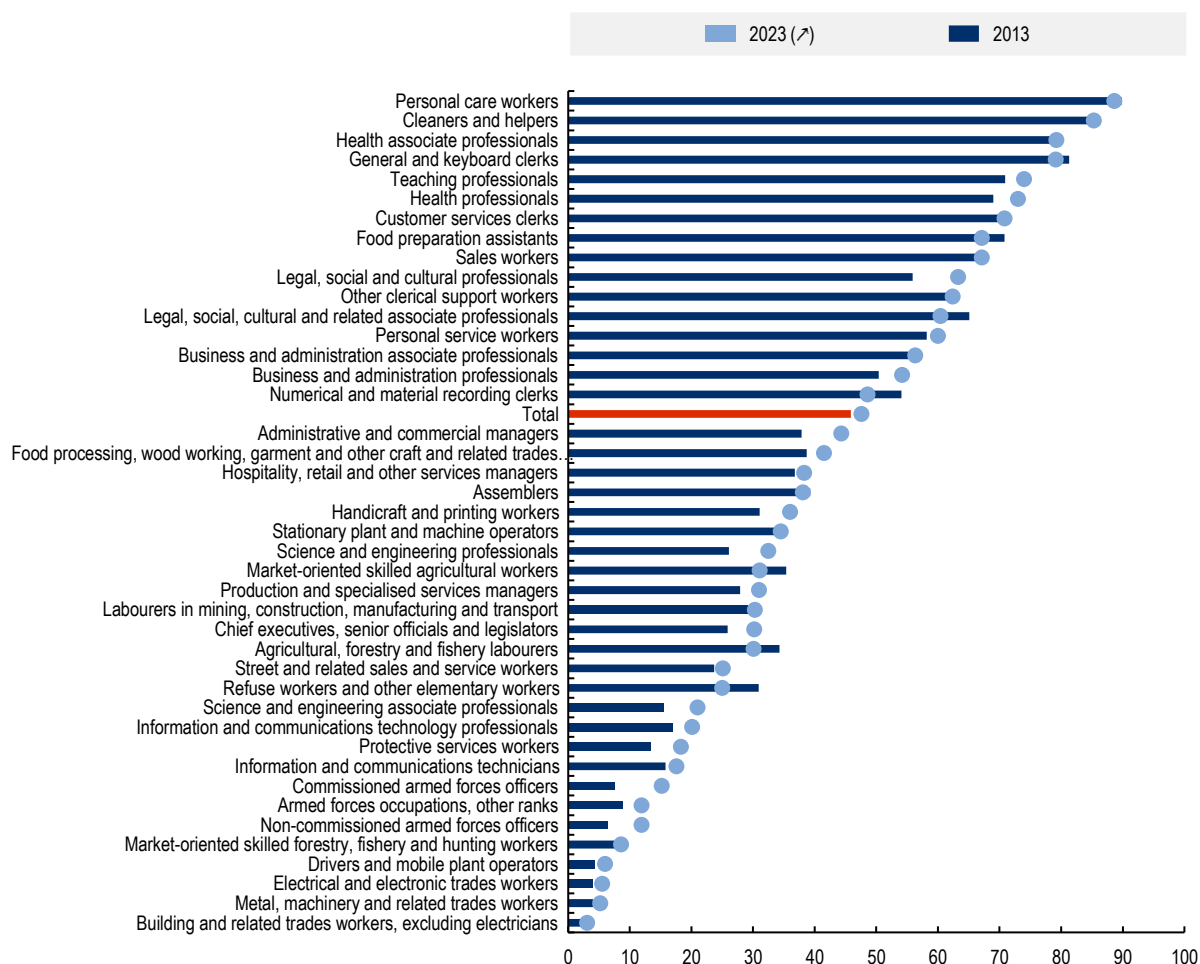
Note: EU-27 average is weighted. "Subsistence farmers, fishers, hunters and gatherers" was dropped due to missing data in 2023. Due to space constraints, not all occupations are reported at the same level. Some occupations are ISCO-08 Level 1 occupations and some occupations are ISCO-08 Level 2 occupations. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: Eurostat "Employed persons by detailed occupation (ISCO-08 two-digit level)" (https://doi.org/10.2908/LFSA_EGAI2D).

Occupational segregation is, in large part, due to a gendered socialisation process that governs interests, aspirations, behaviours, expectations and even career paths (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 6). As children age into young adulthood, these gender norms and stereotypes collide with economic opportunities, as well as policies and practices, ultimately reinforcing existing gender differences.

Legislation matters, too. As of 2024, among the 43 EU and OECD countries, there are a handful of countries with laws against women working in an industrial job in the same way as a man and a few countries with laws against women working in a job deemed dangerous in the same way as a man (see Online Annex Figure 5-A14) (OECD, 2024[106]; World Bank, 2024[107]). These laws typically stem(med) from (outdated) concerns over women's health and safety and (outdated) assumptions that women are more vulnerable to physical strain or hazardous conditions than men. In the last 50 years, many countries have relaxed or amended such labour legislation. Nevertheless, the fact that women were legally unable to

equally participate in certain occupations for many years may have created a path dependency or stickiness that is difficult to overcome.

Consider, for example, that children and youth have repeatedly shown that they learn about available jobs and aspire to different careers based on what is around them. Indeed, in *Drawing the Future*, a survey of over 13 000 children aged 7 to 11 years old in the United Kingdom, 39% of children drew a "dream" job performed by someone they knew (e.g. parents, guardians or an extended family member) (Chambers et al., 2018[108]). Of the other 61% who did not know someone who did their dream job, almost half reported that they had heard about the job through TV, film or radio. The importance of media and personal experience and encounters also shines through in the international sample of 7 000 children from 19 additional countries.

Occupational segregation may also be driven by the fact that some occupations may offer greater flexibility (e.g. flexible hours, part-time opportunities, remote work, etc.), which makes them more compatible with unpaid family and caregiving responsibilities (Das and Kotikula, 2019[109]). Evidence further suggests that this gender segregation may extend beyond the choice of occupation to the choice of firm, with women tending to gravitate toward jobs (within a given occupation) that offer greater flexibility, but that may also come with lower wages. These jobs provide a trade-off between pay and work-life balance, potentially reflecting "compensating differentials" in the labour market around flexible working arrangements (Goldin, 2014[110]).

Beyond occupational and firm segregation, there is also "task segregation" within firms and within narrowly defined occupations. For example, women are more likely than men to volunteer for, to be asked to volunteer for, and to accept low promotability tasks (e.g. notetaking, serving on a committee, planning a party) (Babcock et al., 2017[111]). These tasks – from which everyone benefits – do, however, require time and effort, eating into the time available for high promotability tasks that contribute to career advancement and wage growth. Gender differences in low promotability tasks – which amounted to 200 hours per year in one study (Babcock, Peyser and Vesterlund, 2022[112]) – may, therefore, contribute to slower upward mobility for women within organisations and to vertical gender segregation in the workplace. Many other factors further contribute to vertical segregation in the workplace and the labour market (see Chapter 6), including gender differences in recognition for group work (Sarsons et al., 2021[113]).

Box 5.9. Women in men-dominated industries and occupations

Women in men-dominated industries and occupations may face bias and discrimination in the hiring process (Quadlin, 2018[114]), higher expectations than men with similar levels of education and experience (Hengel, 2022[115]), harmful and hurtful gender-based stereotypes (Funk and Parker, 2018[116]), and harassment and discrimination from colleagues and supervisors (Clancy et al., 2014[117]; Biggs, Hawley and Biernat, 2017[118]; Paul, Sultana and Bosu, 2019[119]; Cyr et al., 2021[120]). Combined, these affect workplace well-being, career prospects and earnings. Many women in these fields describe their workplaces as toxic, and many women who enter these field eventually leave (Spoon et al., 2023[121]). This means that gender gaps that exist in fields of study may be exacerbated in the labour market.

Box 5.10. Care and domestic workers face low pay and poor working conditions

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Access to affordable high-quality ECEC is a crucial driver of women's labour force participation, helping to strengthen economic growth and boost productivity (OECD, 2023[21]). High-quality ECEC can also lead to increased cognitive and non-cognitive development in children (OECD, 2021[122]). Despite these benefits, ECEC work is defined by "low wages, a lack of status and public recognition, poor working conditions, and limited opportunities for professional development" (OECD, 2019[123]). ECEC is also an occupation dominated by women, with women accounting for 96% of staff across OECD-36 countries (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[124]). This extreme level of occupational segregation reflects, in part, that ECEC is considered a low status and a low pay occupation, but also that it is traditionally regarded as "women's work." Diversifying the ECEC workforce by bringing more men into the sector could improve children's development and learning and shape their attitudes toward gender roles (OECD, 2019[123]).

Care and non-care domestic workers

Care and non-care household services can help women increase their labour supply (e.g. Cortés and Tessada (2011[125])). Yet, many of the jobs in this sector are informal, meaning that workers – most of whom are women – are not covered by employment or social protection arrangements and are at greater risk of exploitation or sub-standard working conditions (OECD, 2021[54]). Reflecting the need for action, the 2013 OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship encourages countries to improve "employment conditions and access to social support for informal workers, especially those in the most vulnerable categories, such as home-based and domestic workers" (OECD, 2017[126]). In addition, the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Work establishes global labour standards to ensure fair working conditions and protections for workers, including provisions for fair wages, decent working hours and access to social security (ILO, 2011[127]).

Long-term care

Unpaid caregiving provided by family and friends is both a complement to and a substitute for paid caregiving provided by the long-term care sector, a sector dominated by women and characterised by low wages and poor working conditions (OECD, 2023[57]; OECD, 2021[128]; OECD, 2023[129]). As populations age, paid employment in long-term care is estimated to need to rise by 32% over the next ten years to meet increased demand (OECD, 2023[57]) – a rate that is unlikely to be met. People are aware of this risk: in the 2022 OECD Risks that Matter (RTM) Survey, the majority of people were concerned about not being able to access good-quality long-term care for themselves (67%) and for elderly family members (65%) over the next ten years (OECD, 2023[130]). It will therefore become increasingly important to value long-term care work appropriately and to reduce gender gaps in unpaid care as much as possible (Frey, Alajääskö and Thomas, 2024[131]). Attracting workers to the sector will require a comprehensive policy strategy, including improvements in wages, compliance with staffing requirements and transparency in the communication of effective staff ratios. Interventions could also include enforcing minimum wages, promoting appropriate wages in collective agreements, strengthening training, promoting social recognition, increasing the use of technology, and promoting transitions of undeclared workers to formal employment (OECD, 2023[57]). At the same time, governments can also better support unpaid caregivers. Many countries have already done so, offering paid leave and cash benefits to carers, those in need of care, or both (Rocard and Llena-Nozal, 2022[132]). Training, counselling, psychological and financial support are also key measures to support informal carers, as highlighted in the European Care Strategy (European Commission, 2022[133]).

Gender wage gaps persist across EU and OECD countries

Gender gaps in earnings are a critical manifestation of gender inequalities. Across EU and OECD countries – and around the world – women earn less than men. In 2023, the median full-time working woman earned, on average, 11% less than the median full-time working man – meaning she earned 89 cents to every euro or dollar earned by her male counterpart. This poor outcome is an 8 percentage point improvement upon 1995, when the gender wage gap was 19% (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8. Gender wage gaps have steadily closed over time, but women continue to earn less

Gender wage gap, percent, 10th decile, median and 90th decile, OECD average, 1995-2023
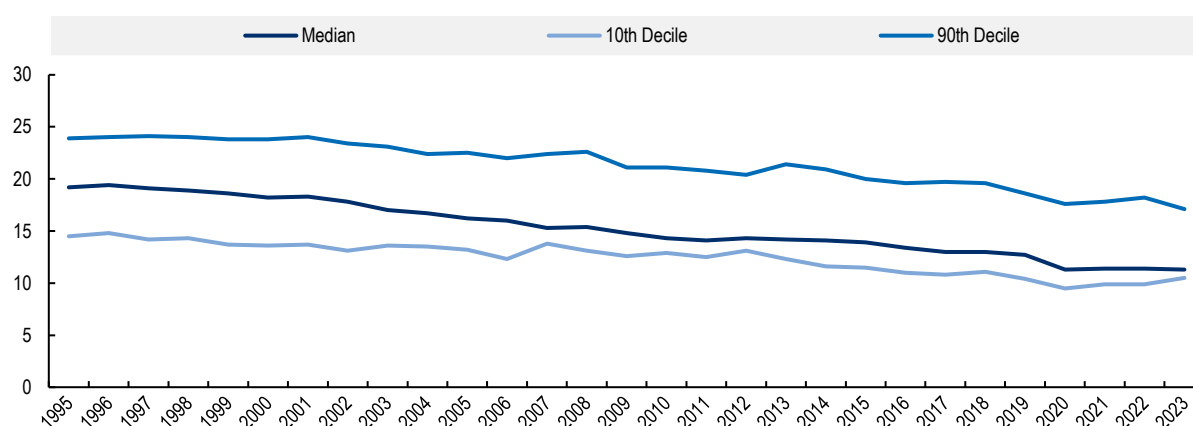
Note: The gender wage gap is unadjusted and defined as the difference between median wages of women and men relative to the median wages of men. The indicator is based on gross earnings of full-time employees by earnings deciles (upper limits) reported in the OECD Distribution of Earnings Database. The most common earnings pay reporting periods are weekly and monthly earnings of full-time employees (for 30 out of 37 countries). Five countries use hourly earnings, and two countries use annual earnings. The distinction between full-time and part-time is according to national definitions as reported in the data source. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Gender wage gap" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16q).

The existence of the gender earnings gap – and its patterns over the life course – reflect the interaction of social, economic and institutional factors, many of which have already been mentioned.

- **Career breaks and the motherhood penalty**: Career breaks affect earnings levels directly through their impact on the number of weeks worked in any given year, but they also have the potential to significantly alter earnings trajectories by limiting upward momentum and the development of skills and experience. The "motherhood penalty" specifically reflects the negative impact of parenthood on earnings for women. This penalty is partly evidenced by the fact that gender wage gaps within and between firms tend to increase over the life course and particularly during the initial phase of women's professional careers, which are prime childbearing years (OECD, 2021[134]). For fathers, the opposite is often the case, contributing to the fatherhood premium (Yu and Hara, 2021[16]).

- **Work intensity**: The overrepresentation of women among part-time workers has important consequences for women's earnings. First, part-time work tends to pay less than full-time work (Garnero, 2016[135]). Second, even supposing that part-time and full-time work were paid identically, fewer weeks and fewer hours worked for women compared to men mean that gender gaps in annual earnings tend to be larger than gender gaps in hourly earnings. In EU-27 countries, for instance, gender gaps in median earnings on an annual basis averaged 17%, while on an hourly basis, they averaged 7% (see Online Annex Figure 5-A15) (Eurostat, 2024[136]; 2024[137]).

- **Horizontal segregation**: Gender differences in occupation and industry contribute to the gender wage gap since women are more likely to work in low-paid occupations than men (OECD, 2017[28]). This helps to explain the higher incidence of "low pay" among women relative to men, where low pay is defined as less than two-thirds of gross median earnings of all full-time workers (see Online Annex Figure 5-A16). The fact that women-dominated industries and occupations tend to be paid less may be because they are undervalued, not because they are inherently less valuable (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2009[138]; OECD, 2023[139]; OECD, 2023[21]). For more on this, see Section 3.2.2. in OECD (2023[140]). There is also evidence that as women do "break in" to men-dominated industries and occupations, wages fall (for both women and men), due in part to a decline in prestige and an increase in flexibility (Harris, 2022[141]). These findings stress the importance of recognising the value of women-dominated jobs and seeking to improve the pay and working conditions in these industries and occupations.

- **Vertical segregation**: Glass ceilings (or vertical segregation) prevent women from reaching the top – and the highest paid positions – in all areas of work, even when women may be adequately or even overly qualified (see Chapter 6). This partly explains why women are less likely to earn "high pay," defined as 150% higher than gross median earnings (see Online Annex Figure 5-A16), and why gender wage gaps are substantially larger at the top of the distribution (Figure 5.8).

- **Firm segregation**: Even when women and men work in the same very narrowly defined occupations and industries, there remains a gender earnings gap, some of which is explained by sorting across firms. Women, for example, have been found to segregate into lower paying firms (Javdani, 2015[142]; Morchio and Moser, 2024[143]). This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the "glass door" effect. This is in contrast to the "glass ceiling" effect, which considers vertical segregation within firms. This firm "sorting" may reflect several factors, including discriminatory hiring practices by employers and preferences of women for firms with flexible working-time arrangements (which also tend to offer lower pay) (OECD, 2023[21]; 2021[134]). Yet, at the same time, it has been shown that about three-quarters of the gender wage gap between similarly skilled women and men reflects differences *within* firms (OECD, 2021[134]).

- **Job transitions**: Between their late 20s and early 40s, women are less likely to switch jobs than men and are less likely to experience a pay increase when they do so (OECD, 2022[144]). This fact contributes to the gender wage gap between firms, and suggests that, instead of wage- or career-motivated job changes, women may be changing jobs for personal reasons (e.g. more flexible working arrangements, working closer to home, following a partner) (OECD, 2023[21]; 2022[144]).

- **Compensating differentials**: Some jobs are "greedy," meaning they involve long and unpredictable working hours in which individuals are not substitutable one for another. Such jobs are not easily compatible with unpaid work responsibilities, and often have pay schedules that increase non-linearly in hours. This trade-off – or compensating differential – has been found to contributing to the gender wage gap, with gaps highest in those occupations where greedy jobs are more common (Sobeck, 2024[145]; Goldin, 2014[110]). Such compensating differentials may also exist between pay and other job characteristics (e.g. family friendliness of firms, shorter commutes) (Le Barbanchon, Rathelot and Roulet, 2020[146]; Fluchtmann et al., 2024[147]).

- **Salary negotiations**: Women and men may engage in and experience salary negotiations differently, which may contribute to disparities in earnings (Säve-Söderbergh, 2019[148]). First, women may be less likely to feel comfortable negotiating their salaries and less likely to do so (see Online Annex Figure 5-A17) (European Union, 2017[63]) – although not all evidence points to a lower propensity to negotiate among women (e.g. Kray, Kennedy and Lee (2024[149]), Dreber, Heikensten and Säve-Söderbergh (2022[150])). Second, even when women do negotiate, they may ask for less and/or receive lower offers than men (Kray, Kennedy and Lee, 2024[149]; Dreber, Heikensten and Säve-Söderbergh, 2022[150]; Kiessling et al., 2024[151]; Recalde and Vesterlund, 2020[152]). Third, women who negotiate may encounter resistance or backlash that can impact

future employment opportunities and earnings growth (Exley, Niederle and Vesterlund, 2020[153]; Recalde and Vesterlund, 2020[152]). Efforts to close gender gaps in negotiation typically focus on either fixing the women (e.g. lean-in recommendations, improvements to women's negotiation skills) or fixing the institution (e.g. banning negotiations, banning salary history information, imposing transparency regulations). Evidence points to more effective closure of gender differences through "fix the institution" policies and programmes (Recalde and Vesterlund, 2020[152]).

- **Discrimination**: In 2017, 13% of men and 8% of women believed it was acceptable in some circumstances for a woman to be paid less than a man for the same job (see Online Annex Figure 5-A18) (European Union, 2017[63]). This means that outright discrimination against women cannot be ruled out as an explanation for the gender wage gap. Indeed, gender-based discrimination (in job and salary offers) has been illustrated in audit studies (OECD, 2023[154]) and a recent meta-analysis finds that discrimination affirms existing occupational segregation (Galos and Coppock, 2023[155]). Other research comes to a similar conclusion, with women suffering large discrimination penalties in men-dominated professions (Kübler, Schmid and Stüber, 2018[156]). Discrimination and bias may also be particularly challenging around maternity and motherhood (Arena, Volpone and Jones, 2022[157]).

Gender gaps may additionally exist for other income sources and assets beyond earnings, such as government transfers, self-employment income, capital income, property and wealth (Box 5.11). But estimating gender differences in other sources of income and in assets can be challenging. Standard methods typically pool and equally distribute income and assets amongst all family members, but recent research has challenged this assumption, showing that equal income sharing may not be guaranteed within a household (European Commission, 2013[158]). There may also be important intra-household considerations around the control of assets. Irrespective of ownership status, power dynamics and differences in financial knowledge within couples can affect the actual economic control of assets and the benefits derived from them.

Box 5.11. Looking beyond earnings to income and wealth

Much recent research points to a gender gap in wealth. In a paper linking administrative data in Estonia, for example, the unconditional gender gap in mean wealth is estimated at 45% (Meriküll, Kukk and Rõõm, 2020[159]). Using various methodological approaches, gender wealth gaps have also been found in other EU and OECD countries, including Germany, France and Italy, and others (Sierminska, Frick and Grabka, 2010[160]; Kent and Ricketts, 2021[161]; Bonnet, Keogh and Rapoport, 2013[162]; D'Alessio, 2018[163]; EIGE, 2024[164]). Recent evidence from Germany finds that gender wealth gaps are the largest between women and men at the top, suggesting that the transfer of business and financial assets from parents may be strongly gendered (Trinh, 2024[165]). This paper shows that if transfers were simply allocated equally, the gender wealth gap for these well-off individuals could be reduced by about 40%. Other evidence from Germany shows that the gender wealth gap varies notably by age, remaining quite small up to the age of 40, widening until retirement, and then declining thereafter. This reflects that "men tend to inherit larger sums of money during their working lives," but also that "women tend to outlive their partners, thus receiving larger inheritances at older ages" (Bartels, Sierminska and Schröder, 2024[166]).

Marital property regimes are another important factor that may contribute to and explain gender wealth gaps, as shown by Frémeaux and Leturcq (2022[167]) in the case of France.

> **Box 5.12. Spotlight on intersectionality: Disability and the gender wage gap**
>
> People with disability face significant barriers to entry into the labour market and these barriers may intersect with gender. In Canada, for example, participation rates for people with disability stood at 51% in 2023, compared to 70% for people without disability. For women with disability, participation rates were 49%, compared to 53% for men with disability. Challenges arise not only with participation rates, but also with earnings. Compared to men without disability, men with disability earn 4% less. For women without disability, the gap stands at 13%. For women with disability, the gap grows even further to 17%, with the average woman with disability earning only CAD 29.81 per hour, compared to CAD 36.04 per hour for the average man without disability.
>
> Source: Statistics Canada (2024[168]), *Labour market characteristics of persons with and without disabilities, 2023*.

5.1.3. Later and older adulthood: Gendered labour supply and retirement patterns

Older women tend to do less paid work than older men

Gender gaps in labour supply remain high among older workers. In the OECD, for instance, gender gaps in employment rates are among their highest for those aged 60-64 years, while gender gaps in part-time employment rates are among their highest for those aged 65-69 years and 70-74 years (Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9. Gender gaps in labour supply remain among older workers

Employment rates (Panel A) and part-time employment rates (Panel B), percent (%), women and men by age group and gender gap in employment rates (Panel C) and in part-time employment rates (Panel D), percentage points, men less women, OECD, 2023
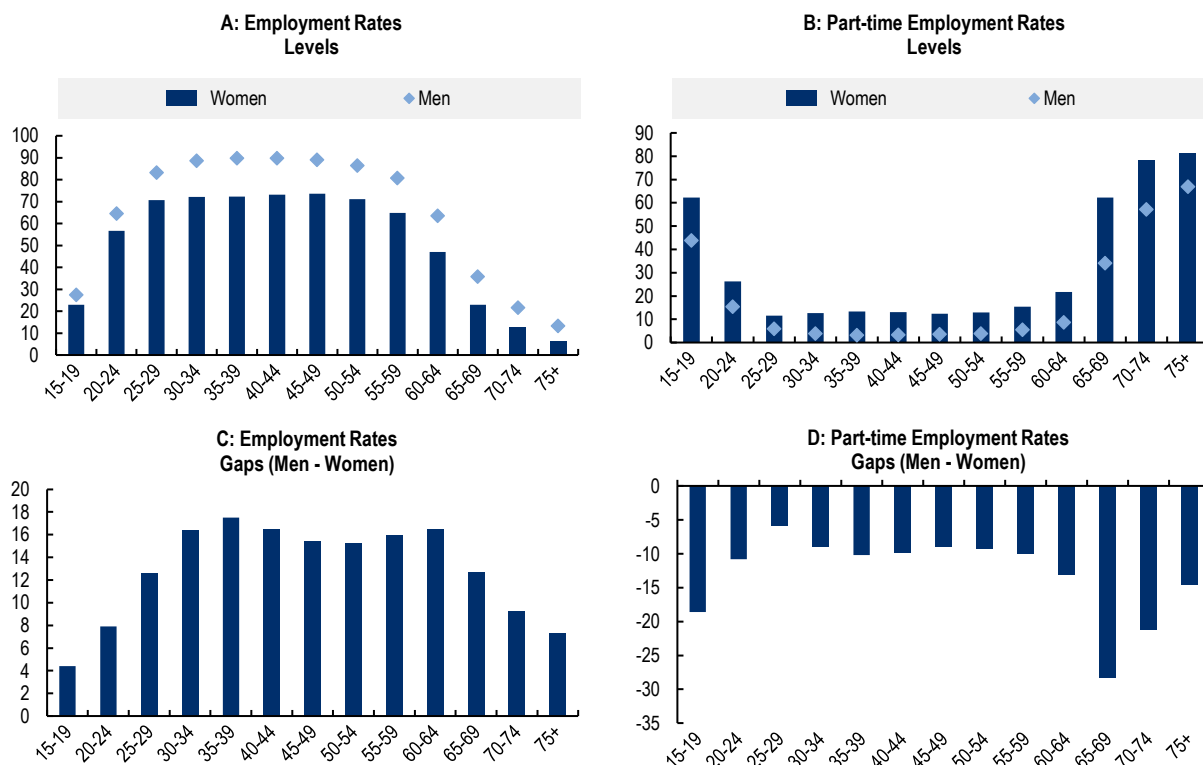
Note: Data refer to pre-calculated averages available in online tables. Data for full- and part-time status refer to employees only. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Incidence of full-time and part-time employment based on OECD-harmonised definition" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16s) and "Employment and unemployment by five-year age group and sex – levels" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16r).

Explaining gender gaps in labour supply between older women and older men

Gender stereotypes and norms around unpaid care and household responsibilities play a large role in explaining differences in labour supply between older women and older men. Older women, for example, are more likely to exit the labour market earlier than men (OECD, 2023[169]), and this earlier exit may reflect unpaid care responsibilities for grandchildren. More specifically, becoming a grandmother appears to have a large negative effect on labour supply (Frimmel et al., 2020[170]; Backhaus and Barslund, 2021[171]; Gørtz, Sander and Sevilla, 2024[172]), with some research finding stronger effects when grandmothers live close to their grandchildren and when there is little or low availability of formal childcare (Frimmel et al., 2020[170]; Backhaus and Barslund, 2021[171]). By comparison, the labour supply of men does not significantly adjust to becoming a grandfather. In fact, grandmothers who are younger, fitter, and healthier may be the most likely to exit the labour force to provide care for grandchildren, but they are also the same women that governments want to encourage to remain in the labour force longer (Glaser et al., 2013[173]).

Older women are also more likely to be providing unpaid care to older relatives (e.g. parents, siblings) or relatives with a disability, which can interfere with paid work. Indeed, in EU-23 countries, older women represent 62% of those providing daily unpaid care (see Online Annex Figure 5-A19) (OECD, 2021[128]). In

a special module of the EU-LFS in 2018 on care responsibilities, older women were more likely than older men to report that caregiving for an incapacitated relative resulted in a work interruption or a reduction in hours worked (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10. Older women experience negative labour supply effects due to caregiving for incapacitated relatives

Share (%) of women and men (55-64) with care responsibilities reporting a work interruption or a reduction in work hours due to care of incapacitated relatives, 2018
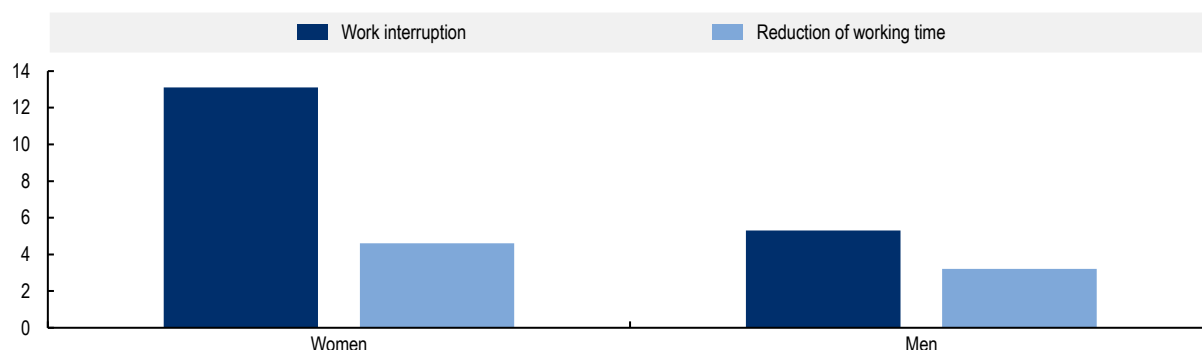
Note: EU-27 average is weighted. "No response" and "Never had care responsibilities" are excluded from the denominator. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: Eurostat "Persons in employment or with previous employment experience by effects of care of incapacitated relatives on employment and educational attainment level" (https://doi.org/10.2908/LFSO_18REDSTED).

Gender differences in the impact of caregiving may reflect gender differences in the intensity of care, as well as the type of tasks undertaken. In Canada, for example, men have been shown to participate in "masculine" activities that are more flexible, less regular and demand less time, such as house maintenance and outdoor work, while women are found to participate in "feminine" activities that may be more time intensive and often must be completed on a regular basis or on a set schedule, such as personal care, appointment and medication management, and emotional support (Statistics Canada, 2022[174]).

Another potential factor that may explain gender differences in labour market outcomes among older workers is the intersection of ageism and sexism, with research suggesting that women are perceived as never of the right age – either being too old or too young. In a study in Australia, for example, older women are more likely than older men to be perceived by their peers as "having outdated skills, being slow to learn new things, or doing an unsatisfactory job" (State of Victoria, 2023[175]). Limited or no workforce accommodations for menopause may also negatively impact women, especially when there are "restricted access to toilets, inability to control ventilation and air conditioning, restrictive workwear, and uncomfortable workstations" (State of Victoria, 2023[175]). Similar findings emerge in a survey in the United Kingdom, where over 27% of employed women aged 40-60 years with menopause symptoms state that such symptoms negatively impacted their career progression, and 17% reported having considered leaving work due to a lack of support in relation to their symptoms (CIPD, 2023[176]). Indeed, recent research finds that menopause leads to a "persistent decline in employment and earnings, along with a greater dependence on social transfers," but that "greater menopause awareness and improved access to menopause-related healthcare can help to mitigate its economic costs" (Conti et al., 2025[177]).

Government policy around pension eligibility can further contribute to gender differences in retirement. In Hungary, for example, women can retire early (before reaching the statutory retirement age) with full benefits through a programme called Women-40. The minimum period of gainful activity is 40 years, but

this can fall to 32 years when accounting for caregiving breaks. Men do not have access to such an early retirement option. In 2022, about half of all women in Hungary were using the Women-40 scheme, leading to notable gender disparities in the effective retirement ages and employment rates for people above age 60 years (OECD, 2024[178]).

Women spend more years in retirement…

Given that women work less, on average, during prime childbearing and childrearing years and are more likely to exit the labour market at earlier ages, they end up having shorter total working lives than men. Indeed, across EU-27 countries, women work, on average, 36 years of their lives, while men work, on average, 39 years (see Online Annex Figure 5-A20) (Eurostat, 2024[179]). Earlier retirement combines with longer life expectancies to mean that women spend more years in retirement than men. Across OECD-38 countries, for instance, women spend 23 years in retirement, compared to 18 years for men (see Online Annex Figure 5-A21) (OECD, 2023[169]).

…with less pension income

Pension levels for women in OECD countries are, on average, 24% below those of men (Figure 5.11) (OECD, 2021[180]; 2022[181]) and older women are at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than are older men (see Online Annex Figure 5-A22) (OECD, 2023[169]).[1]

Since income levels and pension gaps are estimated for those currently over the age of 65 years, improvements in gender equality in recent decades, especially in labour force participation and in earnings, mean that pension gaps will likely decrease over time. But as long as women earn and work less than men and exit the labour force more often and earlier than men, pension gaps will remain. It is not entirely surprising, then, that in the 27 countries that participated in the 2022 OECD Risks that Matter Survey, 80% of women reported concerns about not being financially secure in old age, compared to 70% of men. Similar results emerge in the 2024 OECD Risks that Matter Survey.

Figure 5.11. Pension gaps persist in all EU and OECD countries

Gender gap in pensions, women and men (65+) (among pension beneficiaries), 2018 or latest year
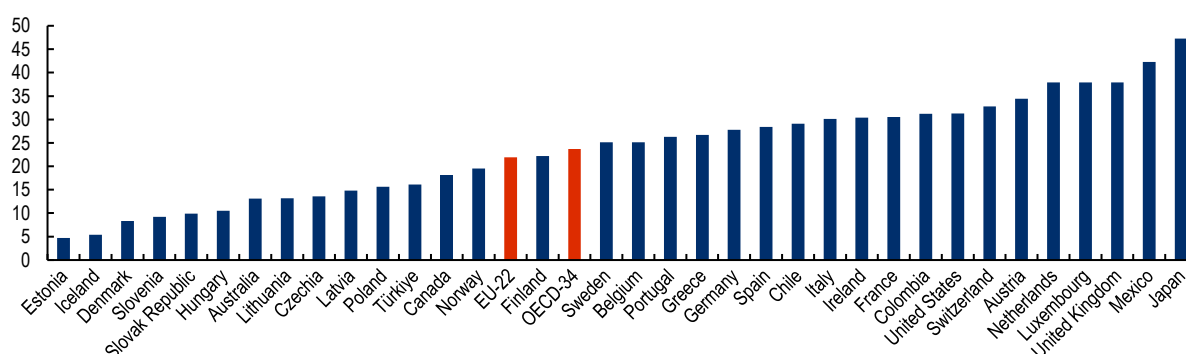
Note: EU-22 and OECD-34 are unweighted averages. The gender gap in pensions is calculated as the difference between the mean retirement income of women and men over the mean retirement income of men, among pension beneficiaries. Calculations are based on the LIS, except for France, Latvia and Portugal, where the HFCS (Wave 3) was used; and Iceland, Sweden and Türkiye where results come from the EU-SILC (published on Eurostat's website). Data for all EU countries are from 2022. Data for Switzerland, Türkiye and the United States are from 2021. Data for Canada, Colombia, Japan, Norway and the United Kingdom are from 2020. Data for Australia and Iceland are from 2018. In Belgium when partner A's pension rights are less than 25% of those of partner B, the pension of A is not paid out and B receives a family pension (calculated at 75% of wages instead of 60%). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 5.A.
Source: Figure 6.9 from OECD (2023[169]), see https://stat.link/e13h5q.

Although public pension systems now provide care credits for time away from work for family leave in many EU and OECD countries, such care credits only partially cushion the impact of childcare-related employment breaks for many workers. This is because pension credits may not fully match the level of contributions the individual would have made while still working, may only cover some years of employment breaks and may only apply to public pension schemes, not to private or occupational schemes (OECD, 2022[181]). In addition, in some countries, working part-time – which women are more likely to do – may mean that a worker is not even eligible to participate in retirement savings plans. Gender differences in behaviour and social and cultural norms may also play a role, such as women's higher risk aversion, lower financial literacy and lower engagement in retirement planning and decision-making (OECD, 2021[180]). To top it all off, older women are more likely to outlive their spouses and subsequently live alone, which is linked to a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat, 2024[182]).

Box 5.13. Additional data sources on gender equality in paid and unpaid work

Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:

- **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps**: Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance and private and public leadership.

- **OECD Employment Database**: Provides up-to-date statistics for making comparisons between countries and identifying trends over time.

- **OECD Family Database**: Collects national and international sources to present key indicators on the structure and the labour market position of families and related public policies.

- **OECD Employment Outlook**: Provides annual insights into ongoing and forthcoming issues related to employment, most recently covering issues relating to artificial intelligence, inclusive labour markets, COVID-19 and the future of work.

- **OECD Pensions at a Glance:** Provides annual insights into pension systems across OECD countries, including regular updates on gender gaps in pension earnings.

- **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database**: Contains information on employment, labour market policies, working conditions and work-life balance, among other key topics related to the labour market.

- **International Labour Organization (ILO)'s ILOSTAT**: Provides statistics on labour markets for a wide range of countries around the world.

- **2017 and 2024 Eurobarometer Surveys on Gender Stereotypes:** Present statistics from EU countries on gender stereotypes at home, in the workplace and in leadership.

- **World Values Survey**: Explores opinions and attitudes toward women at work and in politics.

- **Eurofound's European (Telephone) Working Conditions Surveys (E(T)WCS)**: Present insights into questions pertaining to working conditions, including factors associated with job quality, such as work organisation, access to and use of learning and training, prevalence of physical and psychosocial risk factors, occupational health and safety and work-life balance.

- **Eurofound's European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS)**: Contains data on perceptions of quality of life, society and public services.

- **Women, Business and the Law:** Provides information on laws pertaining to women's ability to enter or remain in the labour force, work after childbirth and start and run a business, as well as occupational segregation, the gender wage gap, pensions, the provision of early learning and childcare and sexual harassment in the workplace.

> - **OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index:** Contains data on laws, norms and practices relating to discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted civil liberties and restricted access to productive and financial resources.
> - **OECD Time Use Database:** Documents gender differences in time allocation over different daily activities.

5.2. Policy combinations to advance gender equality in paid and unpaid work

Using Table 5.1, this section applies the **priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality by exploring four **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1): gender equality in paid and unpaid work (Outcome A), entrepreneurship (Outcome B), pay (Outcome C) and pension income (Outcome D). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 5.1 and additional sources.

Table 5.1 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying the range of cross-portfolio policy and programme *combinations*** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 5.1 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

Work-life balance policies – e.g. access to high-quality affordable childcare and long-term care, access to well-paid parental leave, systems to ensure pay equity – are a key example of policy combinations supporting gender equality not only across paid and unpaid work, but also leadership, health, educational attainment and skills and more. Many countries have taken steps in these directions, with major policy developments in EU countries spurred by the recommendation on the revised Barcelona targets on early learning and childcare for 2030 (European Union, 2022[183]), the recommendation on affordable high-quality long-term care (European Union, 2022[184]), the EU Work-Life Balance Directive and the EU Pay Transparency Directive (Box 5.14). As countries face demographic headwinds that will likely increase the care burden, policies supporting better access to and affordability of childcare and long-term care will be increasingly crucial (Frey, Hyee and Thomas, 2024[56]). Policies encouraging greater take-up of leave around childbirth by fathers are also particularly important as they help to challenge gender stereotypes and norms.

For these key work-life balance policies to fully contribute to gender equality, they need to be complemented by other interventions. Closing **gender gaps in entrepreneurship**, for example, requires entrepreneurship ecosystems ensuring that women-owned and operated businesses have access to entrepreneurship assistance, networks, mentorship, counselling, knowledge and financial support, incubators and accelerator programmes. Moreover, closing **gender gaps in pension income** requires policy action such as offering credits to offset the negative impacts of care-related leave on pension entitlements or earnings.

Table 5.1 also highlights the important **feedback loops** between policy goals. Occupational segregation, for example, contributes to gender gaps in pay, pensions, leadership and representation (see Chapter 6) and to gender differences in the impacts of the green and digital transition (see Chapter 9). Gender differences in labour market outcomes may also reflect that women are more exposed to gender-based violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace (see Chapter 8) and may receive limited support for gender-specific health challenges, such as menopause (see Chapter 7).

> **Box 5.14. EU Directives on Work-Life Balance and Pay Transparency**
>
> **EU Work-Life Balance Directive**
>
> The EU Work-Life Balance Directive (European Union, 2019[185]) grants fathers (or "second parents") at least ten working days of paternity leave around birth, paid at least at the level of national sick leave benefits. Each parent has an individual right to four months parental leave, of which at least two are non-transferable. During the two non-transferable months of parental leave for each parent, an adequate payment or allowance has to be provided, the level of which is to be defined at the national level. The Directive also establishes that all workers have the right to at least five working days of carers' leave per year, and that all parents with children under at least the age of eight years, and all carers, will have the right to request flexible working arrangements for caring purposes. Member States have been required to comply with this Directive since August 2022, though the shape and form of different countries' approaches has varied considerably (Zumbyte and Szelewa, 2024[186]).
>
> **EU Pay Transparency Directive**
>
> The EU Pay Transparency Directive (European Union, 2023[187]) establishes minimum rules to reinforce the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, the prohibition of direct or indirect gender-based pay discrimination, and pay transparency. Member States must establish these provisions by June 2026.
>
> The Directive establishes that employers will be requested to provide information about the initial pay level or its range in job vacancy notices or before the job interview. Moreover, workers will have the right to request information from their employer on pay levels, disaggregated by gender, for workers doing the same work or work of equal value. Employers of certain sizes will need to report on the gender pay gap by categories of workers doing the same work or work of equal value. If a report shows a gender pay gap greater than 5% that cannot be justified by objective, gender-neutral criteria, the company must conduct a joint pay assessment with worker representatives to address the disparity. This is similar to the concept of an equal pay audit (OECD, 2023[154]). The Directive also mandates better access to justice for victims of pay discrimination.
>
> As of mid-2023, 21 of 38 OECD countries required certain private sector firms to report on their gender pay gap. Most reporting rules are less than a decade old, with 12 countries enacting new rules or amending existing ones between 2020 and 2023 (OECD, 2023[154]). Much progress has taken place in the EU, reflecting the EU's 2014 recommendation on equal pay through transparency, but novel policy practices have also occurred in countries as diverse as Australia, Canada, Chile, Israel, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom and some US states (see Online Annex Figure 5-A23) (OECD, 2023[154]).

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes** outlined in Table 5.1 varies across countries and across time. Continuous *monitoring and evaluation* that incorporates a gender perspective (priority consideration 5) is essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended outcomes; identify strengths and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings.

For example, in the field of paid and unpaid work, extensive research across countries has shown that access to affordable, high-quality ECEC effectively enables women's labour force participation (Bettendorf, Jongen and Muller, 2015[188]; Baker, Gruber and Milligan, 2008[189]; Bauernschuster and Schlotter,

2015[190]; Goux and Maurin, 2010[191]; Martínez A. and Perticará, 2017[192]) and can contribute to gender equality in work and care (Müller, Neumann and Wrohlich, 2018[193]). Additionally, ECEC contributes to improved cognitive and non-cognitive development among children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds (OECD, 2021[122]). Numerous studies have also analysed the impact of paid family leave – including maternity, parental and paternity leave – on parents and children. Findings indicate that paid family leave contributes to better maternal and child health (Van Niel et al., 2020[194]), as well as stronger maternal labour force attachment and increased maternal labour supply (up to a point) (Canaan et al., 2022[195]). Paternity leave can additionally contribute to a higher involvement of fathers in unpaid work within their family (Tamm, 2019[196]; Knoester, Petts and Pragg, 2019[197]) and fathers who take leave are more likely to be involved in unpaid responsibilities well beyond the actual period of leave (Tamm, 2019[196]; Huerta et al., 2014[198]; OECD, 2019[27]). This may have downstream impacts far into the future as the new generations will be exposed to a more gender equal distribution of paid and unpaid work in the household (Fontenay and González, 2024[199]). However, the design of these policies is crucial, as poorly structured leave can negatively affect women's labour supply, maternal human capital development and career progression (Canaan et al., 2022[195]). Furthermore, Corekcioglu, Francesconi and Kunze (2024[200]) find no link between leave policies and women's representation in leadership nor measurable impacts on pay gaps.

Looking at interactions family policies, support systems providing a "continuum of supports" – integrating parental leave, childcare, pre-school, school, and after-school care – are shown as most effective at reconciling work and family life, boosting birth rates, and enhancing employment predictability (OECD, 2007[201]). However, such comprehensive systems entail high public expenditure and tax levels, making them challenging to implement universally. Other reviews of policy combinations in EU countries show the relevance of the universal caregiver model, which comprises moderate parental leaves, the presence of fathers' incentives through paid leave, and high levels of perceived affordability and availability of childcare (Lauri, Põder and Ciccia, 2020[202]).

The design of income taxes also affects financial incentives to engage in paid work. While the progressivity of personal income taxes contributes to reduce post-tax income gaps between women and men, as well as between full- and part-time workers, the tax system can also create disincentives for second earners (often women) to (re-)engage in paid work, or to shift from part- to full-time work (Thomas and O'Reilly, 2016[203]; OECD, 2023[21]). Such effects may derive from joint taxation, which results in second earners paying higher marginal tax rates on their income, or from the removal of family-based allowances or tax credits when the second earner enters the labour force. Yet, routine evaluation of gender outcomes in tax policy processes remains uncommon (OECD, 2022[75]). Evaluation practice is also not systematic when it comes to gender pay gap reporting regimes, as only a few national systems have been evaluated quantitatively, with heterogenous conclusions on effectiveness (OECD, 2023[154]).

5.2.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 5.1. Existing policy options to tackle gender gaps in paid and unpaid work (Outcome A), entrepreneurship (Outcome B), pay (Outcome C) and pension income (Outcome D)

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
— **Challenge gender stereotypes and norms**											
A, B, C, D	Implement initiatives for girls and boys and women and men to pursue education and careers in non-traditional and high-demand sectors to **combat horizontal segregation** (see Chapter 4).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
A, B C, D	Launch **awareness campaigns** on issues relating to **gender equality in the labour market**, such as equal sharing of unpaid care work, gendered use of flexible working arrangements, gender wage gaps and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs.	X	X							X	Many countries
— **Provide opportunities for learning and skills development**											
A, B C, D	Provide **adult** and **lifelong learning** opportunities, including **targeted training programmes** in entrepreneurship and in high-demand sectors, especially for women returning to the workforce after career breaks or for mothers who have not yet acquired a profession (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 9).	X	X			X	X			X	AUS, CHL, CRI, HUN, JPN, KOR, MEX, MLT, NOR, ROU
B, D	Invest in programmes and digital tools to improve **financial literacy**, including in topics such as investment strategies, international trade and finance and retirement planning.	X	X							X	AUS, AUT, DEU, ITA, SWE, TUR
B	Integrate **entrepreneurship education** into school curricula and higher education courses, ensuring that programmes tackle gender norms and stereotypes and equally encourage girls and boys to pursue entrepreneurial paths.	X	X							X	MEX
— **Support gender equality with labour laws**											
A, C, D	Implement **legislation** guaranteeing equal treatment of women and men workers (e.g. ratification of ILO Convention 156) and protecting women from gender-based discrimination in employment and entrepreneurship.		X							X	Many countries
A, C, D	Introduce legislation to ensure **equal pay** for work of equal value and/or implement **pay transparency** mechanisms to illuminate pay gaps and support corrective actions.		X							X	Many countries
A, C, D	Increase **minimum wages** to boost earnings of women, who are overrepresented in low-paid occupations and industries.		X							X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
		Likely Ministries Involved									
C, D	Prohibit employers from asking job applicants about **salary history during** wage setting.		X							X	AUT, CAN
C, D	Develop and encourage the use of gender-neutral **job classification systems and salary scales** – and supporting software – to enable employers to undertake pay analyses and implement pay transparency and pay equity legislation.		X							X	BEL, CAN, CHE, CRI, CYP, DEU, ESP, FIN, FRA, ISL, ISR, MLT, POL, PRT, SVK
	Foster better work-life balance										
A, C, D	Ensure all workers have a **right to disconnect** and/or a **right to request** flexible working opportunities (e.g. part-time, telework) and return to full-time work, promoting and incentivising equal take-up among women and men.		X							X	BEL, CAN, CYP, DEU, ESP, FRA, GRC, HRV, ITA, KOR, LUX, PRT, SVK
A, B, C, D	Provide **well-paid parental and paternity leave**, including to entrepreneurs, and support greater take-up by fathers.		X							X	Many countries
A, B, C, D	Support **access to** care and **non-care household services** (e.g. cleaning, laundry, gardening and cooking) by, for example, reducing costs and formalising services.		X		X					X	AUT, BEL, CAN, DEU, ESP, FIN, FRA, ITA, LUX, NLD, SWE
A, C, D	Ensure access to **(well-paid) short-term leave for caregiving** (e.g. sick child), promoting equal take-up by both parents.		X							X	AUS, CHE, HUN
A, C, D	Provide **leave options for carers** of family members with disability or long-term illnesses that enable caregivers to return to paid work, promoting equal take-up by women and men.		X							X	AUS, CAN, CHE, FRA, HUN, ITA, JPN, LTU, LVA, MEX, NOR, PRT, USA
	Build strong and comprehensive care infrastructure										
A, B, C, D	Provide high-quality flexible, accessible and affordable **childcare**, including out-of-school care, and **long-term and elderly care**, including independent living solutions.	X	X	X						X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
							Likely Ministries Involved				
A, C, D	Implement **targeted pay raises** (e.g. via sector-specific minimum wages) particularly in low-pay, women-dominated industries and occupations, such as health and social care.		X	X						X	AUS, HUN
Build gender-sensitive tax-benefit systems											
A, B C, D	Carefully design and review **tax systems**, **tax-based supports and cash benefits** to ensure an appropriate balance between adequate income support and minimal work disincentives (especially for second earners).		X		X					X	CAN, CYP, FRA, JPN, MLT
Ensure gender-equitable pensions and savings behaviours											
D	Implement tax-based incentives (e.g. credits), awareness campaigns and/or behavioural insights (e.g. auto-enrolment) to **increase private pension contributions**, ensuring equal take-up among women and men.		X		X					X	CAN, CZE
D	Provide **basic or minimum pensions** to older people with low contributory pensions, striking a balance between adequacy and work incentives, including recognising **unpaid caregiving**.		X		X					X	COL, ESP, MEX
D	Provide suitable and time-limited **care credits** to offset the negative impacts of care-related leave on pension entitlements or earnings.		X		X					X	Many countries
D	Design **spousal pension rights** carefully (e.g. split pension benefits upon divorce, survivor's benefits, etc.) to ensure that partners who do more unpaid work (and less paid work) are fairly compensated in retirement without creating significant work disincentives.		X		X					X	CAN
Design inclusive social protection systems											
A, C, D	Ensure **equal worker rights** for non-standard workers, including self-employed, part-time and temporary workers.		X							X	CAN, CZE, DNK, ESP, FRA, JPN, NOR
C, D	Implement mandatory or **"opt-out" social security contributions** for non-standard workers.		X		X					X	DEU, ITA
Encourage gender equality within firms											
A, C, D	Encourage companies to offer **flexible working arrangements** (e.g. part-time, flexible hours, **teleworking** and job sharing), ensuring that access to and use of such arrangements does not reinforce gender norms and stereotypes.		X							X	CHE, CRI, GRC, HRV, HUN, ITA, JPN, KOR, LTU, NZL, PRT, SLV

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A, C, D	Encourage employers to limit long working hours and implement and enforce **caps on working time**.		X							X	AUS, KOR
A, C, D	Support employers as they **transpose new legislations and regulations** on gender equality and as they embed gender equality into their workplace policies and practices.		X							X	CHE, CYP, CZE, ESP, FRA, HUN, JPN, LUX, MLT, POL
A, C, D	Support **women's career advancement** to leadership positions through mentorship, training and career development programmes, as well as through quotas, voluntary targets and complementary measures (see Chapter 6).		X							X	Many countries
A, C, D	Create **sectoral action plans** for the improvement of gender equality, including linking **sector-specific government support** (e.g. grants, financing, subsidies) to workplace policies or standards that promote gender equality, especially in industries not traditionally associated with women and where gender gaps are the largest.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	AUS, GBR, HRV
C, D	Encourage, support or mandate the discussion of gender equality, including equal pay, during **collective bargaining**.		X							X	AUT, BEL, BGR, CAN, CHL, CRI, DEU, ESP, FRA, ISL, POL, SWE
Build supportive environments for women entrepreneurs											
B	Strengthen **entrepreneurship ecosystems,** ensuring that women have access to entrepreneurship assistance, networks, mentorship, counselling, knowledge and financial supports and incubators and accelerator programmes, including in green and digital sectors.		X			X	X			X	Many countries
B	Offer **flexible business support services**, such as on-demand consultancy, virtual coaching, and remote networking.		X							X	MEX
B	Increase **women entrepreneurs' access to finance**, including through (targeted) soft loans, loan guarantees, dedicated risk capital initiatives, grants, equity investment and/or digital platforms (e.g. fintech, crowdfunding), with governments acting as sponsors, managers, facilitators or funders.		X							X	AUT, CAN, CYP, DEU, ESP, FRA, GBR, HRV, HUN, IRL, ISL, ITA, KOR, TUR

Likely Ministries Involved									

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
B	Support networks of **venture capitalists and business angels** at the subnational, national and international levels focused on investing in women-owned business.		X							X	BEL, ESP, FRA, GBR, ITA, PRT
Ensure accountability and good governance											
A, C, D	Introduce simple processes for reporting (perceived) **discrimination in pay, hiring and advancement** (e.g. embedded within pay transparency systems).		X							X	CZE, FRA
A, C, D	Authorise and train **labour inspectors** to identify and investigate gender inequality at work, including gender pay gaps, discrimination and sexual harassment.		X							X	BEL, CZE, ESP, FRA, GRC, KOR, ROU, TUR
A, B, C, D	Introduce **labels, certifications or awards** for companies introducing policies that support gender equality and work-life balance in the workplace (e.g. pay, childcare, family-friendly workplace policies, parental leave, leadership).		X							X	AUT, BGR, CAN, CHL, COL, CRI, CYP, DEU, EST, FRA, GRC, ISL, LTU, MEX, PRT
B	Design and implement **procurement systems** that advance gender equality (e.g. equal pay).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CHE, JPN, MLT
A, B, C, D	Review and design **social protection systems, including pension systems,** to ensure equal treatment of women and men by using tools from gender mainstreaming (e.g. gender impact assessments).		X		X					X	ESP, JPN, MEX, MLT, SVN
Support women's health											
A, C, D	Provide **dedicated leave and support for women** to manage menstrual and/or menopausal symptoms, ensuring that such leave and support does not create grounds for discrimination in promotion and retention decisions.		X	X						X	ESP
A, C, D	Provide access to **menstrual products** in the workplace or reduce their cost (e.g. by reducing the VAT).		X	X	X					X	CAN, CYP, FRA, MLT
A, C, D	Provide women who are lactating with adequate paid breaks and safe **spaces** to nurse or express milk.		X	X						X	CAN
D	Support **healthy ageing** to enhance labour force attachment for women and men (see Chapter 7).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Protect women and foster safety											
A, B, C, D	**Combat workplace harassment and violence** through prevention, early intervention, response and recovery programmes, ensuring adequate detection and reporting of instances of harassment and violence against women in the workplace, including both for employees and entrepreneurs and including technology-facilitated violence (see Chapter 8).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation											
A, B C, D	Continue to close **gender data, research and measurement gaps**. Some examples include: • pay and earnings, income, wealth; • the distribution of work and resources within the household; • the evolution of time use over the life course and over time; • the pink "tax" and gendered access to goods and services; and • the gender distribution of "fringe benefits," including employer-paid health insurance, family leave "top ups," additional sick days, vacation days, etc.					X			X	X	Many countries
A, B C, D	**Conduct time use surveys** frequently to capture the extent and evolution of unpaid work to inform policy related to quality of life, prosperity and gender equality.								X	X	COL, CRI, HUN, ISL, MEX
A, B C, D	**Mainstream gender into traditional surveys** and/or integrate the care economy into national accounts to better capture gender equality issues (e.g. work-life balance and time use).					X			X	X	MEX

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, OECD (2022[181]; 2022[204]), Carcillo, Hijzen and Thewissen (2023[205]), Kassam (2024[206]), Deutsche Rentenversicherung (n.d.[207]), OECD (2021[54]) and European Union (2015[208]; 2018[209]; 2019[210]; 2022[211]).

5.2.2. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to advance gender equality in paid and unpaid work. Case studies are provided below, alongside examples of building intersectionality considerations into policy combinations.

Reducing gender gaps in paid and unpaid work

- **Colombia** has launched initiatives to recognise and address the unpaid care work traditionally shouldered by women. The National Development Plan 2022-26 prioritises care as vital to social and economic sustainability, leading to the creation of the National Care System. This system aims to recognise, reduce, and redistribute paid and unpaid care work through a shared responsibility model involving the state, private sector, civil society, families, communities and both women and men. This builds on earlier efforts, such as Law 1 413 of 2010, which integrated the care economy into national accounts, and the creation of intersectoral commissions to co-ordinate care-related actions. This care-focused approach is also central to Colombia's Strategy for Women's Economic Empowerment in Disadvantaged Areas, which combines measures supporting income generation and economic autonomy. These efforts involve multiple ministries (including Education, Labour, Commerce, Industry and Tourism, and Culture) and women's organisations. Additionally, the Pension Bond for Community Mothers provides financial recognition to women who have spent over a decade in unpaid caregiving roles within their communities. It offers a subsistence subsidy of 80-95% of the minimum wage to those who may not meet traditional pension eligibility requirements, acknowledging their economic contributions and addressing pension access inequalities.

- **Korea** is committed to enhancing gender equality in the workplace as part of its broader national agenda, reflected in the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policy (2023-27). One key initiative is the establishment of Women's Re-employment Centres to support women re-entering the workforce after career breaks. These centres offer career counselling, job matching and vocational training, helping women regain economic independence and reduce the gender employment gap. Korea has also introduced family-friendly policies such as expanded parental leave and flexible working arrangements. Combined with pay transparency measures and interventions aimed at increasing women's representation in leadership, these policies are expected to create the basic conditions and incentives for women to be able to engage more equally and fully in paid work.

- **Cyprus'** Gender Equality Strategy combines policies supporting work-life balance and equal pay to reduce gender gaps in employment. The Ministry of Social Welfare, for example, has supported the creation and upgrading of childcare centres and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth has introduced compulsory pre-primary education from age four. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance has introduced a comprehensive policy on work-life balance, including paid parental leave, carer's leave, and the right to request flexible work for parents and carers. This has been enhanced by extending parental leave benefits to self-employed parents and increasing maternity leave from 18 to 22 weeks for the first child. Indeed, as of 30 December 2025, the age limit for each child for which parents are entitled to take parental leave is increased from 8 years of age to 15 years of age, with immediate effect. And effective March 2025, the duration of the 8 weeks of parental leave also increases gradually, as follows: 10 weeks for the second; 12 weeks for the third; and 14 weeks for the fourth and each subsequent child. The age limit for children with disabilities is increased from 18 to 21 years. At the same time, the "National Certification Body for the Implementation of Good Practices on Gender Equality at the Workplace," established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, promotes gender equality by recognising and certifying workplaces committed to equitable pay and practices. Analyses of the gender pay gap (by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance) and job evaluations (by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality) aim to further address structural pay inequalities.

Box 5.15. Spotlights on intersectionality: Migrant women

Several governments have introduced tailored interventions to address the specific labour market disadvantages faced by migrant women. Examples include:

- Targeted employment programmes (e.g. career guidance, counselling, networking, language training, interview practice and job application supports) for migrant women (e.g. **Canada** (IRCC, 2019[212]), **Germany** (European Union, 2016[213]) and **Sweden** (European Union, 2017[214])).

- Dedicated action plans supporting migrant women's labour force participation (e.g. **Finland**).

- Affordable childcare services for users of integration centres and those attending employment programmes (OECD, 2017[215]).

- Culturally-sensitive childcare for migrant parents who want to ensure their children are connected to their culture and language in their early years (Valdivia and Adsera, 2023[216]).

- Interventions to formalise domestic work, where low-skilled migrant women are often overrepresented (e.g. **Costa Rica, France, Korea, Mexico** and **Spain**) (OECD, 2021[54]).

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Box 5.16. Time use surveys to measure gender gaps in paid and unpaid work

Time use surveys are invaluable tools for understanding how individuals allocate their time across various activities. Using time diaries, information on daily activities is re-coded into a set of descriptive categories, so that a 24-hour period can be split into a sequence of time spent on main activities (OECD, 2016[217]). These surveys can reveal disparities in how women and men spend their time, especially regarding unpaid work, caregiving, and leisure. However, the irregularity and infrequency of these surveys pose a challenge, as consistent data collection is essential for tracking progress and adapting policies effectively.

Recent developments illustrate the significance of these surveys in informing gender equality policies.

- **Hungary** conducted its last time use survey in 2009-10 to serve multiple purposes, such as supporting family policy, informing working hour regulations, and assisting in the development of national accounts related to household production. A new survey is planned for 2024-25.

- **Iceland** recently conducted its first time use survey, aiming to capture the extent of unpaid domestic and care work.

- Eurostat has run two rounds of surveys for the **harmonised European time use surveys (HETUS)**. The first round was conducted between 1998 and 2006 in 15 European countries, while the second round was conducted between 2008 and 2015 in 18 European countries. A third round is in progress, with the data collection phase concluding in 2026. About 20 European countries plan to conduct a time use survey during this third round (Eurostat, n.d.[218]; n.d.[219]).

- **Mexico** obtains insights through its regular National Survey on Time Use and the National Survey for the Care System. Although Mexico's National Survey on Time Use uses a different methodological approach (which may affect international comparability), the survey was declared "Information of National Interest" in 2022, meaning that is must be carried out

periodically and be used by government for public policies (Government of Mexico, 2022[220]). This is an important step in ensuring that time use considerations – including around both paid and unpaid work – are reflected in government action.

To help enhance the visibility of the importance of time use surveys and facilitate cross-countries comparisons, the OECD Time Use Database provides information on time use patterns for women and men across 30 OECD countries according to five main categories: unpaid work; paid work or study; personal care; leisure; and other time use.

Note: Differences in survey features, the number of diary days sampled, and the categorisation of activities may affect the cross-country comparability of results in the OECD Time Use Database.
Source: OECD Secretariat based on the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and OECD Time Use Database (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/time-use-database.html).

Ensuring gender equality in entrepreneurship

- **Germany**'s Action Plan "More women entrepreneurs for our SMEs" packages measures from 41 different players – federal ministries, associations, networks and academic institutions – to highlight the achievements of women in SMEs, skilled crafts and startups; motivate more women to go into business; establish a joint platform for measures supporting women entrepreneurs in various fields; and enhance the visibility and impact of individual measures. Many of the entrepreneurship support measures are built to consider the personal situations of women (e.g. the higher burden of care provision or the smaller amounts of finance for startup teams which include women). This is complemented by an interministerial initiative focusing specifically on the interests of self-employed women and the compatibility of self-employment and family life – newly launched by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. The Action Plan also targets men (e.g. with grants for childcare services).
- **Mexico**'s support for female entrepreneurship is exemplified by the "Territorial Strategy for the Reactivation of Autonomy and Economic Empowerment," which establishes "economic empowerment nodes" in Women's Development Centres. These nodes offer workshops, counselling, and connections to public and private financing for women entrepreneurs. Specialised staff offer guidance on entrepreneurship, co-operativism, accounting and digital communication, helping women to strengthen their economic autonomy.

Box 5.17. Spotlights on intersectionality: Rural women entrepreneurs

Women in rural areas may face additional barriers to entrepreneurship, such as limited access to capital and infrastructure, difficulty penetrating men-dominated industries, smaller and less extensive networks, or reduced access to entrepreneurship support programmes (Saavedra, 2024[221]; Yamamura, Lassalle and Shaw, 2022[222]). Several countries have implemented specific initiatives to support rural women, including rural women entrepreneurs.

- **Poland** introduced a Strategy for Sustainable Development of Rural Areas, Agriculture and Fisheries 2030, led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, to support flexible forms of work, counteract discrimination and incentivise longer working lives.
- Through the Icelandic Regional Development Institute, **Iceland** provides targeted loans for the operation of businesses where women own at least 75% of the shares in rural communities.

- In **Croatia**, several strategies relating to agriculture have a focus on women in rural areas, including a specific programme that provides employment opportunities to long-term unemployed women in rural areas who are providing care to the elderly and people with disability (OECD, 2022[181]).

- Based on a survey of rural women's needs, various ministries in **Cyprus** have committed to design and develop a digital skills training programme for rural women.

- **Spain** combines awareness raising, counselling, capacity building, skills and competencies training, mentoring and grants to promote women's entrepreneurship in the green economy and in rural areas, with a special focus on the intersection between the two.

- In **Germany**, a study on rural women aims to make the achievements of women in agriculture more visible, while also raising awareness of gender-equitable partnership and generational constellations and inheritance patterns; empowering women through the expansion of educational and advisory services; improving the legal and social security of women on farms; providing information on (women-specific) health risks, preventive healthcare and occupational health and safety; and improving public infrastructure and the compatibility of work and family in rural areas.

- In **France**, in 2023, 83 of the Centers for Information about Women's Rights (CIDFF) (out of a total of 98) had put in place a special service for women's integration into the labor market. This service is specifically directed at women in rural or isolated areas and women in precarious or vulnerable situations.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

Eliminating gender pay gaps

- One of the main objectives of **Bulgaria**'s gender equality strategy is to reduce gender gaps in pay and income. This is expected to be achieved via a combination of actions: raising public and employer awareness of the gender pay gap and the link between pay, income and social security rights, including pensions; raising awareness of educational and professional opportunities for training and qualification; increasing the adequacy of pensions; and strengthening the role and importance of collective agreements**.**

- **Canada** has introduced several measures to reduce gender gaps in pay, including pay transparency and pay equity legislation for federally regulated employers (about 6% of all employees in Canada). These laws require that employers report wage gap information publicly and establish pay equity plans to ensure that women and men receive equal pay for work of equal value. Alongside measures targeting firms, Canada supports households through significant investments in family policies, including the creation of a national childcare system that aims to reduce childcare fees to CAD 10-a-day by 2026 and improve access by growing the number of childcare spaces. To support lower-income single-parent families, among which women are overrepresented, the Department of Finance Canada, Canada Revenue Agency and Employment and Social Development Canada also jointly introduced the Canada Child Benefit, which has contributed to lifting more than 653 000 children out of poverty between 2015 and 2021.

- To reduce gender inequality in earnings and income, **France** combines policies targeting both firms and households, with actions undertaken by the Ministries of Labour, Equality, Economy, Health, Solidarities, and Public Service. At the core of this policy combination is the Professional Equality Index, requiring companies with more than 50 employees to assess the gender pay gap, distribution of pay raises, promotions, and the representation of women among top earners. Low-scoring companies must implement corrective measures within three years or face financial penalties. Managed by the Ministry of Labour, the Index has increased transparency and

accountability, with compliance rates rising from 54% in 2020 to 77% in 2024. In 2023, the Ministry of Transformation and Public Service extended the Index to public hospital services, ensuring uniform gender equality standards across sectors. Inter-ministerial efforts, led by the Directorate General for Labour, are underway to review and enhance the Index. Such measures are combined with the individualisation of income tax rates, to be implemented in 2025 by the Ministry of Economy, to promote the economic independence of women and reduce income disparities within households. This policy shift addresses a well-known source of implicit gender bias in tax systems, where joint taxation of household income typically results in higher marginal tax rates for second earners, usually women, disincentivising their labour force participation (OECD, 2023[21]). France also introduced the Rixain law in 2021, which aims to ensure a more equitable representation of women in corporate management bodies by introducing quotas for senior executives and management bodies in large companies by 2030. In addition, schemes such as the Fonds de garantie à l'initiative des femmes (FGIF) facilitate women entrepreneurs' access to bank financing. In 2021, France signed a 2021-23 framework agreement in favour of women's entrepreneurship with the public investment bank Bpifrance, broken down into regional action plans. Another framework agreement was signed in 2021, extending to 2024, between the ministries in charge of Equality and Labour and the public employment service (France Travail) for the integration of women.

Closing gender gaps in pension income

- With initiatives from the Human Rights Directorate and the Ministry for Finance, **Malta** is introducing policies to ensure equal treatment of women and men. The government is proposing interventions including tax incentives which strengthen women's participation in the labour market, incentives which entice informal workers to transition to the formal sector, and incentives for women to enter the labour market and become financially independent. Moreover, inland revenue policies, social security policies and gender gaps in pensions are being reviewed and revised to ensure equal treatment between women and men.

- **Spain**'s Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men 2022-25 aims to ensure equal access to resources, combat the overrepresentation of women among those in poverty and precariousness, and foster a life-centred, ecologically and socially sustainable economy focused on care throughout the life course. It addresses gender gaps in earnings across policy areas – including employment (building a quality labour market for women), care and time (promoting the recognition of the right to care and a socially just reorganisation of care and time), resources (fighting against the overrepresentation of women among those in of poverty and precariousness) and ecological and social sustainability (moving towards sustainable living environments). This plan builds on evaluative evidence of the previous gender equality plan, which identified effective actions to close earning gaps in older age – such as a maternity supplement in contributory pensions. Additionally, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration has advanced efforts to close the gender pension gap. Royal Decree-law 2/2023 equalises part-time jobs (around 75% held by women) with full-time jobs for future social security pensions and allows for temporary positive action for the calculation of benefits in favour of women. Royal Decree-law 3/2021 introduced a supplement in contributory pensions to reduce the gender gap, acknowledging women's historical disadvantage in the labour market due to childcare responsibilities. This measure will continue as long as the gender gap in retirement pensions exceeds 5%. Men who can demonstrate reduced contributions due to caregiving responsibilities following the birth or adoption of a child are also eligible for this supplement (Ministerio de Igualdad y Equidad, 2024[223]).

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Annex 5.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 5.A.1. List of Chapter 5 Online Annex Figures

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Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 5 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink ⊞⊐ https://stat.link/kvf72n

Notes

[1] Individual estimates of pension income may sometimes assume equal pooling and sharing of resources amongst all family members. This assumption may not be true in all households, which may affect the accuracy of estimates of poverty rates.

6 Women still lag behind men in reaching leadership roles

This chapter provides an overview of key gender gaps in leadership and representation in the public and private sector and in politics, as well as the social, economic and institutional factors standing in the way of equality. The chapter then explores policy options to improve gender representation in management and senior leadership in the private sector and reduce gender gaps in political representation.

Key findings

- Gender gaps in aspirations to leadership emerge early through socialisation processes, with boys far more likely than girls to want to work in management or elected political positions. These early gaps foreshadow women's underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making positions in adulthood, with evidence of the leaky pipeline across all areas of private sector and public leadership.

- Women are underrepresented among board members, CEOs and presidents in the private sector; among legislators at all levels of government; among members of cabinet and ministers; and among country leaders (e.g. presidents, prime ministers or chancellors).

- Several factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership, including gendered perceptions of skills and abilities, motherhood penalties, gender differences in actual and expected behaviours, and experiences of harassment and discrimination. Other key factors play a role in specific areas. In business, a lack of transparency in selection criteria, gendered differences in work assignments and experiences, and a lack of women role models and mentors matter.

- In politics, gendered party recruitment, differences in electoral systems, gender gaps in campaign financing, violence and harassment of women public figures and differences in media coverage drive down women's participation. Voter bias and (mis)perceptions about the electability of women also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics. For example, nearly one-quarter of women and men in EU and OECD countries with available data believe that men make better political leaders than women and nearly one-fifth believe that women do not have the necessary qualities and skills to fill positions of responsibility in politics. Even though not a majority, this may contribute to negative perceptions about women's electoral chances and lead to strategic voting against women.

- To tackle underrepresentation of women in leadership, governments have implemented disclosure requirements, quotas and targets supporting gender balance on boards and in politics. Simultaneous interventions to change social and policy environments in business have included promoting the transparency and objectivity of hiring and promotion procedures; engaging with social partners, civil society and educational institutions to raise awareness about gender equality in leadership; and introducing targeted sector-specific initiatives to tackle gender inequality, especially in men-dominated industries and occupations. In politics, governments implement rules around sitting times, offer on-site childcare for legislators, and work toward eliminating the violence and harassment experienced by women politicians.

Ensuring that women and men are well represented at all levels of decision-making in all areas, including in politics and business, is important for a just and egalitarian society. Diverse perspectives in leadership can foster fairer and more representative decision-making.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 6.1 provides an overview of key gender gaps in leadership outcomes in the public and private sector, as well as the social, economic and institutional culprits standing in the way of equality. Section 6.2 explores policy options and combinations to improve gender representation in management and senior leadership positions in business and reduce gender gaps in political representation.

6.1. Background: Gender gaps in key outcomes in leadership and representation

Taking a life course approach, this section first looks at childhood and youth and gender gaps in leadership aspirations and expectations. It then turns to adulthood to explore the persistent underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership in management in the public and private sector, as well as in politics.

6.1.1. Childhood and youth: Girls are less likely to aspire to and expect to work in leadership positions than boys

Gender differences in career aspirations and expectations develop early, with girls and boys demonstrating significant differences in anticipated future occupations by age 15 (see Chapter 4) (OECD, 2023[1]). These gender differences extend to certain leadership positions, with boys accounting for about two-thirds of 15-year-old students stating that they expect to be working as managers and managing directors and chief executives by age 30 years (Figure 6.1). Some leadership positions, however, are more gender balanced, with girls representing nearly half of all students aged 15 years stating they expect to be legislators and senior officials.

Figure 6.1. Teen boys are more likely than teen girls to expect to work in certain leadership positions

Distribution of 15-year-old students expecting to work in leadership positions by gender, EU and OECD averages, 2022
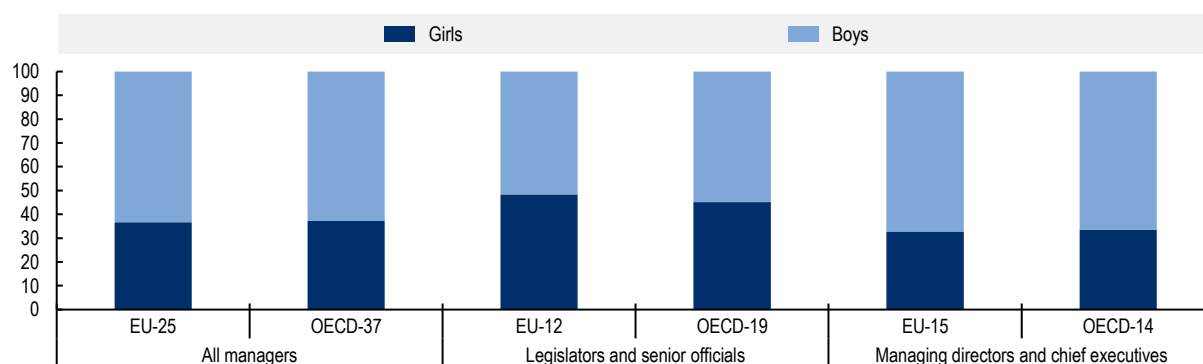
Note: EU and OECD averages are unweighted. Data for Cyprus and Luxembourg are not available. Children are asked what kind of job they expect to have when they are about 30 years old. Children's responses are subsequently coded according to ISCO-08. All managers is ISCO code 1 (Managers). "Legislators and senior officials" is ISCO code 111. "Managing directors and chief executives" is ISCO code 112. As much as possible, ISCO codes for each observation are converted into three-digit ISCO codes, but some observations have only one- or two-digit ISCO codes, preventing further specification. Country-gender-occupation cell sizes of less than five are dropped. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using publicly available microdata from the 2022 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/pisa-2022-database.html#data).

Key factors behind gender differences in career aspirations and expectations

One of the main reasons for differences in boys' and girls' aspirations to and expectations of leadership positions is the gendered socialisation process, which teaches children – explicitly or implicitly – about expected gender norms and behaviours from the moment they are born. Media (Box 6.1), parents, teachers and peers all contribute to this socialisation process.

Parents, for example, are more likely to talk to boys than to girls about politics, and talking about politics is an important determinant of young people's interest in politics and later political ambition (Bos et al.,

2021[2]; Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006[3]). Encouragement from parents, friends, teachers, grandparents and coaches also matters, with a smaller share of young women than young men reporting that they have been urged to run for elected office later in life (Lawless and Fox, 2013[4]). Through play, peers also reinforce and uphold gender norms and stereotypes. Typical play by boys, for instance, is riskier and more competitive, while typical play for girls is more nurturing and domestic (Kung, 2021[5]). Differential reactions from teachers and parents to risks in childhood play entrench these patterns and lead to "less self-confidence and self-esteem for women in work contexts" (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014[6]). Taken together, these factors can create an environment in which girls and young women do not see themselves as leaders.

Box 6.1. Girls and women are stereotypically represented, objectified and sexualised in the media

In media and in advertising, women are often stereotypically represented, objectified, and sexualised. Exposure to such representations of women may enhance stereotypical beliefs, foster sexist behaviour, incite harassment and violence in men, and stifle women's career ambitions. It may also lead to the internalisation of (unattainable) beauty ideals and sexist attitudes, as well as creating an acceptance for and tolerance of abuse and body shaming (Santoniccolo et al., 2023[7]). Even though such representations persist, in a recent EU survey, over 50% of respondents believe that women and men are treated the same way by media and advertising (Eurobarometer, 2024[8]).

Stereotypical and sexualised representations of women in the media and in advertising may partly reflect that women are underrepresented as decision-makers. Of 1 492 content creators across the top 100 films of 2022, women represented only 24% of directors, writers and producers (Smith, Pieper and Wheeler, 2023[9]). In other media, such as public broadcasting organisations, women are also underrepresented as decision-makers, but substantial progress has been made in recent years. In EU-27 countries, for example, women held 38% of executive positions and 27% of CEO positions in public broadcaster organisations in 2024. This is up from 30% and 13%, respectively, in 2014 (EIGE, 2024[10]).

6.1.2. Adulthood: Women face considerable barriers to leadership

Early differences between boys' and girls' aspirations to and expectations of leadership foreshadow significant gender gaps in leadership in adulthood, where gender norms and stereotypes, business practices, structural barriers and bias and discrimination combine to result in women's underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making positions, especially at the highest levels.

Women are underrepresented in private and public sector leadership

On average, across EU and OECD countries, only about one-third of managers in the private sector are women, but there is considerable variation across countries (Figure 6.2). In Japan, for example, only 13% of private sector managers are women, compared to 44% in Colombia.

Figure 6.2. Only about one-third of managers are women in EU and OECD countries

Share (%) of managers who are women, private sector, 2023 or latest
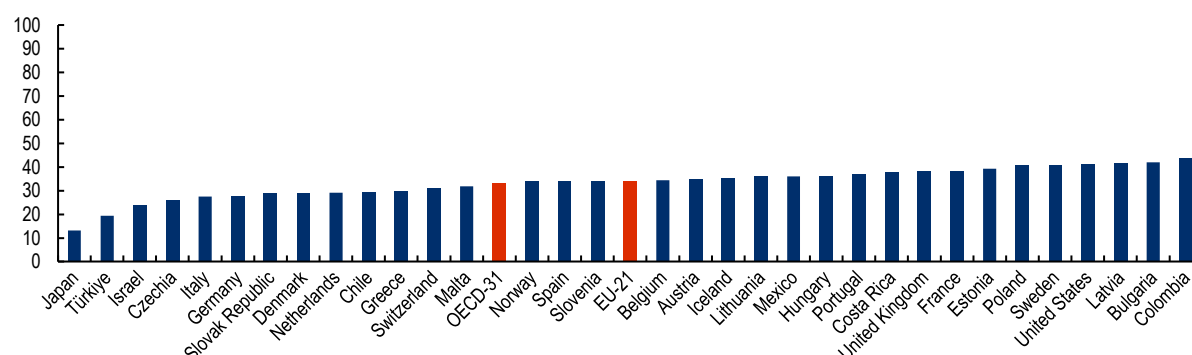
Note: EU-21 and OECD-31 averages are unweighted. For all EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland less the Slovak Republic, private sector is calculated as all NACE activities less "Public administration and defence; compulsory social security" (code O). Data on managers are calculated as ISCO-08 code 1. For Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Slovak Republic and Türkiye, data refer to the private sector, as defined by the ILO, and to ISCO-08 code 1. Data for the United States are from 2024. Data for Denmark, Estonia and Japan are from 2022. Data for Israel are from 2021. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.

Source: For Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Türkiye, the United Kingdom and the United States, ILOSTAT Data Explorer "Employment by sex, occupation and public/private sector (thousands)" (https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/). For all EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland less the Slovak Republic, Eurostat "Employment by sex, age, occupation and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) (1 000)" (https://doi.org/10.2908/LFSA_EISN2).

There is also wide variation across industries. In the EU-27, only 14% of managers in construction and 24% of managers in manufacturing are women. This compares to 66% in human health and social work activities and 63% in education (see Online Annex Figure 6-A1) (Eurostat, 2024[11]), and largely mirrors patterns observed across occupations (see Chapter 5).

In publicly-listed companies and top levels of management, evidence of the leaky pipeline – the slowly decreasing share of women as one climbs the career ladder – and the glass ceiling – an invisible barrier to women's advancement – is even starker (OECD, 2023[12]; 2023[1]). Among EU-27 countries, for example, women represent only 30% of board members of the largest publicly-listed companies and only 8% of CEOs (Figure 6.3).

In addition, the representation of women is low among decision-makers in social partner organisations – on the side of both trade unions and businesses, and at both the national and European Union level. In 2024, for example, women accounted for only 34% of the highest decision-makers of national-level social partner organisations representing workers in Europe and only 28% of their presidents or chairs (EIGE, 2024[13]; 2024[14]). In national social partner organisations representing employers, women accounted for only 20% of the total number of members of their highest decision-making bodies and only 8% of their presidents or chairs (EIGE, 2024[15]; 2024[16]).

Figure 6.3. Women are underrepresented among board members and CEOs

Share (%) of board seats and CEO roles in the largest publicly-listed companies held by women, 2024 or latest
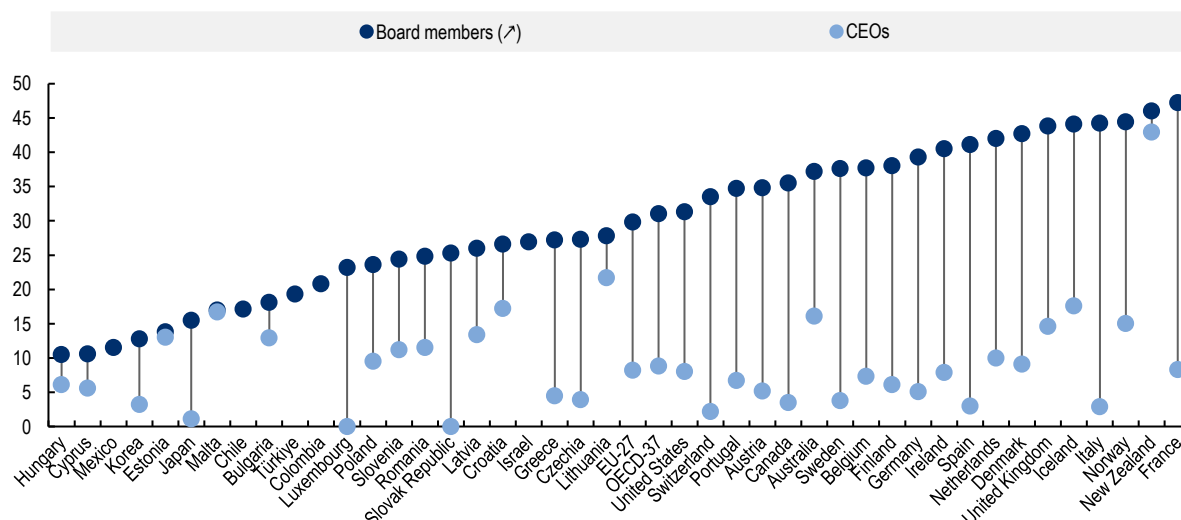
Note: EU-27 and OECD-37 averages are unweighted. ↗ indicates that the data is sorted according to this series in ascending order. Data for EU countries plus Iceland, Norway and the United Kingdom are an average of data collection carried out twice in 2024 by EIGE. See EIGE (2024[17]) for more details. Data for EU countries plus Norway, Iceland, the United Kingdom refer to the top 50 companies of the primary blue-chip index, an index maintained by the stock exchange that covers the largest companies by market capitalisation or by market trades. Companies must be registered in the country to be counted in that country. Data for all other countries refers to the MSCI ACWI Index. See Matanda, Wang and Emelianova (2023[18]) and Csonka and Milhomem (2024[19]). Data refer to 2022 values for Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United States. Board members include all members of the highest decision-making body, such as the chairperson, non-executive directors, senior executives and employee representatives. CEO refers to the Chief Executive Officer or equivalent position. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.

Source: For EU countries plus Norway, Iceland and the United Kingdom, EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G17. The proportion and number of women and men among presidents and chief executive officers (CEO) of the largest nationally registered companies listed on the national stock exchange" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs) and EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G18. The proportion and number of women and men among members of the highest decision-making body of the largest nationally registered companies listed on the national stock exchange" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs). For all other countries, Matanda, Wang and Emelianova (2023[18]) and Csonka and Milhomem (2024[19]).

Public sector employment also shows clear evidence of the leaky pipeline (OECD, 2023[1]). In EU countries, for example, women accounted for 60% of all employees in the public sector, but only 48% of middle managers and 43% of senior managers (Figure 6.4). As with the private sector, some policy areas within the public sector fare better in terms of representation of women at the top. Women are, for example, more likely to be managers in ministries covering socio-cultural functions compared to economic, infrastructure or basic functions. One area with particularly striking gender gaps is central banking. Across EU-27 countries, there was not a single woman Governor of a national Central Bank in 2023 (EIGE, 2024[20]), and at the EU-level, women represented only 8% of members of decision-making bodies of the European Central Bank (ECB) (EIGE, 2024[21]). It was also not until 2019 that the ECB appointed its first woman President.

Justice systems – including judges and front-line justice (Box 6.3) – also show evidence of notable gender inequalities.

Figure 6.4. Public sector employment shows evidence of the leaky pipeline to management

Share (%) of public sector employees and managers who are women, 2024 or latest
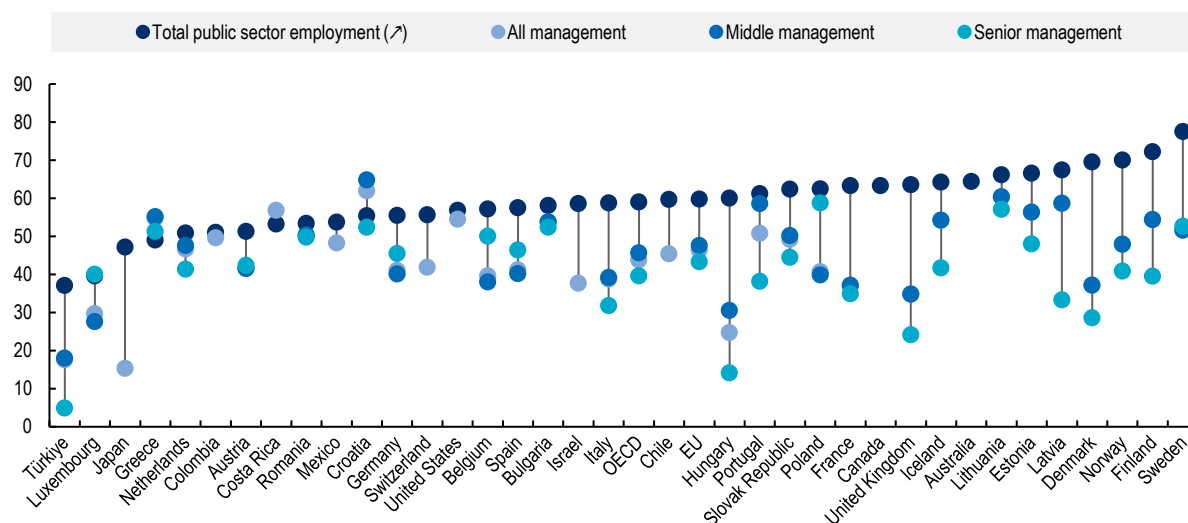
Note: EU and OECD averages are unweighted. There are data for 22 EU countries for all four series and for 33 OECD countries for total public sector employment, 31 OECD countries for all management and 23 OECD countries for middle and senior management. Total public sector employment includes staff at all levels, including middle management (Level 2 administrators) and senior management (Level 1 administrators). For total public sector employment, data represent varying years: Canada and the United States (2024); Austria, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Japan, Mexico, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United Kingdom (2023); Australia and Israel (2021); and Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden (2020). For management, all data are from 2024 except Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Japan, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland and Türkiye (2023) and Israel (2021). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.
Source: For total public sector employment, data for Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania and Sweden are from OECD Data Explorer "Public employment and representation – Government at a glance indicators, 2023 edition" (http://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/kq), while all other countries are from ILOSTAT Data Explorer "Employment by sex, age and public/private sector (thousands)" (https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/). For public sector management, data for Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Slovak Republic, Switzerland and Türkiye are from ILOSTAT Data Explorer "Employment by sex, occupation and public/private sector (thousands)" (https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/), while all countries are from EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G8. The proportion of women among the highest-ranking civil servants in the Member States" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs).

Box 6.2. Spotlight on intersectionality: Management, migrant status and disability status

Migrants and people with disability face barriers to reaching the top that can compound gendered disadvantage. Women with disability and first-generation migrant women, for instance, are less likely to be managers than women without disability and non-migrant women (measured as "third generation or more"), respectively (Figure 6.5). Men with disability and men who are migrants also face a disadvantage in reaching the top, although they are more likely to reach the top than women with disability and women who are migrants.

Figure 6.5. Migrants and persons with disability are less likely to be managers, especially when they are women

Share (%) of women and men (15-64) who have a migrant background or disability who are managers, by migrant and disability status, EU-27 average, 2023 or latest
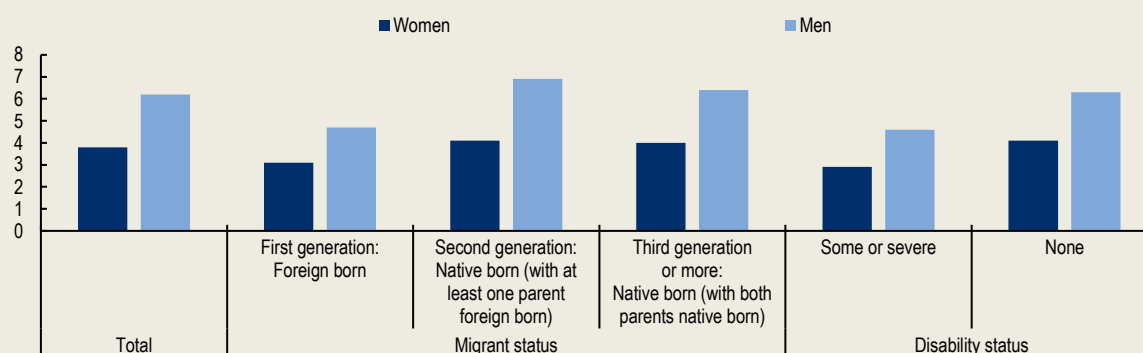
Note: EU-27 average is a weighted average. "Total" is calculated using estimates by migrant status. Data for migrant status is from 2023. Data for disability status is from 2022. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.
Source: Eurostat "Employment by sex, age, migration status, occupation and educational attainment level" (https://doi.org/10.2908/LFSA_EGAISEDM) and "Employment by level of disability (activity limitation) and occupation" (https://doi.org/10.2908/LFSA_EGAIDL).

Explaining leadership gaps in the public and private sector

The underrepresentation of women at the top, especially at the highest levels, is the effect of multiple factors experienced throughout the life course, including entrenched gender stereotypes and norms as well as gender-blind policies, both in the public and private sectors (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014[6]; OECD, 2017[22]; OECD, 2023[1]; Son Hing et al., 2023[23]). Some important key factors and barriers include:

- **Perceptions of women's skills and abilities**: On average, in 2019, only 88% of women and men in EU countries with available data believed that women were equally as good at being managers as men and only 74% *disagreed* that men make better business executives than women do (see Online Annex Figure 6-A2) (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020[24]; WVS, 2023[25]). Perceptions of women as less competent at management likely reflect that strong leadership is often associated with stereotypically masculine traits (e.g. assertiveness). Although traditionally feminine traits (e.g. empathy, communality) are valued among leaders, this is only after stereotypically masculine traits (e.g. dominance) have been met (Vial and Napier, 2018[26]).

- **Biased assessments of performance**: Perceptions that women are not as good at management translate into biased assessments of performance. Identical performance by women and men in the workplace has been found to be interpreted and evaluated differently (Turban, Freeman and Waber, 2017[27]). Men's success in the workplace, for instance, is generally attributed to skills, whether the role is perceived as traditionally feminine or masculine, while women's success is attributed to luck when the role is typically associated with men (Hamilton and Lordan, 2023[28]). Even in contexts where women may have objectively equivalent or better performance to men – e.g. measured through previous performance assessments or the use of sensor-based technologies – gender gaps in promotions persist, indicating potential bias (Turban, Freeman and Waber, 2017[27]; Benson, Danielle and Shue, 2022[29]). Indeed, in a recent survey, 40% of respondents in EU-27 countries, on average, *disagreed* that a woman has the same chance of getting promoted as a man (see Online Annex Figure 6-A3) (Eurobarometer, 2024[8]).

- **Expected behaviours and the "double bind"**: Women leaders who demonstrate overly "masculine" behaviours are often evaluated negatively, but women leaders who demonstrate overly "feminine" behaviours are also evaluated negatively. This "double bind" makes it extremely difficult for women leaders to succeed and may explain women's disproportionate levels of burnout, as they must constantly assess, adjust and adapt their behaviours to the setting (Trzebiatowski, McCluney and Hernandez, 2023[30]; Zheng, Kark and Meister, 2018[31]).

- **Motherhood penalties and career breaks**: Due to gender norms and the availability and structure of policy supports, women are more likely than men to interrupt their careers for childbearing/rearing, and these interruptions are often longer than those of men. Career interruptions – regardless of the reason – come with penalties: employees miss out on opportunities for promotion and skill development, lose momentum in their career trajectories, and work fewer years overall (Reitman and Schneer, 2005[32]). All of these negatively affect progression up the corporate ladder. On top of career interruptions, assumptions about working mothers – stemming from stereotypes and the fact that women are, on average, undertaking a greater share of unpaid caregiving responsibilities than men – only reinforce the belief that women are less committed to work, creating a vicious cycle (Fitzsimmons, Callan and Paulsen, 2014[6]; Chung, 2018[33]; Son Hing et al., 2023[23]). This vicious cycle is reinforced by institutional barriers including a lack of access to childcare and after-school care, as well as a lack of access to long-term care for elderly family members and family members with disabilities.

- **Self-confidence, self-esteem and self-promotion**: Climbing to the top of the corporate ladder requires not only skill and ability, but also self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as the ability to promote oneself. Across countries and cultures, men "consistently report higher self-esteem than women" (Casale, 2020[34]). Men are also more likely to engage in self-promotion, especially in relation to tasks perceived as "male-typed" (Exley and Kessler, 2022[35]).

- **Hiring and promotion processes and practices**: Non-transparent selection processes and selection criteria, lack of gender balance on selection panels, and gender bias in job advertisements may create barriers for women in recruitment and career progression, especially at the top (OECD, 2020[36]; European Parliament, 2022[37]).

- **Work assignments and experiences**: Women's management experience is more often related to human resources and communication, while men's is more often in general or line management. As general and line managers constitute the main pool for recruitment for the highest positions, women's early-stage management opportunities are less likely to give them adequate experiences, skills and abilities for advancement (European Parliament, 2022[37]).

- **Experiences of harassment and discrimination**: Women's movement up the career ladder may be hampered by harassment and discrimination. For instance, microaggressions – remarks or behaviours, whether overt or not, that humiliate or dismiss someone based on their identity – are exceedingly common in workplaces for women, especially women of colour and women with

disability (Devillard et al., 2021[38]; Field et al., 2023[39]). Over time, microaggressions (and related protective behaviours) contribute to job dissatisfaction (Algner and Lorenz, 2022[40]), with women more likely to consider quitting their job and feeling close to burnout (Field et al., 2023[39]). Indeed, in a recent survey in the EU, 51% of respondents believed that men are treated better at work, compared to 6% who think women are treated better and 40% who believe women and men are treated the same (Eurobarometer, 2024[8]). Although harassment and discrimination are illegal in most EU and OECD countries, and many cases are brought forward every year, harassment and discrimination are difficult to prove and hard to measure (Algner and Lorenz, 2022[40]), meaning the onus of pursuing justice often falls to the victim. Harassment and discrimination can therefore persist within an organisation for a long time before made known or addressed.

- **Networking, role models and mentors**: Men may have an advantage in climbing the corporate ladder as they may have greater access to informal networking and socialising opportunities with other men who are in leadership positions, such as at after-work socials. Since greater social interactions between a manager and an employee are linked to greater promotability, this creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which men tend to disproportionately promote other men, who then continue the pattern (Son Hing et al., 2023[23]; Cullen and Perez-Truglia, 2023[41]). Role models and mentors may help to break this cycle, but may not be sufficient – especially if women are "over-mentored" but "under-sponsored," where sponsoring is a more assertive form of mentorship where a senior executive advocates for the career progression of a particular individual (Ibarra, 2019[42]).

Box 6.3. Justice systems face notable gender inequalities

Leaky pipelines in the judiciary

In contrast to most other aspects of leadership, women represent over half of all judges in most EU and OECD countries (see Online Annex Figure 6-A4) (OECD, 2023[43]; Eurostat, 2024[44]; EIGE, 2024[45]). Nevertheless, the leaky pipeline persists, with a downward trend in women's representation as one moves up to higher levels of the judicial system. In EU-25 countries, for example, women represent 63% of professional judges, but only 43% of judges on the Supreme Court (see Online Annex Figure 6-A4) (Eurostat, 2024[44]; EIGE, 2024[45]; OECD, 2023[43]). At the level of the European Union, there is even lower representation of women, with women accounting for only 22% of members of the European Court of Justice, 30% of members of the Court of Justice of the European Union, and 33% of members of the General Court in 2023 (EIGE, 2024[46]). Besides representation, there are other channels through which women may be disadvantaged in high-level political or judicial positions. For instance, in U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearings, men and white Senators are more likely to interrupt Justice candidates who are women and people of colour (Boyd, Collins and Ringhand, 2023[47]).

Gender inequality in front-line justice

Around the world, police work and police culture are "rooted in hegemonic masculinity" (Clinkinbeard, Solomon and Rief, 2020[48]), so it is perhaps unsurprising that women represent less than 30% of police officers in 21 out of 25 EU and OECD countries (see Online Annex Figure 6-A5) (Eurostat, 2024[44]). Even when women enter policing, however, challenges remain that may lead to an increased exit rate and a lower rate of promotion. Women, for example, have found it difficult to gain acceptance in police forces due to the strong masculine norms associated with policing. Women, too, have reported facing overtly hostile behaviour, including sexual harassment. To top it all off, work-life balance issues are problematic in this setting as well, with front line justice often demanding long and unusual hours of work (Angehrn, Fletcher and Carleton, 2021[49]; Alexander and Charman, 2023[50]).

Box 6.4. Glass cliffs: Women's leadership in times of crisis

Even when women reach the top, their appointment to leadership positions may reflect underlying gender norms. For instance, women may be more likely to be appointed or promoted to high-level positions in times of crisis or poor performance, reflecting the perception that a woman leader can signal a significant change in direction to the outside world – but also the stereotype that women have better crisis management skills due to their nurturing and caring qualities. This "think crisis-think female" effect creates a "glass cliff," whereby women are placed in exceedingly challenging leadership positions that make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to achieve the same status or level of success as men appointed under less difficult circumstances. Indeed, in these positions – characterised by declines in stock market value or unstable employment, for example – women are at high risk of being held responsible in the event of failure (Galsanjigmed and Sekiguchi, 2023[51]; Morgenroth et al., 2020[52]; Reinwald, Zaia and Kunze, 2022[53]; Bruckmüller et al., 2014[54]; Ryan et al., 2016[55]; Kulich et al., 2015[56]; Glass and Cook, 2016[57]). There may also be a dearth of men interested in taking on a high-risk position in times of crisis, though this is harder to measure.

Women are making progress in reaching elected positions, but major gaps persist

Over the past half century, there has been tremendous progress in women's representation in politics. The share of national legislators (i.e. parliamentarians and congresspersons) who are women in OECD countries increased from an average of less than 10% in 1974 to over 30% in 2024 (see Online Annex Figure 6-A6) (IPU, 2024[58]). Other levels of political office present a similar picture, with women representing around one-third of all elected individuals at the regional level (34%) and the local level (31%) in EU-27 countries (Figure 6.6). The supranational European Parliament has achieved a slightly higher share of legislators who are women (37% in 2024).

Women are also underrepresented among national ministers and cabinet members, accounting for about one in three ministers in both EU-27 and OECD-38 countries in 2023. Similar to private and public sector management, ministers are often given portfolios reflective of gender norms and stereotypes – with women more likely to receive responsibility for family or social affairs and men more likely to receive responsibility for finance and the economy or foreign affairs (see Online Annex Figure 6-A7) (IPU, 2023[59]; EIGE, 2024[60]; Kroeber and Hüffelmann, 2021[61]; UN Women, 2024[62]). This is also found to occur in committees of the European Parliament (Wax, 2023[63]).

Figure 6.6. Women are underrepresented across all levels of government in most EU and OECD countries

Share (%) of members of various levels of government who are women, 2024
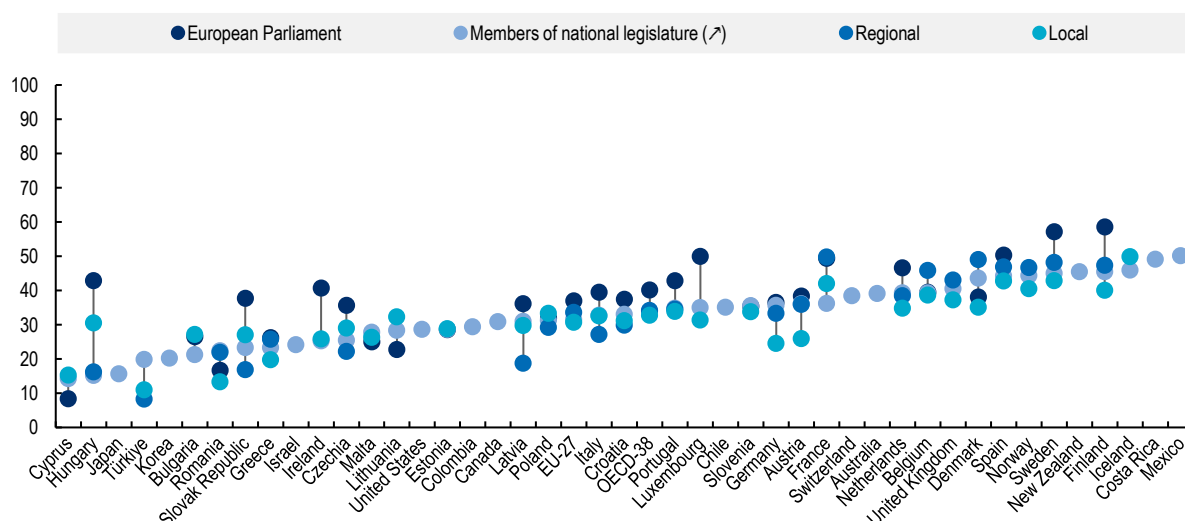
Note: EU and OECD averages are unweighted. Data are available for 27 EU countries and 38 OECD countries for members of national legislature. For the European Parliament, data are available for all EU countries and for 22 OECD countries. For local councils, data are available for all EU countries and for 26 OECD countries. For regional authorities, data are available for 19 EU countries and 20 OECD countries. Data on members of national legislatures as of 31 December 2024. Data on the European Parliament (EP) cover the president and members of the EP comprised of representatives elected by the EU Member States. This is a supranational legislative parliament, exercising powers similar to those of the national legislatures. Data on the EP represent the average of the share of members of the EP who are women across all four quarters (Q1 through Q4). Data on regional assemblies cover the representative assemblies of regions (i.e. regional authorities). The term region refers to regional authorities that are endowed with self-government acting as the territorial authorities between the central government and local authorities. Data on local councils cover the representative assemblies of municipalities, cities or towns. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.
Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline "Historical data on women in national parliaments" (https://data.ipu.org/historical-women/), EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G1b. The proportion of women in the European Parliament" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs), EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G2. The proportion of women in the regional assemblies of the Member States, where appropriate" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs) and EIGE "Gender Statistics Database Indicator G3a. The proportion of women in local assemblies in the Member States [starting from 2011]" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs).

Box 6.5. Spotlight on intersectionality: Political representation and race and ethnicity

Minority representation in politics means that diverse perspectives and backgrounds can influence decision-making processes. Yet, in many EU and OECD countries, data on ethnicity and race are not collected, making it impossible to assess the presence of minority voices in legislatures and social and economic outcomes more broadly. Even in those countries where data are collected, it is often not collected in a systematic, harmonised or consistent manner. Some countries with available data include **Australia**, where in 2022, about 10% of parliamentarians had a non-European or Indigenous background, compared to 24% of the population. Of the 13 non-European and 10 First Nations representatives elected, most were women (Poole, 2022[64]). In **Canada**, in the most recent election in 2021, 16% of members of parliament (MPs) were racialised minorities, less than their share of the total population (26%) (Ie, 2023[65]). Among the MPs who were visible minorities, 34% were women (Black and Griffith, 2022[66]).

Turning to the highest positions in government – the elected executive (e.g. prime ministers, chancellors or presidents) – there has also been considerable progress, but major gaps remain. Only 79% of the 43 EU and OECD countries have *ever* had the executive office held by a woman and only 21% had an executive who was a woman as of 29 January 2025 (see Online Annex Figure 6-A8) (Council on Foreign Relations, 2024[67]).

Ever having had a woman executive does not capture time spent in office or the number of unique women who have held office. Looking at the period between 1947 and 2025, a woman was the executive in only 10% of the 79 years, on average, across OECD-38 countries (Figure 6.7). And, in many countries, there has only ever been *one woman* who has held this position and often for a relative short period of time. Canada, for example, has only ever had a woman Prime Minister once, appointed to office for only 132 days. Austria has also only had a woman federal Chancellor once, in office for only 218 days. Other countries who have only had a woman executive once and for a short tenure include Belgium (340 days) and Portugal (155 days).

Some of these short tenures may reflect biases and barriers to women reaching and staying in politics, including women's re-electability, but some of them may also reflect women's departures from politics, as suggested by Lazarus, Steigerwalt and Clark (2022[68]). A recent study, for example, noted that online harassment, abuse and threats of violence contributed to the poorer retention rate of women MPs in the United Kingdom (UK Parliament, 2022[69]). Understanding why women may choose to voluntarily leave politics at a higher rate than men is particularly important given women's continued underrepresentation.

Figure 6.7. Many countries have only ever had women as leaders for a short period of time

Share (%) of years between 1947 and 2025 when there was a woman political executive (prime minister, president or chancellor)
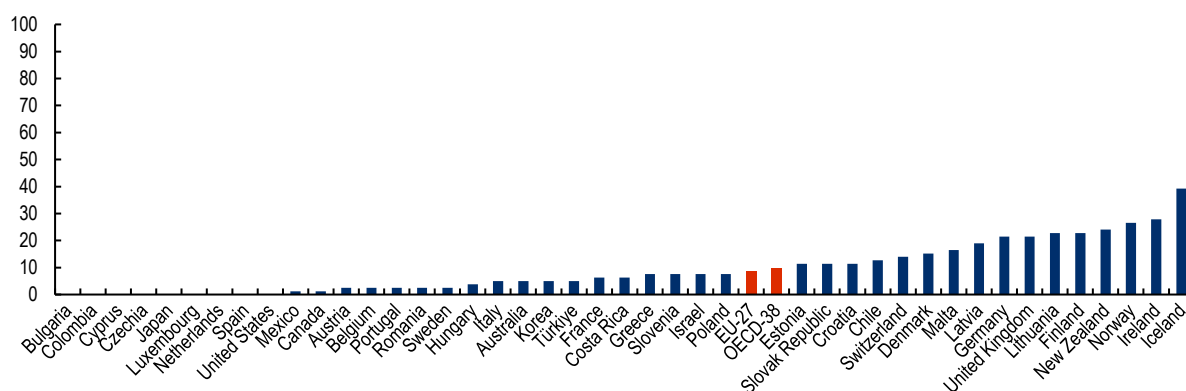
Note: EU-27 and OECD-38 averages are unweighted. A country is counted as having had a woman executive (e.g. president, prime minister, chancellor) in a given year as long as a woman occupied at least one of the executive positions for at least one day of a given year. Given that Switzerland has seven leaders in its Federal Council and that at least one of these seven has been a woman since 1993, this approach leads to greater overestimation than in other countries, where there are just one or two executives (i.e. a head of government and/or a head of state). To correct for this, the following approach is used. The number of men and the number of women who held a position on the Federal Council for at least one day in every year between 1947 and 2025 is calculated. The total number of women and men ranges from seven to 11 people given that elections may happen in the middle of a year. Between the 1947 and 2025 period, there were 530 men-years and 86 women-years, meaning that the share of women over this entire period was 14%. A specific year is coded as having a gender equal share of women as long as the share is above 40%. This occurred for the first time in 2010, when there was a total of five men and four women. In 2023, for the first time ever, three of the seven were women at the same time. Data from the Council of Foreign Relations "Women's Power Index" are accurate to 1 December 2024. To bring the estimates up to 29 January 2025, data refer OECD Secretariat desk research. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 6.A.
Source: Council of Foreign Relations (2024[67]) "Women's Power Index" and OECD Secretariat desk research using national sources on elections between 1 December 2024 and 29 January 2025.

Barriers to women reaching political leadership

The underrepresentation of women in politics is the result of numerous factors that aggregate throughout the life course to create barriers to entry and disadvantages for women (OECD, 2019[70]), as well as political-institutional arrangements that favour men. Some important reasons for this underrepresentation include:

- **Perceptions of women's abilities**: In a recent EU survey, nearly 20% of respondents believed that women do not have the necessary qualities and skills to fill positions of responsibility in politics (European Union, 2017[71]). Such negative perceptions create an environment in which women may internalise the belief that they are not qualified to run. Indeed, women may be less likely to believe that they will be or are qualified for office, and women tend to wait until they are "more qualified" to run for office than men (Miller, 2016[72]; Boschma, 2017[73]), aligning with findings on gender gaps in self-confidence and self-promotion.

- **Voter bias**: Negative perceptions of women's abilities to hold positions of responsibility in politics may fuel voter bias against women. Across OECD countries, for instance, 22% agree or strongly agree than men make better political leaders than women (see Online Annex Figure 6-A9) (WVS, 2023[25]), though this is likely a low estimate in the face of social desirability bias. Although suggestive of gender bias in the electorate, survey evidence does not indicate the extent to which these perceptions may influence voting patterns and actual electoral outcomes. Significant research has been dedicated to this question, but no clear consensus has emerged – with some finding evidence that voters are biased against women (Eyméoud and Vertier, 2020[74]; Le Barbanchon and Sauvagnat, 2021[75]; Saltzer and McGrath, 2022[76]) and some finding evidence that gender does not impact voters' choices (Kage, Rosenbluth and Tanaka, 2018[77]; Brechenmacher, 2018[78]; Schwarz and Coppock, 2022[79]; Poutvaara and Graefe, 2024[80]). Evidence also shows that party affiliation matters for the extent of voter bias against (or in favour) women (Saltzer and McGrath, 2022[76]; Pas, Aaldering and Steenvoorden, 2022[81]; Poutvaara and Graefe, 2024[80]). Yet, even if an individual voter is not biased against women, *perceptions* of bias against women in the electorate at large or assumptions about the electability of women may cause voters to vote strategically against women. In short, a voter may not vote for a woman candidate because they expect others to be biased against the candidate and do not think she stands a good chance of success (Lean In, 2020[82]). This behaviour and these misperceptions have been found to be at play in countries with party primary elections, where a candidate must succeed in a within-party election before advancing to the general election against other party candidates (Bateson, 2020[83]; Corbett et al., 2022[84]).

- **Motherhood penalty in politics**: Women legislators have fewer children than men legislators and are less likely to be in stable, partnered relationships (Rosenbluth, Kalla and Teele, 2015[85]; Joshi and Goehrung, 2020[86]; Fiva and King, 2023[87]), suggesting that family obligations, especially when children are young, may discourage mothers from entering politics. Gender stereotypes and norms mean that a greater share of unpaid responsibilities fall on women and such responsibilities limit one's ability to relocate to a new city, travel regularly and work long hours – tasks typically required of (and associated with) politicians (Ouellet and Shiab, 2019[88]; OECD, 2019[70]). At the same time, public perceptions of mothers can be at odds with public perceptions of political leaders (Menasce Horowitz and Goddard, 2023[89]; Stalsburg, 2010[90]). Caregiving and household responsibilities may also affect potential women politicians' opportunities to engage in politics and limit their time to nurture an interest in politics (Fraile and Gomez, 2017[91]; Sánchez-Vítores, 2018[92]).

- **Experiences of violence and harassment, especially online**: Although both women and men in politics may experience violence and harassment, such acts against women often take the form of sexist hate speech or gender-based comments or threats, including threats of rape or violence

(Council of Europe, 2019[93]; Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah, 2020[94]). For instance, in a survey in Europe, 85% of participating women members of parliament (MPs) reported suffering psychological violence during their term of office, 68% reported being the target of comments on their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes, 58% reported being the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, 47% reported receiving death threats or threats of rape or beating, and 25% reported suffering sexual violence (Council of Europe, 2019[93]). Indeed, in a recent EU survey, 54% of respondents believe that men are treated better in politics, compared to 6% who believe that women are treated better, and 37% who believe that women and men are treated the same way (Eurobarometer, 2024[8]). These experiences may discourage women from joining or staying in politics, or prevent them from aiming for higher leadership roles (OECD, 2023[1]). Misinformation and disinformation campaigns are also disproportionately targeted at women, featuring "humiliating and sexually charged images" and framing women as "inherently untrustworthy, unintelligent, or too emotional or too libidinous to hold office or participate in democratic politics" (Di Meco and Wilfore, 2021[95]).

- **Party recruitment**: Parties want to win elections and will put forward the candidates that they believe are most likely to succeed. This means that any (perceived) bias against women in the electorate will translate into bias in party recruitment (OECD, 2019[70]). But parties may also have their own inherent biases against women, acting as "gatekeepers" to politics. Evidence of party bias has cropped up across EU and OECD countries (Ouellet and Shiab, 2019[88]; ANU News, 2022[96]; Casas-Arce and Saiz, 2015[97]; Esteve-Volart and Bagues, 2012[98]; O'Neil, 2018[99]).

- **Electoral systems and political structures**: Political institutions play an important role in party recruitment and the representation of women. Compared to majoritarian systems, proportional representation systems are linked to higher proportions of women elected. This is largely explained by the fact that proportional representation systems rely on larger constituencies that elect more than one representative. By contrast, majoritarian systems elect a single candidate, and there is often a strong incumbency advantage (Real, 2020[100]; European Parliament, 1997[101]; Ridley-Castle, 2023[102]; Brechenmacher, 2018[78]; Real, 2020[100]) and incentives for strategic voting (Bateson, 2020[83]; Corbett et al., 2022[84]). Electoral quotas – an important tool for increasing representation – are also more common in proportional representation than majoritarian systems, potentially amplifying the effects of proportional representation on women's likelihood of being elected (Ridley-Castle, 2023[102]).

- **Campaign funding**: In countries where election campaigns are completely or mostly privately financed, gender gaps in campaign funding can create another hurdle for women in politics (OECD, 2019[70]; Ouellet and Shiab, 2019[88]; Lyytikkä, 2021[103]). But even when women and men are shown to raise similar amounts, women are more likely to rely on many small donations, while men are more likely to obtain large contributions from mega-donors, which means that fundraising requires more time and effort for women (Jenkins, 2007[104]). In Europe, where electoral systems rely mostly on public money, gender differences may still be present, particularly when candidates consider putting their names forward, since aspirants need to build name recognition to be nominated onto party lists (Brechenmacher, 2018[78]).

- **Media coverage**: Media coverage is, in many ways, strongly linked to electoral success (Lühiste and Banducci, 2016[105]). In a meta-analysis covering over 25 000 politicians in over 750 000 media stories, evidence suggests that women candidates and politicians receive less media attention than men in proportional representation systems, while the gap is absent in majoritarian system (Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020[106]). In addition to lower coverage under proportional representation, women politicians are also found to receive more media attention focused on their appearance and their personal life (Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020[106]).

- **Political ambition**: Compared to similarly-placed men, women who are potential political candidates report less interest in running for political office (Piscopo and Kenny, 2020[107]; Lawless

and Fox, 2022[108]). This is not entirely surprising: girls are socialised to the idea that leadership roles are male spaces, limiting political interest and ambition among girls from an early age (Bos et al., 2021[2]; Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores, 2019[109]). Socialisation also teaches girls and women to be risk averse and less competitive than men, traits that are less suited to campaigning (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007[110]; Brechenmacher, 2018[78]; Lawless and Fox, 2012[111]; Kanthak and Woon, 2014[112]; Preece and Stoddard, 2015[113]).

Box 6.6. Additional data sources on women in leadership

Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:

- **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps:** Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance and private and public leadership.
- **OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**: Features data on students' expectations concerning future careers.
- **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database**: Contains information on women and men in decision-making positions in the EU, covering politics, public administration, the judiciary, business and finance, social partner organisations and NGOs, media, education, science and research, sports and transportation, among others.
- **Interparliamentary Union's Parline Database**: Contains detailed monthly information on women in national parliaments around the world from 1997 to the present, as well as data on the existence of specialised bodies on gender equality and women's caucuses.
- **2017 and 2024 Eurobarometer Surveys on Gender Stereotypes**: Explore opinions on gender equality in politics and at work.
- **World Values Survey**: Contains several important questions exploring attitudes and beliefs toward gender equality.
- **OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index:** Contains information on laws, social norms and practices relating to discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted civil liberties and restricted access to productive and financial resources, including measures of political voice and women's ability to hold public or political office.

6.2. Policy combinations to advance gender equality in leadership and representation

Using Table 6.1, this section applies the **priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality in leadership and representation by exploring two **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1): tackling gender gaps in management and senior leadership positions in public and private sectors (Outcome A) and in political representation (Outcome B). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 6.1 and additional sources.

Table 6.1 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying the range of cross-portfolio policy and programme *combinations*** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 6.1 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

Interventions, when they occur, can follow a **life course approach**. For example, starting in childhood, policy can combat gender norms and stereotypes and increase the talent pipeline of young girls and women through awareness campaigns; changes to school curricula and teaching materials; as well as youth leadership programmes, mentorships and networks of women leaders. **Work-life balance policies** – such as affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare and long-term care – can also make a great difference for women's leadership and representation.

Supporting **senior management and leadership in the public and private sector** may require complementary interventions, such as disclosure requirements on gender balance in management positions and/or quotas or voluntary targets supporting gender balance on boards. Training and mentorship programmes, diversity and inclusion policies, networks, role model schemes, peer-to-peer support and advocacy initiatives also hold the potential to raise awareness, overcome biases and cultural resistance, and develop the female talent pipeline (OECD, 2023[1]). Different public interventions can support **women's representation in leadership positions in the public space** – including requirements for public leadership positions, non-binding guidelines for public institutions, or the inclusion of gender equality goals in broader strategic frameworks, among others.

To support **political representation**, various governments have implemented rules around sitting times and/or offer on-site childcare for legislators. Governments are also working toward eliminating the violence and harassment experienced by women politicians (see Chapter 8) as evidence suggests that higher levels of election-related violence are associated with lower representation of women in political leadership (Wood, 2024[114]). Many governments have also used tools, such as electoral quotas or targets, to increase gender balance on candidate lists. In addition, political parties can adopt voluntarily gender quotas and other targeted actions, such as actively recruiting women or prioritising their nominations to promote the presence of women among candidates. Additionally, for appointed positions, governments have led by example, striving for gender balance in appointments, such as cabinet positions.

Specific illustrations of country practices and policy combinations are included in Section 4.2.2. Key policy developments in EU countries will also be spurred by the EU Directive on "Women on Boards" (Box 6.7). Countries are further making headway in supporting women's representation in peacebuilding and the foreign service (Box 6.8).

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes** outlined in Table 6.1 varies across countries and across time. Continuous *monitoring and evaluation* that incorporates a gender perspective (priority consideration 5) is essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended outcomes; identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings.

For example, binding gender quotas and voluntary targets have been shown to lead to tangible improvements in **women's board representation** and drive progress over the short-term, but evidence also suggests that sustaining further progress may prove difficult (Denis, 2022[115]). Moreover, quotas and targets alone can produce unintended consequences, such as leading to a concentration of board memberships among a limited number of women (Rigolini and Huse, 2019[116]) or to smaller board sizes to facilitate compliance with the mandated threshold (Seierstad and Huse, 2017[117]). In this context, the implementation of complementary measures by governments and companies has proven instrumental to sustainably enhancing gender diversity in leadership roles and to changing social and policy environments – such as increasing the transparency and objectivity of hiring and promotion procedures; engaging with social partners, civil society and educational institutions to raise awareness about gender equality in leadership; and introducing targeted sector-specific initiatives to tackle gender inequality, especially in

men-dominated industries and occupations (e.g. Hughes, Paxton and Krook (2017[118]), Sojo et al. (2016[119]), De Acutis, Weber and Wurm (2024[120]) and Harnay et al. (2024[121])).

Legislated and voluntary quotas can also support **women's representation in elected positions** (Kerevel, 2019[122]), but their effectiveness depends on their level, the incentives to comply, and the sanctions for non-compliance (OECD, 2023[1]) and longer-term sustainability of progress also requires efforts to raise social awareness of the value of gender-balanced representation. Adopting electoral quotas or targets has also demonstrably improved **gender balance in politics** in many cases, but the effectiveness of various initiatives greatly depends on internal party culture. A supportive internal party environment can greatly amplify the benefits of legislated quotas, when they exist (OECD, 2019[70]).

Box 6.7. The EU Directive on "Women on Boards"

In 2022, the European Parliament adopted the Directive on gender balance among directors of listed companies (European Union, 2022[123]). Proposed by the European Commission ten years earlier, the Directive sets targets for large-listed EU companies (above 250 employees), including that the under-represented gender accounts for at least 40% of non-executive board members or 33% of all directors by 30 June 2026. Member States have two years to transpose the Directive.

The Directive also establishes that the best qualified candidates for election or appointment to board positions should be selected based on a comparative analysis of their qualifications by applying neutrally formulated and unambiguous criteria to ensure that applicants are assessed objectively based on their individual merits, irrespective of gender. Large-listed companies will also have to undertake individual commitments to reach gender balance among their executive board members.

Companies that fail to meet the objective of the Directive must report the reasons and the measures they are taking to address this shortcoming to the competent authorities. Member States will be required to set up a penalty system for companies that fail to meet the new standards by 2026. Penalties must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive. They could include fines and annulment of the contested director's appointment. Member States will also publish information on companies that are reaching targets.

6.2.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 6.1. Existing policy options to close gender gaps in management and senior leadership in the public and private sector (Outcome A) and political representation (Outcome B)

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Challenge gender stereotypes and norms											
A, B	Ensure **school curricula, textbooks and teaching materials** – including early learnings materials – challenge gender norms and stereotypes.	X								X	Many countries
A, B	Launch **awareness campaigns** to encourage the participation of women in politics, increase the visibility of women leaders (including mothers) and/or ensure better understanding of the benefits of gender equality in representation.	X								X	BEL, CZE, CYP, GRC, HRV, HUN, ISL, LUX, MLT, SLV
Provide opportunities for learning and skills development											
A, B	Support **training and skills development** programmes for women considering positions of leadership.	X								X	COL, ESP, HUN, IRL, JPN, MLT, NLD, PRT, ROU
A, B	Build **networks of (women) leaders** to facilitate mentorships and support talented women.		X							X	DEU, ESP, JPN, NLD, ROU
B	Raise awareness, including among decision-makers in the media and politics, on the **challenges faced by women politicians**.	X								X	CZE, FIN, MEX, MLT, ROU
Build a strong and gender transformative social protection system											
A, B	Provide **well-paid parental and paternity leave**, including to political leaders, supporting take-up by fathers and a better distribution of unpaid work.		X							X	Many countries
A, B	Provide high-quality flexible, accessible and affordable **childcare**, including out-of-school care, and **long-term and elderly care**, including independent living solutions.		X							X	Many countries
B	Provide **on-site childcare** in legislatures to support parents of young children.		X							X	AUS, CAN, DEU, ESP, GRC, IRL, JPN, LVA, NZL, SWE

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
						Likely Ministries Involved					
A, B	Introduce policies that support **work-life balance** in leadership, such as a **right to disconnect**, a right to request **flexible working arrangements** (and a return to full-time work) and/or restrictions on **late-hours parliamentary sittings** and parliamentary sittings and voting during summer or other holiday periods (see Chapter 5).		X							X	AUS, AUT, BEL, CAN, CYP, DEU, ESP, FRA, GRC, HRV, IRL, ITA, KOR, LUX, NZL, PRT, SLV, SVK, SWE
	Protect women and foster safety										
A, B	Conduct **awareness campaigns** and/or provide **training programmes** to **prevent gender-based violence** against women in leadership, especially women politicians.	X	X					X		X	MLT, SWE
A, B	Introduce policies and programmes to prevent **workplace harassment** (both online and in person), detect and punish perpetrators and support victims/survivors (see Chapter 8).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
B	Develop a **code of conduct and code of ethics** for legislative staff and legislators to ensure gender-sensitive behaviour and language.		X							X	AUT, DEU, DNK, LVA, SWE
B	Implement, amend or expand **sexual harassment** and **discrimination policies** pertaining to politicians and/or provide women politicians with **support services**, **judicial recourse** and **protection** in the event of harassment, whether online or in person.		X	X				X		X	CAN, DNK, GRC, LUX, SWE
	Implement gender transformative legislation, regulations and procedures										
A, B	Implement and enforce **equal pay**, **pay equity** and **pay transparency legislation** in political, private and public sector environments, including through pay reporting and pay auditing (see Chapter 5).		X							X	Many countries
A, B	Offer family-friendly environments and options (e.g. changing tables, nursing stations, proxy voting) to ensure **mothers** are not excluded.		X							X	AUS, AUT, CAN, DEU, HUN, IRL, LUX, NZL, POL, SWE

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
		Likely Ministries Involved									
A	Introduce **labels, certifications** and/or **awards** for companies introducing policies that support gender equality and work-life balance (e.g. pay, childcare, family-friendly workplace policies, parental leave, leadership).		X							X	AUT, BGR, CAN, CHL, COL, CRI, CYP, DEU, EST, FRA, GRC, ISL, LTU, MEX, PRT
A	Introduce, enforce and monitor provisions, such as quotas, voluntary targets and disclosure requirements supporting **gender balance on boards and in management**.		X							X	Many countries
A	Encourage and train companies to embed transparency and gender-equality criteria into **selection, recruitment retention and promotion processes**, including "opt-out" mechanisms for promotion, diversity and inclusion committees, tailored hiring practices, as well as training, mentorship and networking.		X							X	CZE, DEU, EST, JPN, POL
A	Create **sectoral action plans** for the improvement of gender equality, including linking **sector-specific government support** (e.g. grants, financing, subsidies) to workplace policies or standards that promote gender equality, especially in industries not traditionally associated with women and where gender gaps are largest.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	GBR, HRV
A	Ensure recipients of government funding are promoting gender equality and supporting women leaders, especially in areas that are not traditionally associated with women, such as **innovation, digitalisation** and the **green transition** (see Chapter 9).		X			X	X			X	ISL
B	Ensure **gender balance on candidate lists** through incentives, quotas or voluntary targets for all political parties, encourage the use of affirmative actions, such as zipper methods, and/or **publicly disclose** progress made by political parties in increasing the representation of women – both as candidates and legislators.									X	CHE, COL, CZE, GRC, JPN, LUX, MEX, PRT, ROU
B	Ensure women in politics are afforded equal opportunities to serve on all kinds of **ministerial portfolios**, including those related to traditionally male-dominated sectors and ongoing transitions.									X	ISL, SWE

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
	Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation										
A, B	Continue to close **gender data, research and measurement gaps**. Some examples include: • women's political representation at subnational levels (e.g. provincial, state, municipal); • the political representation of women with intersecting identity factors (e.g. women of colour, women with disability, women who are migrants); • sexual harassment of women politicians and women in the workplace, including women in senior management and leadership positions; • differences in career paths (recruitment, advancement, attrition) for women and men.		X	X				X	X	X	Many countries

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.
Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and OECD (2022[124]), European Union (2015[125]; 2016[126]; 2017[71]; 2024[127]; 2019[128]), European Union (2021[129]), Fair Work Ombudsman (2024[130]) and OECD (2023[131]; 2022[132]; 2019[70]).

6.2.2. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to advance gender equality in leadership and representation. Case studies are provided below.

Improving gender representation in management and senior leadership positions in the public and private sector

- **Denmark** has put in place a combination of policies to foster cultural change, transparency and accountability in leadership positions, aligning its national efforts with the EU's "Women on Boards" Directive (see Box 6.1). In 2023, for example, legislation was introduced to ensure gender balance across private companies and public institutions, with efforts led by the Ministry for Gender Equality and the Ministry of Industry, Business, and Financial Affairs, and with the involvement of Danish municipalities and regions. This legislation mandates that covered companies and institutions set gender composition targets for upper management and boards. Transparency is enhanced through a publicly accessible website. At the same time, the Ministry for Gender Equality launched the "Gender Equality Summit" and the "Gender Equality Award" initiatives to recognise and encourage best practices. Supporting these efforts, an inspirational catalogue was developed to guide public authorities in improving gender balance in leadership positions. This resource provides practical advice and examples, helping to ensure that the strategy is not only mandatory but also actionable.

- **Iceland** has implemented legislative action, financial incentives, and monitoring tools to improve gender representation in business leadership. The Equality Scale, developed by the Association of Businesswomen with government support, tracks gender balance in management and executive boards. And, following the Gender Equality Action Programme (2020-23), the Ministry of Industries and Innovation assesses gender balance on company boards to enforce and refine policies. Financial support also plays a key role. The Women's Loan Guarantee Fund – Svanni, renewed in 2020 through an agreement between the Prime Minister, the Minister for Industries and Innovation, and the Mayor of Reykjavík, offers loan guarantees to companies where women hold the majority ownership. Additionally, the Icelandic Regional Development Institute provides loans to businesses in rural areas with at least 75% ownership by women.

Reducing gender gaps in political representation

- **Romania** supports women's access to leadership positions through affirmative measures, such as quotas; analyses of women's participation in decision-making positions; and leadership training for women in political parties. Other interventions include providing information sessions on work-life balance in politics for people in leadership positions in politics and on gender in the media to decision-makers in the media.

Box 6.8. Supporting women's representation in peacebuilding and the foreign service

Peacebuilding and foreign services are additional forms of leadership where several countries are making efforts to increase women's representation and gender equality considerations. In the **Slovak Republic**, for example, the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1 325 on Women, Peace and Security for 2021-25 combines policies that promote women's representation and leadership with training, capacity building, and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response. This is enhanced by a set of actions to improve the quality of the Human Resources Development System in the Foreign Service, promoting a stronger focus on diversity, gender inclusiveness and non-discrimination in career guidance, internal audits, and awareness raising events (e.g. the organisation of regular events focused on "Women in Diplomacy"). Similarly, **Slovenia**'s National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 identifies foreign policy as one of its pillars and aims to increase the proportion of women in international peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations and missions, as part of efforts to strengthen political dialogue on and direct support to gender equality in bilateral relations, diplomatic efforts, development co-operation and humanitarian aid activities.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Annex 6.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 6.A.1. List of Chapter 6 Online Annex Figures

Figure no.	Figure title and subtitle
Figure 6-A1	**Women are most underrepresented in management in construction and manufacturing** Share (%) of managers who are women by sector, EU-27 average, 2023
Figure 6-A2	**Countries vary in public perceptions of women as managers** Share (%) who agree or disagree with certain statements regarding women as business leaders, 2019 or latest
Figure 6-A3	**Many do not believe that women have the same chances of being promoted as men** Share (%) who disagree that a woman has the same chances of getting promoted as a man, EU countries, 2024
Figure 6-A4	**Women judges face a leaky pipeline** Share (%) of professional judges and Supreme Court judges who are women, 2024 or latest
Figure 6-A5	**Women account for considerably less than half of all police officers** Share (%) of police officers who are women, 2022 or latest
Figure 6-A6	**Gender balance in the legislature has not yet been achieved in many EU and OECD countries despite significant progress** Share (%) of members of national lower chambers and unicameral legislatures (Parliament or Congress) who are women, 1974, 1999 and 2024
Figure 6-A7	**Ministerial portfolios exhibit a notable gender division across functions** Share (%) of members of the government or political executive who are women by function, 2024
Figure 6-A8	**Despite progress, one-fifth of EU and OECD countries still have never had a woman leader** Share (%) of countries that have ever had a woman executive (Panel A) and that currently have a woman executive (Panel B), EU and OECD countries, 1947-2025
Figure 6-A9	**More than 20% of people believe men are better political leaders than women** Share (%) who agree or strongly agree that men make better political leaders than women by age group, 2017-22

Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 6 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink 🔢 https://stat.link/sozdy0

7 Gendered differences in health outcomes and healthcare access

This chapter first presents gender-disaggregated data relating to health from birth and infancy to old age and death, including life expectancy, self-perceived health, physical activity and causes of death. Alongside these key statistics, the chapter explores drivers of observed gender gaps. The chapter then proceeds to lay out policy options to improve gender equality in physical and mental health and reduce gender gaps in physical activity.

Key findings

- Gender inequalities in health are complex. Women tend to live longer than men, though many of their additional years of life are spent in poorer health. Over the life course, there are also gendered risks and areas of concern. Women and girls face higher rates of poor self-reported physical and mental health, specific gendered risks related to pregnancy and childbirth, lower rates of participation in physical activity and sport and poorer experiences of healthcare (e.g. unmet healthcare needs, mis- or under-diagnosis). By contrast, men are more likely to engage in more risky behaviours (e.g. smoking, drinking heavily, drug abuse), have higher rates of death by suicide, are more likely to be overweight or obese and exhibit a greater reluctance to use preventive medicine and seek care.

- Gender norms and stereotypes around access to and use of healthcare, as well as healthy and health-reducing behaviours among both patients and providers likely contribute to much of the observed narrative. Societal expectations of stoicism, for example, may be deterring men from preventive care, while caregiving duties and limited inclusion in healthcare decision-making and research may be restricting women's access to care and deepening gaps in understanding women's specific health needs.

- Overcoming gender gaps in physical and mental health requires a comprehensive life course approach, including efforts to combat gender bias in healthcare institutions that limit women's and men's access to healthcare and the quality of services they receive. This can be achieved, in part, by mainstreaming gender considerations into all healthcare settings – emergency, long-term treatment and preventive – and by continuing to invest in gender-disaggregated health data and research to support evidence-based changes in policies and practices among governments and healthcare providers. Combatting gender stereotypes and norms through adequate health education for girls and boys and awareness raising and training among care providers regarding gender sensitivity and unconscious biases can also help ensure girls and boys and women and men can seek and receive adequate care when they need it.

- Reducing and eliminating gender gaps in physical activity also requires a range of interventions across various domains and ministries, such as early involvement of girls in physical activity and sports through school curricula and extracurricular activities; investments in safe and inclusive sports complexes, fitness facilities, recreational centres and active transportation methods; and equal and predictable media coverage of women's sports to provide girls with role models and encourage girls to see themselves as athletes.

Having good health is key to a fulfilling life, giving people the ability to take part in the activities that they most need, value and appreciate (OECD, 2020[1]). "Health" encompasses many aspects including perceptions of health and indications of ill-health, with many metrics used to assess health status, outcomes, behaviours and experiences.

Life expectancy is one of the most commonly used indicators of population health, and gender gaps in life expectancy at birth tend to favour women. In 2021, average life expectancy across OECD countries was 82 years for women and 77 for men (Figure 7.1). But data on life expectancy do not account for the quality of life, including in later years. When looking at *healthy* life years – a measure of life expectancy adjusted to reflect the number of years a person is expected to be in good and functional health – gender gaps narrow. In fact, adjusting for healthy life years reduces the gender gap from five to two years.

Figure 7.1. At birth, gender gaps in healthy life years are smaller than gender gaps in life expectancy

Life expectancy and healthy life years at birth, number of years, 2021
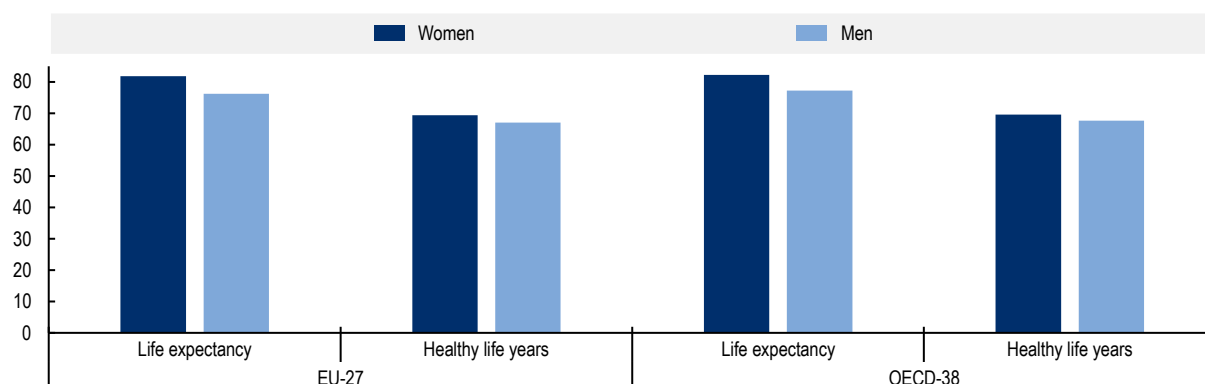
Note: EU-27 and OECD-38 averages are unweighted. Healthy life years is the average number of years that a person can expect to live in "full health" by taking into account years lived in less than full health due to disease and/or injury. See WHO "Healthy life expectancy (HALE) at birth (years)" for more details. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: WHO "Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy," (www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/indicator-groups/indicator-group-details/GHO/life-expectancy-and-healthy-life-expectancy).

Another commonly used measure of population health is self-perceived health (Cullati et al., 2020[2]). This indicator shows that women consistently report poorer health than men, with 66% of women in OECD-37 countries reporting good or very good self-perceived health, on average, compared to 71% of men (Figure 7.2). Recent evidence from the OECD's Patient-Reported Indicator Surveys (PaRIS) confirms the gender health paradox: women live longer than men but consistently report poorer physical and mental health. In addition, women tend to report lower levels of well-being (OECD, 2025[3]). These gender gaps are persistent and remain even after controlling for socio-economic factors, age and multi-morbidity (OECD, 2025[3]).

Figure 7.2. Self-perceived health is lower among women than men

Share (%) of women and men (15+) with very good or good self-perceived health, 2023 or latest
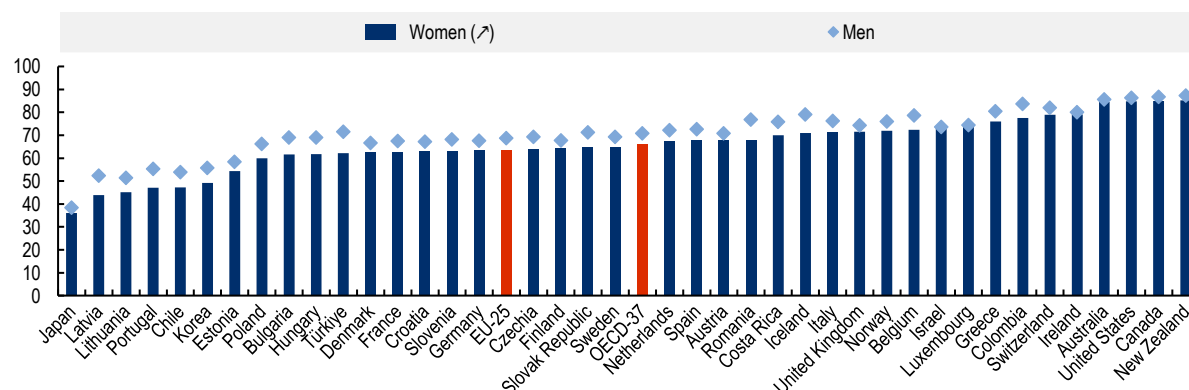
Note: EU-25 and OECD-37 averages are unweighted. ↗ indicates that the data is sorted according to this series in ascending order. Data from Costa Rica are from 2018. Data from Colombia, Iceland and the United Kingdom are from 2019. Data from Chile are from 2021. Data from Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, Korea, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United States are from 2022. Perceived health refers to people's overall self-reported health status. Data are based on general household surveys or on more detailed health interviews. The indicator is based on questions such as: "How is your health, in general?" with answers usually classified as "Very good," "Good," "Fair," "Not very good," and "Poor," although in some non-European countries, such as Australia, Canada, Chile, Israel, New Zealand and the United States, different response scales are used, which may lead to an upward bias in the estimates. In the OECD Health Status Database, the response categories from different surveys are rescored to fit into three broad categories of "Good/Very good" (all positive response categories), "Fair" (neither good nor bad), "Bad/Very bad" (all negative response categories). Respondents are generally 16 years or over, though the specific age range varies across countries. See OECD (2023[4]). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Perceived health status" (http://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/16t).

Box 7.1. Spotlight on intersectionality: Self-perceived health and income

For both women and men, income is positively associated with self-perceived health. This relationship may reflect that higher incomes facilitate greater access to and use of preventive healthcare and screening, support healthier lifestyle choices (e.g. more frequent health-enhancing behaviours, increased ability to afford healthier foods) and improve living conditions (e.g. improved housing conditions, less exposure to pollutants) (OECD, 2019[5]). At the same time, lower health can limit labour force participation, reduce productivity at work, and lower earnings (Stephens (Jr.) and Toohey, 2018[6]). Among EU-27 countries, this association is slightly stronger for women than for men, with the share of women perceiving themselves to be in good health rising from 52% to 79% (or 27 percentage points) between the lowest and the highest income quartiles (Online Annex Figure 7-A1) (Eurostat, 2025[7]). This compares to a rise from 58% to 81% for men (or 22 percentage points).

Recent evidence from the OECD's Patient-Reported Indicator Surveys (PaRIS) furthers these findings, noting that not only do people with lower education and income fall ill earlier, but once sick, they also experience worse outcomes compared to their higher earning or higher educated counterparts, putting them at a double disadvantage (OECD, 2025[3]).

The complex story presented by these three measures of health – life expectancy at birth, healthy life years and self-perceived health – reflects gender norms and stereotypes around health-related outcomes and behaviours, differences in experiences with and access to healthcare systems, as well as differences in socio-economic status.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 7.1 presents an overview of key gender gaps in health outcomes, behaviours, and experiences using a life course perspective and offers some key causes contributing to gender inequality. Section 7.2 explores policy options and policy combinations to improve gender equality in physical and mental health and reduce gender gaps in physical activity and at all levels of sport.

7.1. Background: Gender gaps in key outcomes in health

Starting with childhood, this section examines gender gaps in health outcomes, behaviours and perceptions across the life course, such as life expectancy, self-perceived health, physical activity, mental health and access to and use of healthcare and preventive medicine, among others. Potential explanatory factors are put forth.

7.1.1. Childhood and youth: Gender gaps in health outcomes start early

From the earliest years, there are gender gaps in health outcomes. Some of these gaps favour boys, and some of these gaps favour girls pointing to the complex interaction of gender norms and stereotypes around health and healthcare, as well as gender differences in risk factors and health-inducing behaviour.

Boys have higher mortality rates, but girls are less likely to feel very healthy

Although mortality rates are low for both genders between birth and the age of 14 years, boys have higher mortality rates than girls (Figure 7.3, Panel A). Mortality rates increase and gender gaps grow larger around the beginning of adulthood (i.e. age 15 years), with mortality rates for boys and young men more than double that of girls and young women.

Despite a lower likelihood of mortality, girls are less likely than boys to feel very healthy. In OECD-28 countries, for example, only 26% of girls aged 11, 13 and 15 years rate their health as "excellent," compared to 38% of boys of the same age (Figure 7.3, Panel B). In most countries, including those who rate their health as "good" alongside those who rate their health as "excellent" increases shares of positive self-perceived health for both girls and boys, with slightly larger increases for girls. For the OECD-28 countries, an average of 87% of boys and 78% of girls perceive their health as "good" or "excellent."

Figure 7.3. Mortality rates are higher among boys than girls, but self-perceived health is lower among girls than boys

Mortality rates by age group and gender, deaths per 100 000 population, population aged 0-24 years, OECD-38 countries, 2021 (Panel A) and share (%) of 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old children who rate their own health as "excellent," 2021-22 (Panel B)
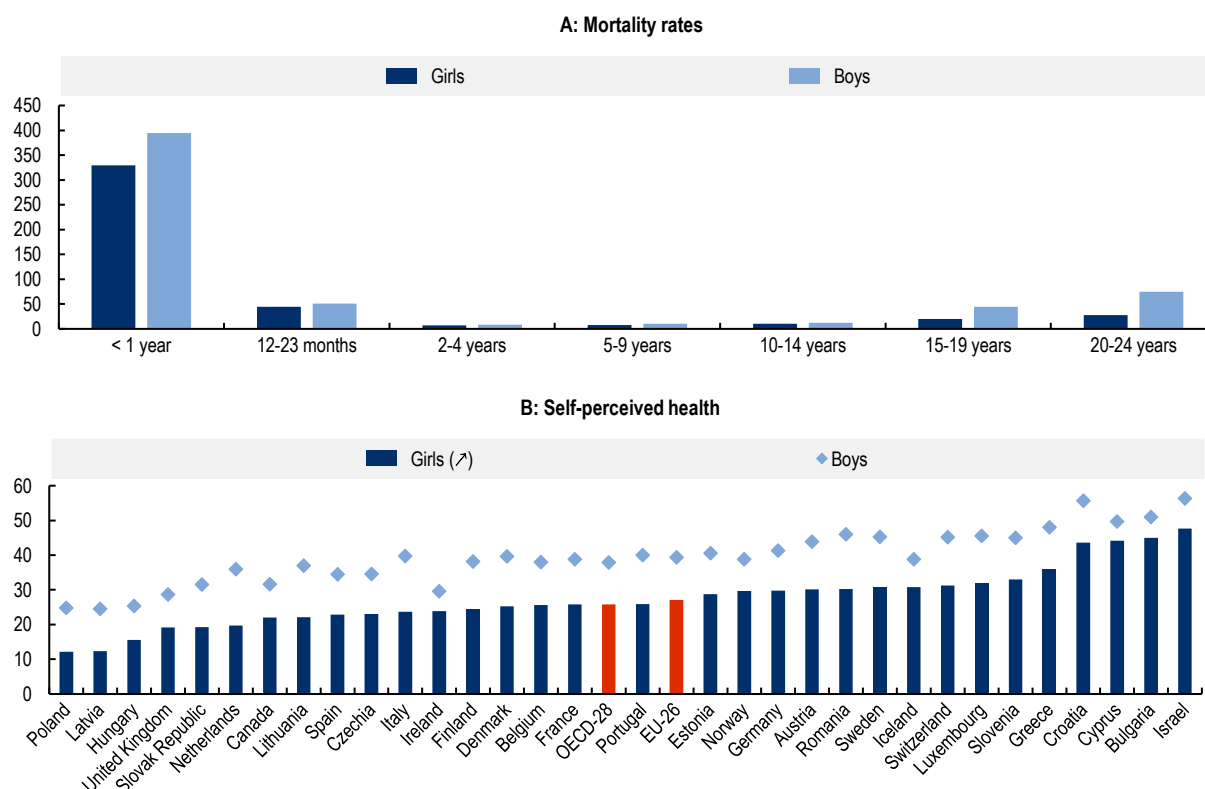
Note: For Panel A, OECD-38 average is unweighted. For more details on underlying input sources and metadata, see IHME (2021[8]). For more details on methodology, see the Lancet Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Resource Centre (www.thelancet.com/gbd). For Panel B, OECD-27 and EU-25 averages are unweighted. Data for the United Kingdom refer to the unweighted average of England, Scotland and Wales. Data for Belgium refer to the unweighted average of the Flemish- and French-speaking regions. Data refer to the percent of children who, when asked "Would you say your health is …?" and presented with the response options "Excellent," "Good," "Fair" or "Poor," respond with "Excellent." "11-, 13- and 15-year-old school children" refers to children aged 11, 13 and 15 attending mainstream schools. Estimates are based on the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) World Health Organization Collaborative Cross-National Survey. The combined series of "good" and "excellent" is available in the Online Annex. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Results Tool (https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/) (Panel A) and OECD Child-Well Being Data Portal on Child Well-Being Outcomes (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/child-well-being-outcomes0.html) (Panel B).

Boys are more likely to exercise, but girls are less likely to be overweight or obese

Many sources, across countries and over time, show that boys are more likely to engage in physical activity than girls (OECD/European Commission, 2024[9]; Graf and Cecchini, 2019[10]; OECD/European Union, 2016[11]; OECD/WHO, 2023[12]; International Children's Accelerometry Database (ICAD) Collaborators, 2023[13]; Women in Sport, 2017[14]; Telford et al., 2016[15]). Indeed, in a 2021-22 survey of health behaviours among school-aged children across OECD countries, an average of 24% of boys aged 11, 13 and 15 years reported engaging in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily, compared to only 14% of girls (Figure 7.4, Panel A).

In this same survey, girls were less likely than boys to be classified as overweight or obese based on their body mass index (BMI) (17% versus 27%) (Figure 7.4, Panel B). Physical activity is only one factor that contributes to children being or becoming overweight or obese. Other factors include socio-economic factors (e.g. income), personal characteristics (e.g. lifestyle preferences, diet) and family history (e.g. genetic makeup) (OECD/European Union, 2020[16]; OECD, 2021[17]; OECD/European Commission, 2024[9]; OECD/European Commission, 2024[9]). All of these factors likely interact with gender.

Figure 7.4. Despite higher rates of participation in physical activity, boys are more likely to be overweight or obese than girls

Share (%) of children aged 11-, 13-, and 15-years-old being physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes every day for the last 7 days (Panel A) and who are classified as overweight or obese (Panel B), by gender, 2021-22
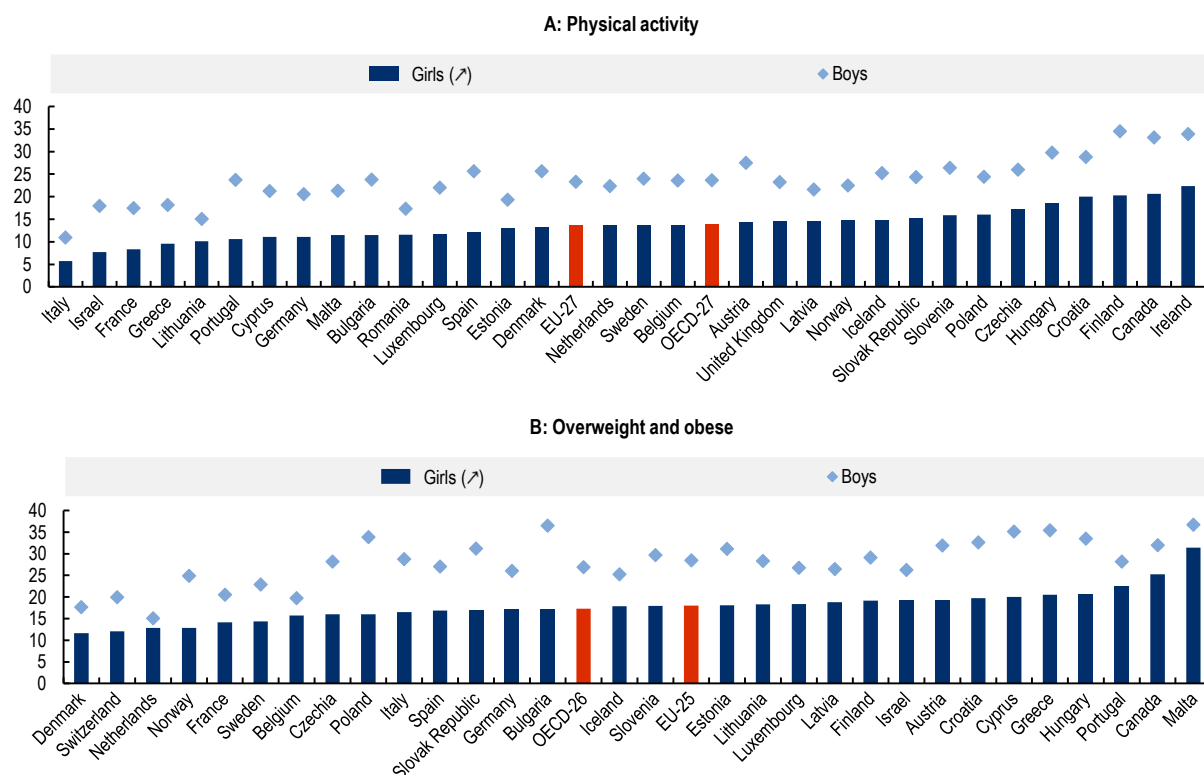
Note: EU and OECD averages are unweighted. For Panel A, data for the United Kingdom refer to the unweighted average of England, Scotland and Wales. Data for Belgium refer to the unweighted average of the Flemish- and French-speaking regions. Children were told "Physical activity is any activity that increases your heart rate and makes you get out of breath some of the time. Physical activity can be done in sports, school activities, playing with friends, or walking to school. Some examples of physical activity are running, brisk walking, rollerblading, biking, dancing, skateboarding, swimming, soccer, basketball, football, and surfing [additional country-specific examples could be given]." Children were then asked "Over the past 7 days, on how many days were you physically active for a total of at least 60 minutes per day? Please add up all the time you spent in physical activity each day." Data refer to the share of children who respond with "7 days". The WHO guideline for physical activity is at least an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous-intensity, mostly aerobic, physical activity across the week (WHO, 2020[18]). For Panel B, data for Belgium refer to the unweighted average of the Flemish- and French-speaking regions. Data refer to the percent with a Body Mass Index (BMI) that would be classified as "overweight" or "obese" according to the WHO's age- and sex-specific child growth curve (www.who.int/growthref/en/). BMI data were calculated based on self-reported height and weight. See Figure 7.3 for additional notes. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.

Source: OECD Child-Well Being Data Portal on Child Well-Being Drivers (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/child-well-being-drivers.html) (Panel A) and OECD Child-Well Being Data Portal on Child Well-Being Outcomes (www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/child-well-being-outcomes0.html) (Panel B).

Box 7.2. Gender equality in future sports career expectations

On average, across 22 EU and OECD countries,[1] less than percentage of girls aged 15 years state that they expect to be athletes and sports players (ISCO-08 code 3 421) by age 30 years (OECD, 2024[19]), compared to almost 4% of boys. Several explanations contribute to this gender gap, including:

- **Gender norms:** Sports are traditionally associated with "masculine" traits – such as strength, resilience, speed and competitiveness – and women and girls who engage in sports are often perceived as more masculine (EIGE, 2017[20]; Midgley et al., 2021[21]). As a result, it is not surprising that boys aged 8-18 years are four times more likely to participate in organised youth sport than girls (Emmonds et al., 2021[22]), and lower sports participation among girls and women also naturally translates into lower career expectations in sport.

- **Poorer media coverage:** Sportswomen receive less media coverage than sportsmen, and when they do, it is often about their appearance as opposed to their performance (Fink, 2015[23]; EIGE, 2017[20]; Midgley et al., 2021[21]). Since career expectations are influenced by media (Chambers et al., 2018[24]), lower visibility of women athletes translates into fewer girls seeing themselves as sportswomen.

- **Lack of women role models, coaches and officials:** Sports, including coaching and officiating, are dominated by men (EIGE, 2017[20]). A lack of women coaches and role models may affect girls' interest in sports and the development of girls as athletes, especially at crucial stages such as puberty. Indeed, evidence shows that women are more motivated by "same-gender and sport-matched" role models (Midgley et al., 2021[21]).

- **Underinvestment in women's sports:** Long-standing inequities in public and private funding for women's sports contribute to women's underrepresentation. Women, for example, find it "difficult to access specialised equipment" and struggle to obtain "optimal times on hockey rinks, basketball courts, or golf courses" (Midgley et al., 2021[21]). In a recent survey in the United Kingdom across 28 different sports, 99 out of 143 elite sportswomen responded that most of the equipment they use is not specifically designed for women (BBC, 2024[25]).

- **Underrepresentation of women as decision-makers:** In 2024 in the EU-27, in the national sports federations of the top ten most funded Olympic sports, women accounted for only 24% of members (EIGE, 2024[26]). Similarly, at the political level, women account for only 31% of ministers responsible for sports in their portfolios (EIGE, 2024[27]).

- **Fewer professional opportunities and lower compensation:** For much of sports history – and in some cases until quite recently – women were unable to compete in certain sports at certain events. For example, despite competing internationally in ski jumping events since the 1990s, women were excluded from the Olympic sport until 2014 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025[28]). Pole vault was also not on the women's programme of the Olympics until 2000 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025[29]), despite being a competitive event at the Games since 1896. Some countries also had restrictive rules that severely limited the growth of women's sports. In England, for example, the Football Association banned women from playing on professional grounds and pitches between 1921 and 1971, relegating women's clubs to public parks and smaller grounds (The Football Association, n.d.[30]). In addition, in many countries and sports, women's amateur and professional sports remain underdeveloped (Canadian Women and Sport, 2023[31]). Even when professional opportunities exist, women athletes are often paid less than men (UN Women, 2024[32]).

More information is available from the recording of a 2024 OECD event for International Equal Pay Day, entitled "Closing the Gender Play Gap: Towards Pay Equity in Sports."

Suicide is a leading cause of death for young people, and boys and young men are far more likely to die by suicide than girls and young women. In OECD countries, for example, an average of about 9 boys and young men aged 15-19 years will die by suicide for every 100 000 boys and young men of the same age (Figure 7.5). For girls and young women, this figure is 3 per 100 000. Among those aged 20-24 years, rates rise to 17 per 100 000 for men, compared to 4 per 100 000 for women. Although boys and young men are more likely to die by suicide, girls and young women are found to have a higher risk of suicide attempts (Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2019[33]; Committee on Adolescence, 2016[34]).

In a systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, risk factors for suicide among boys and young men were "drug abuse, externalising disorders (e.g. conduct disorder, substance abuse disorder, deviant behaviour) and access to means (e.g. firearms, pesticides, toxic gas)" (Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2019[33]). For girls and young women, risk factors for suicide attempts include eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, being a victim of dating violence, depressive symptoms and interpersonal problems (Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2019[33]).

Gender differences in mortality from suicide attempts may be explained, at least in part, by differences in methods. Boys and young men, for instance, are more likely to use methods that have a higher risk of death, such as weapons and hanging, while girls and young women are more likely to use less lethal means, such as drug poisoning (Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2019[33]; Beautrais, 2003[35]; Mergl et al., 2015[36]; Rhodes, Lu and Skinner, 2014[37]).

Figure 7.5. Boys are more likely to die as a result of self-harm than girls

Death rate due to self-harm, population aged 0-24 years by age group and gender, rate per 100 000 persons, OECD-38 average, 2021
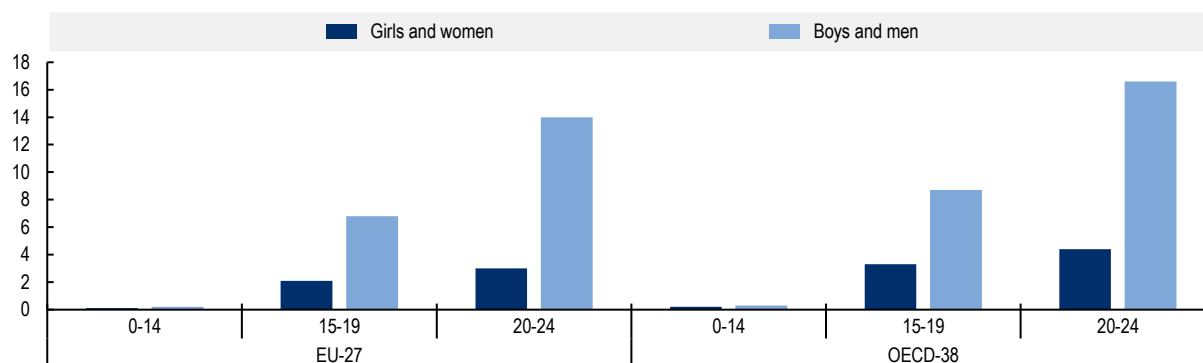
Note: EU-27 and OECD-38 are unweighted averages. IHME GBD provides estimates of the prevalence of a range of mental health conditions and neurological disorders based on a wide variety of data sources and a set of modelling assumptions. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: IHME GBD Results Tool (https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/).

The prevalence of mental health conditions and neurological disorders is higher among boys aged 0-14 years than among similarly aged girls, while it is higher among girls and young women aged 15-19 and 20-24 years than among similarly aged boys and young men (see Online Annex Figure 7-A2). Nonetheless, these aggregates mask considerable variation by type of mental health condition or neurological disorder, with girls and young women facing higher prevalence rates in the case of anxiety,

depressive and eating disorders and boys and young men facing higher prevalence rates for autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and conduct disorders (Figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6. Anxiety, depression and eating disorders are more common among girls, while autism, ADHD and conduct disorders are more common among boys

Prevalence of various mental health conditions and neurological disorders by age group and gender, population aged 0-24 years, rate per 100 000 population, OECD-38 averages, 2021
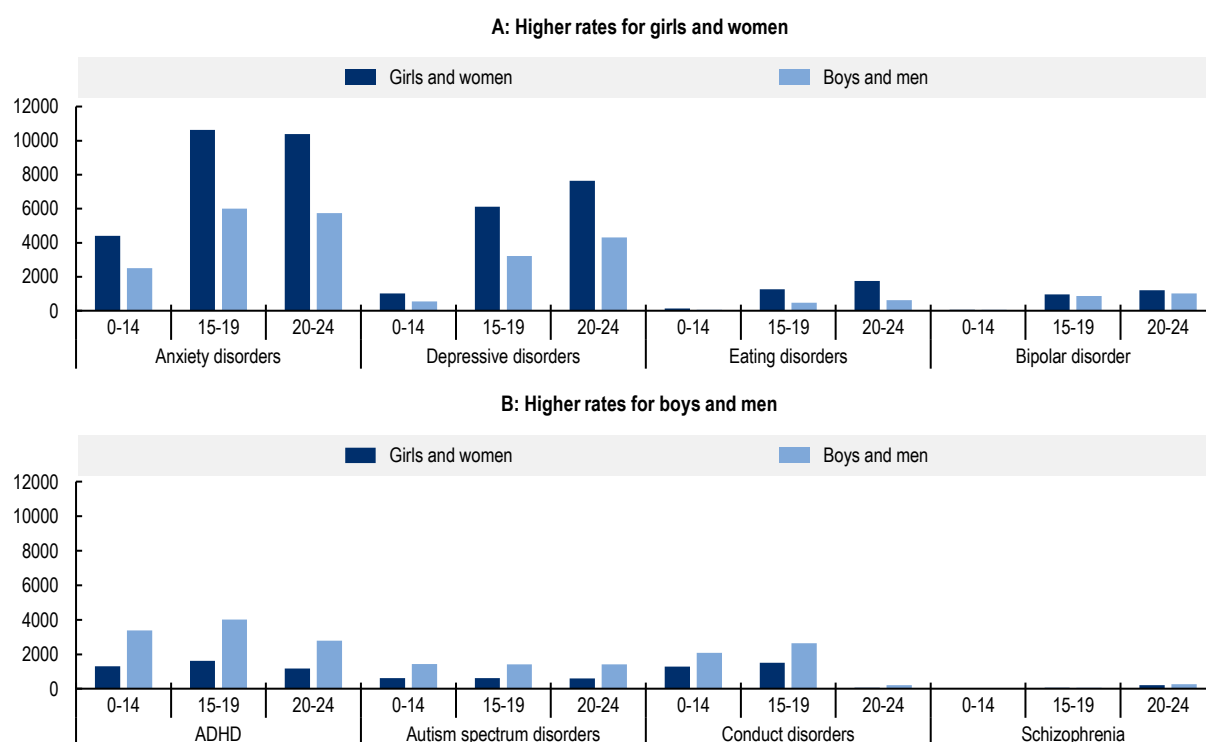
Note: OECD-38 averages are unweighted. ADHD is short for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. IHME GBD provides estimates of the prevalence of a range of mental health conditions and neurological disorders based on a wide variety of data sources and a set of modelling assumptions. IHME GBD defines prevalence as the proportion of people in a population who are a case of a disease, injury or sequela. All results refer to point prevalence. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: IHME GBD Results Tool (https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/).

Gender gaps in children's and young people's mental health and neurological disorders take place against the backdrop of under-developed and variable public support (including in schools) for children with mental health conditions and neurological disorders across EU and OECD countries (Brussino, 2020[38]; OECD, 2019[39]). For example, some countries provide only limited support to children with disability, difficulty and disadvantage at particular stages of learning, and some countries exclude some children with disability, difficulty and disadvantage from mainstream schools (Brussino, 2020[38]).

In face of significant challenges in the integration of children with mental health conditions and neurological disorders, many countries are attempting to develop adequate and inclusive educational, health and social systems for all children, which is foundational for improving outcomes for both girls and boys. Related to this, countries must also ensure that gender norms and stereotypes are not preventing diagnoses of girls and women, thereby limiting their access to these types of (developing) supports (Box 7.3).

Box 7.3. Are autism and ADHD underdiagnosed in girls and women?

Girls and women may be underdiagnosed in many areas of health (see Section 7.1.2), including certain neurological disorders, such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These two neurological disorders have long been identified as conditions experienced predominantly or mainly by men and boys (Werling and Geschwind, 2013[40]; Lai, Baron-Cohen and Buxbaum, 2015[41]). Although biology may explain part of this gender gap, other explanatory factors relate to the fact that early research on these issues included mostly or only men, and that gender norms and stereotypes may mediate typical signs and symptoms, both of which could lead to the mis- or underdiagnosis of these conditions in girls and women (Bölte et al., 2023[42]; Christiansen, McCarthy and Seeman, 2022[43]).

Clinicians, for instance, are more likely to recognise restricted interests in stereotypically "male" domains, such as transportation and space, as an indication of autism spectrum disorder, but may overlook restricted interests in stereotypically "female" areas, such as animals, art or literature (Harvard Medical School, 2023[44]). Repetitive patterns of behaviour may also present differently in girls and women compared to men and boys, tending toward behaviours such as perfectionism or disordered eating instead of rocking and hand or finger movements. In addition, girls and women with autism are more likely to be misdiagnosed by clinicians with conditions like anxiety, mood disorders and eating disorders – a phenomenon referred to as "diagnostic overshadowing." Consider, too, that girls and women with autism tend to have "stronger social imitation skills and the ability to mimic social behaviour" (Harvard Medical School, 2023[44]), often having "one or two close friendships" that help them to "absorb social rules and norms" and to mask or moderate personal challenges with socialising and communicating (Harvard Medical School, 2023[44]). This, however, makes it more challenging to identify autism in girls in "everyday interactions or larger classroom or employment settings" (Harvard Medical School, 2023[44]).

In a similar way, the diagnostic bias in ADHD likely reflects a combination of biologically determined differences in symptom presentation and gender-specific perceptions of ADHD symptoms in girls and boys (Waite, 2010[45]; Martin, 2024[46]).

7.1.2. Adulthood: Women report higher unmet healthcare needs, but men have higher mortality rates

Gender gaps in health outcomes, behaviours and experiences in childhood and youth foreshadow those in adulthood across key indicators, including unmet healthcare needs, mortality, self-perceived health, physical activity, mental health, suicide and more.

Women are more likely to report unmet healthcare needs

Self-reported unmet healthcare needs – an important indication of perceived access to care – are higher among women than among men across all age groups (Figure 7.7, Panel A). In EU-27 countries, for example, 28% of women report unmet healthcare needs due to financial reasons, distance or transportation, or a waiting list, while only 23% of men report the same.

Figure 7.7. Women are more likely to report unmet healthcare needs than men and are less likely to perceive that they have access to good quality and affordable healthcare

Share (%) of women and men (15+) reporting unmet healthcare needs, by age group, 2019 (Panel A) and share (%) of women and men who believe that they and their household have or would have access to good quality and affordable healthcare, 2024 (Panel B)

A: Unmet healthcare needs

B: Perceptions of access to good quality and affordable healthcare
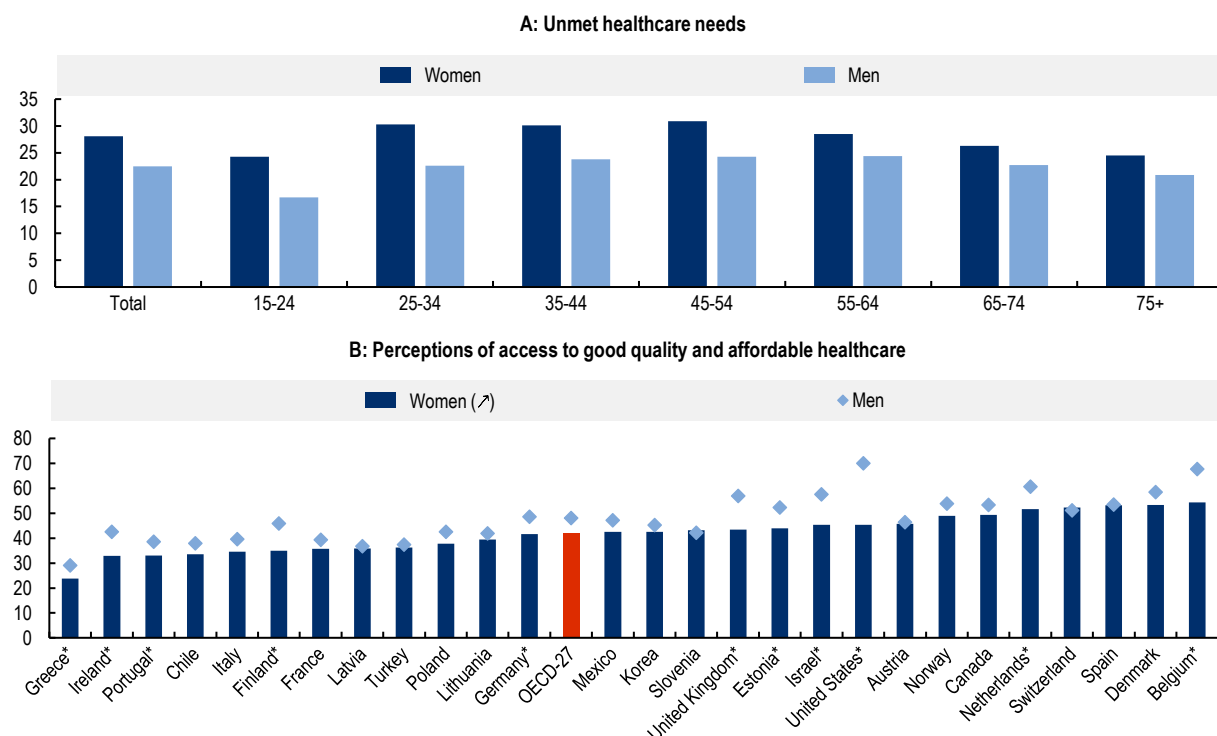
Note: In Panel A, EU-27 is a weighted average. Estimates refer to the proportion of people in need of healthcare reporting to have experienced delay in getting healthcare in the previous 12 months for reasons of financial barriers, long waiting lists, distance or transportation problems. In Panel B, OECD-27 is an unweighted average of the 27 OECD countries participating in the OECD RTM Survey. The share refers to the percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the following statement "I think that my household and I have/would have access to good quality and affordable public services in the area of health services, if needed." Response options were "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," "Neither agree nor disagree," "Agree," "Strongly agree" and "Can't choose." Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: Eurostat "Self-reported unmet needs for healthcare by sex, age, specific reasons and educational attainment level" (https://doi.org/10.2908/HLTH_EHIS_UN1E) (Panel A) and OECD Secretariat calculations using OECD 2024 Risks that Matter Survey microdata (https://oe.cd/rtm) (Panel B).

These gender gaps likely reflect the combination of several factors, including (but not limited to):

- A greater need for care among women than men due to poorer health over the life course (see below).
- An elevated risk of mis- and under-diagnosis among women compared to men (see below), which may cause women to regularly return to the doctor to find answers.
- A lower ability to afford care due to women's lower earnings (see Chapter 5).
- A greater prevalence of gender-based violence (see Chapter 8) and/or differing or more severe physical and mental health impacts among women compared to men.
- Gender-specific health issues relating to pregnancy, childbirth (e.g. postpartum depression), menopause and reproductive health (e.g. endometriosis).

Gender gaps in unmet healthcare needs may also reflect stereotypes and norms around "waiting it out" and being "tough" that are stronger for men than for women (i.e. men may have a higher threshold for seeking treatment than women) (Cleveland Clinic, 2019[47]; Höhn et al., 2020[48]). This aligns with findings that men are less likely to use preventive healthcare and medicine (see below).

These factors are reflected in recent results from the 2024 OECD Risks that Matter (RTM) Survey, which finds that women are 6 percentage points less likely than men to believe that they and their family would have access to affordable and good quality health services, if needed (Figure 7.7, Panel B). In 11 of 27 participating RTM countries, women are statistically significantly less likely to express this belief.

Higher unmet healthcare needs among women may stem from poorer health

In EU and OECD countries, women are less likely to feel healthy than men, with 66% of women reporting good or very good self-perceived health in OECD-37 countries, compared to 71% of men (Figure 7.2). This gender difference is driven by a complex combination of biological, social, behavioural and socio-economic factors, including that women and men experience different physical and mental health conditions.

In the flagship 2025 OECD Patient Reported Indicator Surveys (PaRIS), for example, women were more likely to report arthritis and mental health conditions, while men were more likely to report hypertension and cardiovascular and heart conditions (Figure 7.8). This is aligned with other work that finds that women experience a higher burden of morbidity-driven conditions (e.g. low back pain, depressive disorders and headache disorders), while men have a higher burden for mortality-driven conditions (e.g. road injuries, ischemic heart disease). Indeed, the six causes with the highest disease burden disfavouring women were headache disorders, anxiety, depressive disorders, other musculoskeletal disorders, low back pain and dementia (Patwardhan et al., 2024[49]).

Figure 7.8. Women more often report arthritis and mental health conditions, while men lead in hypertension and cardiovascular and heart conditions

Share (%) of women and men by chronic conditions, women and men with one or more chronic conditions, 2024
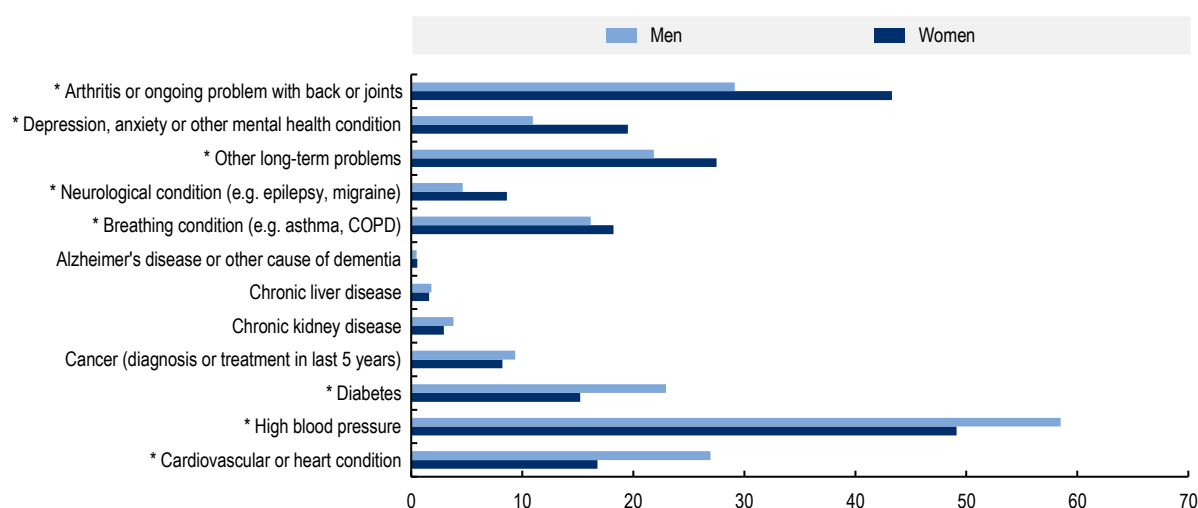
Note: * indicates that the difference is statistically significant (p<0.05). Conditions are sorted by the relative difference calculated by dividing the prevalence in men by the prevalence in women. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: Figure 5.1 from OECD (2025[3]), available at https://stat.link/qnsd52.

Women are more likely to be underdiagnosed than men

Evidence points to the potential for significant gender differences in healthcare diagnosis and treatment within healthcare systems, including that women may be more likely than men to be underdiagnosed or left undiagnosed. In the United Kingdom, for example, women were found to be more likely than men to wait at least 10 months between their first visit to a doctor and their diagnosis for cancer and many women reported "not being taken seriously" (The Brain Tumour Charity, 2016[50]). Other studies find diagnostic delays as well (e.g. Din et al. (2015[51])). Women may also receive different treatments than men. For instance, evidence points to gender differences in the treatment and discharge of patients who suffered a stroke, with women less likely than men to be prescribed statins (Dahl, Hjalmarsson and Andersson, 2020[52]). Women may additionally receive improper diagnoses, with evidence pointing to cases of women with complex trauma being labelled with bipolar disorder, preventing them from receiving proper treatment (Department of Health and Social Care, 2018[53]).

These outcomes may stem, in part, from a lack of health research on women and women's health issues, which hinders progress in many areas and diseases that disproportionately affect women. For example, women are often underrepresented in clinical trials (Franklin, Bambra and Albani, 2021[54]). Indeed, a study of over 20 000 clinical trials shows gender bias in enrolment, with women's representation lowest compared to disease burden in oncology, neurology, immunology, and nephrology (Steinberg et al., 2021[55]). This means that medication and treatments may not be as effective for women as for men and may produce different – potentially more harmful – side effects (Franklin, Bambra and Albani, 2021[54]). This may be true even of women-dominated mental health conditions, for which health research often uses primarily men or male animals (Bangasser and Cuarenta, 2021[56]). It also means that doctors may not recognise certain more gendered signs and symptoms. Research is increasingly documenting, for example, that women may experience different heart attack or stroke symptoms like back pain, dizziness, or nausea, while men typically report chest pain and sweating (Department of Cardiovascular Sciences, 2017[57]; Quaye, 2024[58]). In addition to differing signs and symptoms, two common tests used for diagnosing heart attacks – the cardiac troponin test and cardiac catheterisation – are not as effective in women (Quaye, 2024[58]).

Clinical trials also often exclude people with pre-existing autoimmune diseases (Kehl et al., 2019[59]), many of which are more common in women than men (Kronzer, Bridges and Davis, 2020[60]), as well as pregnant women (Chambers, Polifka and Friedman, 2007[61]; Shields and Lyerly, 2013[62]), significantly limiting the understanding of drug safety and drug interactions, especially during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Evidence further suggests there are large epidemiological and clinical data gaps for conditions predominantly or exclusively affecting women, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, chronic gynaecologic issues (e.g. endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome, fibroids), menopause-related conditions, and certain autoimmune disorders (Temkin et al., 2023[63]). Indeed, stigma around menstrual disorders and female reproductive diseases has led to inadequate treatments and underinvestment in research (As-Sanie et al., 2019[64]). The lack of consistent definitions and measurement scales only contribute to additional biases in diagnosing these conditions. Underdiagnoses and undertreatment may also be an issue for certain men-specific conditions (e.g. male infertility) (Pandruvada et al., 2021[65]) or among men who are experiencing diseases considered to be primarily an issue among women (e.g. osteoporosis) (Rinonapoli et al., 2021[66]).

This lack of research and treatment of gender-specific conditions and gendered differences in the presentation of conditions can feed into and reproduce gender bias, with doctors sometimes attributing the pain and symptoms experienced by women to "emotional rather than physical causes" (Agarwal, 2023[67]; Drossman and Ruddy, 2020[68]; Shahvisi, 2018[69]). As an example, women wait an average of 7-9 years for a diagnosis of endometriosis, which can impart significant negative impacts physically, psychologically and financially (Frankel, 2022[70]; Ghai et al., 2019[71]). Perceptions that women's pain is emotionally-driven may also interact with bias against other groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, compounding the

likelihood of misdiagnosis, underdiagnosis and undertreatment (Hoffman et al., 2016[72]; Boakye et al., 2024[73]).

Gender bias in medical education also contributes to gendered outcomes in healthcare settings as curricula and clinical guidelines often overlook gender differences in health conditions, symptoms and treatment responses. These biases in medical education are themselves partly rooted in the above-noted lack of gender-sensitive research and over-reliance on men in clinical trials.

With mounting evidence that women face disadvantages in medical settings, it is perhaps not surprising that in the EU, 16% of men and 22% of women believe men are treated better by medical staff than women (Eurobarometer, 2024[74]). Women also tend to trust the healthcare system less than men. Recent evidence from the OECD's Patient-Reported Indicator Surveys (PaRIS), for example, find that in a third of participating countries, the gender gap in trust in the healthcare system is over 10% and in all but two countries it is over 5% (OECD, 2025[3]).

Collectively, these findings suggest that a lack gender mainstreaming into healthcare research may be affecting women's and men's experiences and outcomes of care.

Men are more likely to die

Despite men's better self-perceived health compared to women and women's greater self-reported unmet healthcare needs compared to men, men are more likely to die than women across all age groups, with gender gaps in mortality increasing with age (Figure 7.9). The top five causes of death in 2022 – cardiovascular disease, cancer, COVID-19, respiratory disease, and metabolic disorders – accounted for 75% of deaths for both genders.

Figure 7.9. Men are more likely than women to die at all ages

Gender gap (men minus women) in mortality rates, deaths per 100 000 population, by age group, 2021
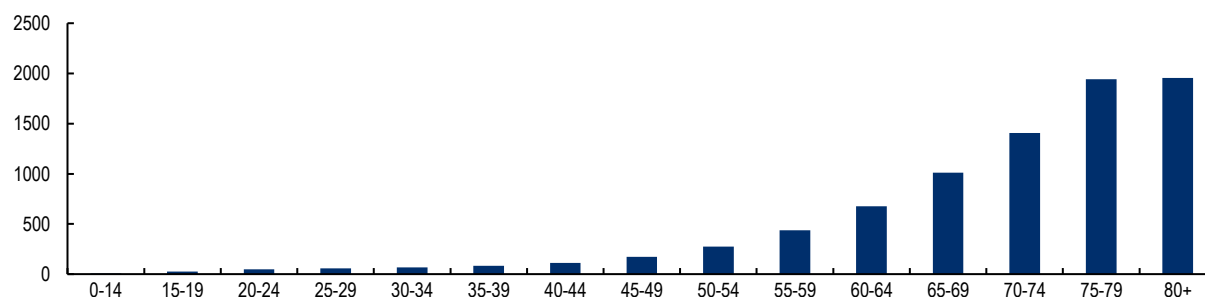
Note: OECD-38 are unweighted averages. IHME GBD provides estimates of the prevalence of a range of mental health conditions and neurological disorders based on a wide variety of data sources and a set of modelling assumptions. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: IHME GBD Results Tool (https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/).

Higher mortality among men than women across age brackets is driven by numerous causes, including higher levels of assault, intentional self-harm and accidents. Men are considerably more likely to die than women even for those causes of death that rank highly among women, such as malignant neoplasms (cancer) and ischaemic heart diseases (Table 7.1). Indeed, when looking at different causes of death most of them disfavour men. Zeroing in on cancer, for women, breast and lung cancer have the highest mortality rates. For men, it is lung and prostate cancer (Online Annex Figure 7-A3) (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[75]).

Standardised mortality rates per 100 000 population, women and men, by cause of death, average of 39 EU and OECD countries, 2022 or latest

	Women		Men		Gender gap
	Rate	Rank	Rate	Rank	Percent (%) (↗)
Assault	0.9	18	4.5	13	404%
Intentional self-harm	4.8	12	17.0	12	252%
Accidents	20.1	9	44.9	6	123%
Ischaemic heart diseases	91.3	2	164.1	2	80%
Diseases of the respiratory system	51.2	4	88.5	3	73%
Diseases of the digestive system	30.4	7	51.9	5	71%
Malignant neoplasms	158.8	1	258.0	1	62%
Certain infectious and parasitic diseases	11.8	11	17.1	11	45%
Diseases of the genitourinary system	16.8	10	23.1	10	38%
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	32.1	6	41.2	7	28%
Cerebrovascular diseases	63.2	3	78.4	4	24%
Certain conditions originating in the perinatal period	2.0	17	2.4	17	21%
Diseases of the blood and blood-forming organs	2.5	14	3.0	15	17%
Diseases of the nervous system	34.5	5	39.8	8	16%
Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities	2.3	15	2.6	16	15%
Mental and behavioural disorders	28.5	8	29.8	9	5%
Diseases of the skin and subcutaneous tissue	2.1	16	2.1	18	3%
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	4.4	13	3.6	14	-19%
Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium	0.3	19			
Total	**779.5**		**1 197.8**		**54%**

Note: Gender gap is measured as the rate for men less the rate for women divided by the rate for women. Data are an unweighted average across 39 EU and OECD countries, including all 38 EU countries minus New Zealand and Norway plus Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania. Rates are age-standardised to remove variations arising from differences in age structures. Data are extracted from the WHO Mortality Database. Data for Australia, Canada, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden are for 2022. Data for Austria, Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Mexico, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland and the United States are for 2021. Data for Belgium, Costa Rica, Germany, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom are for 2020. Data for Portugal, Romania and Türkiye are from 2019. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: OECD Data Explorer "Causes of mortality" (https://data-explorer.oecd.org/s/pv).

Explanations for higher mortality among men

Beyond physiological differences between women and men, there are several reasons why women and men may have different rates of death for these underlying causes.

- **Lower rates of consultations of medical professionals**: Men are less likely to seek and use healthcare. In 2019, in EU-27 countries, men were less likely to have seen a specialist medical practitioner (13 percentage points), to have seen a general medical practitioner (8 percentage points less likely than women), to have called on a dentist (6 percentage points), to have consulted a physiotherapist (5 percentage points), and to have visited a mental health professional (3 percentage points), in the last 12 months (Online Annex Figure 7-A4, Panel A) (Eurostat, 2022[76]; 2022[77]).

- **Lower use of preventive medical services**: Self-reported screening for cardiovascular diseases and diabetes is lower among men than among women. In 2019 in EU-27 countries, men were less likely than women to have undertaken a blood pressure measurement (7 percentage points), a blood sugar measurement (6 percentage points) and a blood cholesterol measurement

(5 percentage points) in the past 12 months. By contrast, men were more likely to report having received an influenza vaccination in the past 12 months (3 percentage points). There was little gender difference in reported colonoscopies and colorectal cancer screening (Online Annex Figure 7-A4, Panel B) (Eurostat, 2022[78]; 2022[79]; 2022[80]; 2022[81]).

- **Lower prescription medication use**: Men are less likely to use prescription medicines than women. In 2019, across EU-27 countries, 52% of women reported using medicines prescribed by a doctor in the past 2 weeks, compared to 43% of men (Online Annex Figure 7-A5, Panel A) (Eurostat, 2022[82]). This gender difference may partly reflect women's use of prescribed contraceptives. However, gender gaps in the use of prescribed medicine exist for all age groups, including among older women, suggesting that contraceptives are not the only explanation. Further to this, the use of non-prescribed medicines shows a similar differential overall and by age group (Online Annex Figure 7-A5, Panel B) (Eurostat, 2022[83]).

- **More likely to be overweight and obese**: Women are less likely to be overweight or obese than men. In OECD-32 countries, about 48% of women are overweight or obese using self-reported measures of height and weight to estimate body mass index (BMI) (Online Annex Figure 7-A6, Panel A) (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[84]). This compares to 61% of men. Such self-reported measures are, however, subject to bias – whether due to misreporting of height or weight (Ng et al., 2011[85]; Merrill and Richardson, 2009[86]). Comparing across data sources for countries where both measured and self-reported data are available, the share of women who are overweight or obese is 8 percentage points higher when using measured data instead of self-reported data, while the share of men who are overweight or obese is 6 percentage points higher (Online Annex Figure 7-A6, Panel B) (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[84]).

- **Greater concentration in industries with higher rates of fatality at work:** Accidents are a significant cause of death among men and some of these fatal accidents occur at work. In 2022, there were 3.2 fatal accidents per 100 000 employed men, compared to 0.3 per 100 000 employed women (Eurostat, 2024[87]). This gender difference is, in part, driven by occupational and industrial segregation by gender. Construction, transportation and storage, manufacturing and agriculture, forestry and fishing are the industries that contribute the most to fatal accidents at work – all of which are men-dominated (Eurostat, 2024[88]).

- **Greater risk factors and risky behaviours**: Women are less likely than men to engage in health-enhancing behaviours, such as physical activity. In 2019, 29% of women across EU-27 countries engaged in at least 150 minutes or more of health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week – the WHO recommendation (WHO, 2020[18]). This compares to 37% of men (Online Annex Figure 7-A7) (Eurostat, 2022[89]). By contrast, men are more likely to engage in health-reducing risky behaviours, like smoking and heavy drinking. Men, for example, are 8 percentage points more likely than women to smoke daily, 9 percentage points more likely than women to drink every day and 5 percentage points more likely than women to drink heavily at least once a week (Online Annex Figure 7-A8) (Eurostat, 2022[90]; 2022[91]; 2022[92]). These risky behaviours are linked to an increased risk of cancer, illness and disease.

Box 7.4. Spotlight on intersectionality: Health-reducing and -enhancing behaviours and income

Health-reducing behaviours are more common among individuals with low income – and this relationship is much stronger for men than for women. Consider daily smoking: about 18% of women in the lowest income quintile smoke cigarettes daily, while only 13% of women in the highest income quintile do (Online Annex Figure 7-A9) (Eurostat, 2022[93]). For men, there is an 11 percentage point difference between the top and the bottom, with 28% of men in the first income quintile smoking daily compared to 17% in the fifth income quintile.

Turning to health-enhancing behaviours, only 23% of women in the first income quintile report engaging in at least 150 minutes or more of health-enhancing (non-work-related) aerobic physical activity per week (the WHO recommendation) (WHO, 2020[18]), while 36% of women in the fifth income quintile report doing so (Online Annex Figure 7-A10) (Eurostat, 2022[94]). The relationship is slightly less strong for men, with 34% of those in the first income quintile and 44% of those in the fifth income quintile meeting or exceeding the WHO recommendation.

Box 7.5. More data and research needed on occupational health and safety in women-dominated occupations and industries

Given the higher rate of death for men at work in men-dominated industries, occupational health and safety has long been concerned with improving working conditions in jobs dominated by men. Although it is vitally important to continue to improve occupational health and safety in these jobs, this focus has also left occupational health and safety in traditionally women-dominated fields, such as in cleaning, hairdressing and healthcare, both understudied and underreported. There is, for instance, a general lack of knowledge regarding the health impact of the interaction of the different types of chemical products used in traditionally women-dominated occupations and the health impact of long-term exposure to such products individually or in combination. There may also be important differences in the rates at which women and men uptake and metabolise different dangerous substances even within the same occupation, and exposure to certain dangerous substances can affect women's fertility and foetal development. In addition, in both men- and women-dominated industries and occupations, personal protection equipment (PPE) (e.g. gloves, boots, masks, helmets, body armour) designed to be gender neutral may be ill-fitting, hamper work and/or create safety and health hazards.

Source: Criado Perez (2019[95]), Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2023[96]) and European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2013[97]).

Self-perceived mental health is lower for women than for men

Women tend to fare worse than men across a range of metrics related to mental health, including self-perceived mental health and common mental health conditions (EIGE, 2021[98]). Data from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) Survey, for instance, show that women are more likely to be at risk of experiencing mental distress than men across all age groups (Figure 7.10). Results from OECD's Patient-Reported Indicator Surveys (PaRIS) confirm these findings, with women more likely to report mental health conditions (e.g. depression, anxiety) and lower levels of mental health (OECD, 2025[3]).

Figure 7.10. Women are more likely to report mental distress than men

Share (%) of women and men at risk of experiencing mental distress by age group, average of 26 OECD countries, 2018
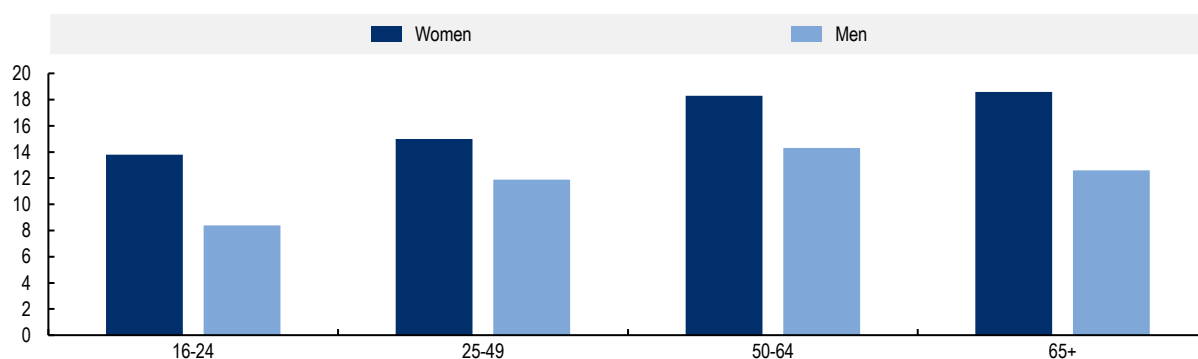
Note: The MHI-5 questionnaire consists of five questions, including "Have you been a happy person" (reverse coded), "Have you felt calm and peaceful" (reverse coded), "Have you been a very nervous person," "Have you felt downhearted and blue," and "Have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up." Response options are "All of the time," "Most of the time," "A good bit of the time," "Some of the time," "A little of the time," and "None of the time," with scores ranging from 1 (All of the time) to 6 (None of the time). All items are added together to provide a score ranging from 5-30, which is then transformed into a variable ranging from 0-100 using a standard linear transformation. Risk of mental distress is defined as having a score greater than or equal to 52 on a scale from 0 (least distressed) to 100 (most distressed). Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: Figure 3.4 (https://stat.link/3yntk5) in OECD (2023[99]) based on the 2018 European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) Survey.

Prevalence rates of common mental health disorders also tend to be higher among women. Across OECD countries, for example, the prevalence of anxiety disorders stands at 7 834 women per 100 000 population, compared to 4 325 men per 100 000 population. For depressive disorders, prevalence rates are, on average, 6 114 per 100 000 population for women versus 3 725 per 100 000 population for men. By contrast, the prevalence rates of ADHD, autism spectrum disorder and conduct disorder are higher among men (Box 7.3). Rates for these conditions and disorders are, nevertheless, considerably lower than reported rates for anxiety and depression.

Table 7.2. Anxiety and depression are notably more prevalent among women than men

Prevalence of mental disorders, women and men, rate per 100 000 population, 2021

	Women (rate per 100 000 population)	Men (rate per 100 000 population)	Gender gap (women-men)
Anxiety disorders	7 834	4 325	3 509
Depressive disorders	6 114	3 725	2 389
Eating disorders	497	222	276
Bipolar disorder	901	744	157
Idiopathic developmental intellectual disability	279	246	32
Schizophrenia	307	325	-18
Conduct disorder	294	537	-243
Other mental disorders	1 641	2 319	-677
Autism spectrum disorder	546	1 313	-767
Attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	614	1 576	-962

Note: OECD-38 are unweighted averages. IHME GBD provides estimates of the prevalence of a range of mental health conditions and neurological disorders based on a wide variety of data sources and a set of modelling assumptions. The IHME defines prevalence as the proportion of people in a population who are a case of a disease, injury or sequela. All results refer to point prevalence. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: IHME GBD Results Tool (https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/).

While all available data suggests considerable gendered patterns in mental health outcomes ("objective" differences in women's and men's experiences of mental health and ill-health), differential rates of reporting are also likely influenced by social and cultural norms. Surveys on attitudes toward mental health and stigma in Sweden, for instance, have found that women are more likely to "report feeling positive attitudes towards those with mental health conditions" than men, which could imply a greater willingness for women to be open about their own mental health (OECD, 2023[99]). Men have also been found to minimise their symptoms more than women, especially when reporting symptoms may result in follow-up treatments and care (OECD, 2023[99]). On top of this, men may struggle with recognising and communicating issues relating to mental ill health to health professionals and with rapport-building (Yousaf, Grunfeld and Hunter, 2013[100]). This suggests that enhancing access to mental health support is only one piece of the puzzle in combatting gender gaps in mental health. Governments should also consider addressing gender norms and stereotypes that discourage men from reporting mental distress and seeking care, and invest in education to help men recognise and communicate about mental ill-health.

Although presented separately, physical health and mental health are intimately related to one another through direct and indirect channels (OECD, 2021[101]; Ohrnberger, Fichera and Sutton, 2017[102]; Canadian Mental Health Association, 2024[103]; Naylor et al., 2016[104]). Chronic stress and anxiety, for instance, have been shown to have negative effects on the cardiovascular, nervous and immune systems. Lower mental health may also affect decision-making processes regarding healthcare, including reduced motivation and use of preventive medicine. From another perspective, living with a chronic condition can have important mental health impacts, especially if the chronic condition limits or interferes with daily living or is subject to bias and discrimination. In addition to influencing one another, many external factors can negatively affect both physical and mental health at the same time, such as poverty, a loss of employment, social isolation, discrimination, trauma, abuse and substance use.

Box 7.6. Spotlight on intersectionality: Mental health and race and ethnicity

Few OECD countries have publicly available, easily accessible data on race and ethnicity, but race and ethnicity may interact with gender to impact mental health.

In Australia, for example, 42% of First Nations women had a diagnosed mental health condition in 2018-19, compared to 30% of men – a gap of 12 percentage points (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, n.d.[105]).

In Canada, 39% of visible minority women and 53% of visible minority men reported excellent or very good mental health in Q2-Q3 of 2023, for a gender gap of 14 percentage points. This compares to 52% of men and 46% of women who are not a visible minority, a gender gap of 6 percentage points (Statistics Canada, 2024[106]).

7.1.3. Later adulthood: Women live longer than men, but additional years are often in poor health

Upon reaching the age of 60 years, women can continue to expect to live longer than men in all EU and OECD countries. However, as with life expectancies at birth, factoring in healthy life years reduces gender gaps. This suggests that even though men may be dying before women, the extra years gained by women are likely to be lived in poor health (Figure 7.11) (OECD, 2023[107]). It is therefore unsurprising that women represent more than half of all long-term care recipients, both in institutions and in homes (Online Annex Figure 7-A11) (OECD Data Explorer, 2024[108]).

Figure 7.11. Factoring in the quality of additional life years reduces gender gaps in life expectancy at age 60

Life expectancy and healthy life years at age 60 years, number of years, 2021
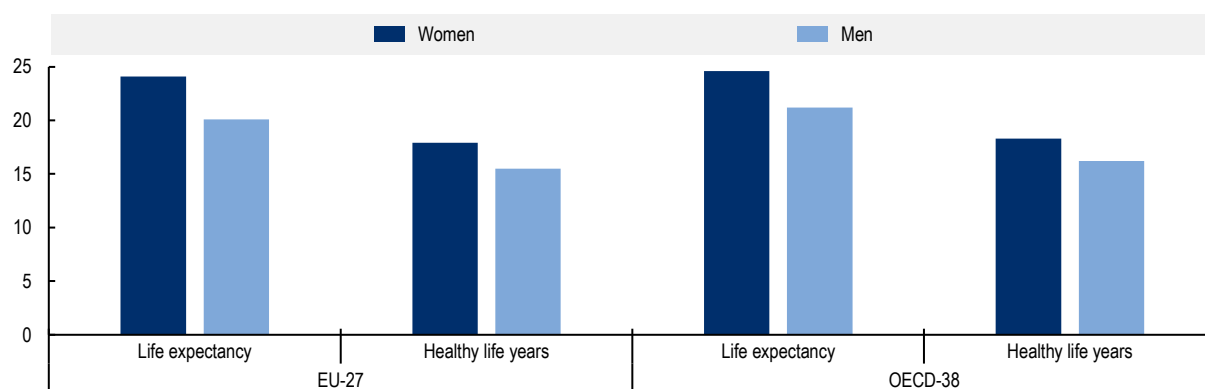
Note: EU-27 and OECD-38 averages are unweighted. The average number of years in full health a person (usually at age 60) can expect to live based on current rates of ill-health and mortality. See WHO "Healthy life expectancy (HALE) at age 60 (years)" for more details. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 7.A.
Source: WHO "Life expectancy and Healthy life expectancy" (www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/indicator-groups/indicator-group-details/GHO/life-expectancy-and-healthy-life-expectancy).

> ### Box 7.7. Additional data sources on gender equality in health
>
> Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:
>
> - **OECD Health at a Glance**: Provides a set of comprehensive indicators on population health and health system performance, including health status, risk factors for health, access to and quality of healthcare, and health system resources.
> - **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps**: Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance and private and public leadership, technology and resources and health and well-being.
> - **Institute for Health Metrics (IHME) Global Burden of Disease (GBD)**: Covers over 400 health outcomes across more than 200 countries and territories to present 600+ billion highly standardised and comprehensive estimates of health outcomes and systems.
> - **World Health Organization (WHO) Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study**: Presents key indicators into health and well-being and the social determinants of health for young people.
> - **WHO Global Health Observatory**: Provides updated data on health and health-related indicators across a range of subjects, including violence, mental health, child mortality, tobacco control, health financing, health taxes and more.
> - **OECD Patient-Reported Indicator Surveys (OECD PaRIS)**: Presents indicators on self-reported health outcomes and experiences with healthcare among people aged 45 years and older who live with chronic conditions.
> - **OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI):** Contains data on laws, social norms and practices relating to discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted civil liberties and restricted access to productive and financial resources.

7.2. Policy combinations to advance gender equality in health

Using Table 7.3, this section applies the **priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality in health by exploring two **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1): improving gender equality in physical and mental health (Outcome A) and reducing gender gaps in physical activity and at all levels of sport (Outcome B). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 7.1 and additional sources.

Table 7.3 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying cross-portfolio policy and programme *combinations*** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 7.3 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

Overcoming **gender gaps in physical and mental health**, for example, demands a comprehensive approach across the life course. This includes efforts to support a better understanding of gender-specific health conditions and gender differences in signs and symptoms, as well as efforts to address biases in diagnoses and treatments. Governments may need to revisit medical education, curricula and clinical guidelines to ensure that they do not overlook those gender differences, and implement complementary

interventions (e.g. awareness raising and training) to address gender biases or underrepresentation in research and clinical trials.

Complementary policies can look at tackling gender stereotypes and norms that may limit the extent to which men seek care, prevent men from recognising and communicating about mental ill-health or distress with medical practitioners, or lead to a belief that women's pain is a product of emotional rather than physical causes. Tackling gender norms and stereotypes should start early with adequate health education for girls and boys, including a special emphasis on screening, early detection, healthy eating and physical activity.

Approaches to ensure that the specific needs of women and men are better met in healthcare settings encompass ensuring equal representation of women and men as decision-makers on hospital boards and redesigning healthcare services to mainstream gender considerations into both preventive and emergency healthcare (e.g. triage, treatment and discharge). Complementing these interventions with stronger and more inclusive care and social protection systems can contribute to a better work-life balance for both women and men, including access to and use of healthcare services for themselves and their families. Indeed, policies that provide paid parental leave and affordable childcare have been associated with improved physical and mental health outcomes for both parents and children (Van Niel et al., 2020[109]).

Reducing and eliminating **gender gaps in physical activity and at all levels of sport** also requires a comprehensive approach across various domains and ministries – including education and skills, labour, health, justice and transportation. For instance, supporting the early involvement of girls in physical activity and sports through school curricula and extracurricular activities is crucial for future healthy habits in adulthood. Complementary investments in safe and inclusive sports complexes, fitness facilities, recreational centres and active transportation methods can help to ensure that women feel comfortable and safe engaging in physical activity.

Table 7.3 also highlights the important **feedback loops** between policy goals. Closing gender gaps in physical activity (Outcome B) will also improve women's physical health (Outcome A). Preventing and eliminating gender-based violence and supporting victims/survivors (see Chapter 8) can improve physical and mental health for women. Supporting women's representation in positions of leadership, including in hospitals and sports organisations (see Chapter 6), can help to ensure a greater consideration of those issues facing women and girls. Tackling the (gendered) social determinants of health, including poorer labour market outcomes, lower earnings and a higher risk of old-age poverty for women (see Chapter 5) can further improve women's health and women's access to healthcare.

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes** outlined in Table 7.3 varies across countries and across time. Continuous *monitoring and evaluation* that incorporates a gender perspective (priority consideration 5) is essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended outcomes; identify strengths and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings.

For example, a systematic review of the effects of awareness raising and training programmes on gender sensitivity and unconscious biases revealed their positive effects in terms of gender-related knowledge, attitudes and practices among healthcare providers, but highlighted a critical need for more rigorous evaluation of the long-term impact on healthcare providers' behaviours and practices (Lindsay et al., 2019[110]). Other research has shown that the engagement of men and boys alongside women has proved key in addressing gender inequality and ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, but a systematic review highlighted that the engagement of men and boys needs to be further strengthened in research and programming (Ruane-McAteer et al., 2019[111]). This is corroborated by studies that indicate

that organisations with greater workplace diversity tend to have better patient outcomes (Gomez and Bernet, 2019[112]).

Evidence also suggests that educational initiatives can increase men's engagement with health services, thereby improving health outcomes (Mahalik, Burns and Syzdek, 2007[113]). This is true also for girls' physical activity, with a randomised control trial showing that comprehensive school-based interventions increased regular participation in vigorous physical activity among high-school girls (Pate et al., 2005[114]).

7.2.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 7.3. Existing policy options to improve gender equality in physical and mental health (Outcome A) and reduce gender gaps in physical activity (Outcome B)

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Support healthy habits and challenge gender stereotypes and norms around health											
A	Launch gender-sensitive health promotion campaigns (e.g. **campaigns with a gender focus** to promote health-enhancing behaviours, such as physical activity), limit **health-reducing behaviours** (e.g. smoking and drinking) and/or reduce **stigma around mental health**, especially among boys and men.	X		X						X	COL, CZE, LVA, MLT, NOR, PRT, ROU, SLV
A, B	Address **gender inequality in participation in sport**, including the impacts of differential sports coverage of women and men in the media.			X						X	HRV
Ensure women's economic security and independence											
A, B	Tackle the (gendered) **social determinants of health**, including poorer labour market outcomes, lower earnings and a higher risk of old-age poverty for women (see Chapter 5).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
A, B	Build **health education into curricula**, with a specific emphasis on tackling gender norms and stereotypes around screening and early detection, healthy eating and physical activity (see Chapter 4).	X	X	X						X	Many countries
Integrate in gender-sensitive thinking into health-related systems											
A	**Design and manage health information, hospitals and healthcare settings** to consider the specific needs of women and men and reduce inequalities in access to care (e.g. risk prevention, reproductive health, emergency care, mental health care, etc.).			X						X	CHE, CYP, CZE, FRA, JPN, PRT

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A	Raise **awareness** of and/or offer **training for medical and other key professionals on gender-specific health concerns, gender sensitivity and unconscious biases** to reduce gender gaps in detection and treatment, research and development and innovation.	X	X	X						X	CHE, COL, DEU, FRA, JPN, MLT, NOR, ROU
A	Ensure protection of **women's reproductive health,** access to (affordable or free) **contraception and menstrual products**, and/or **maternal** care for mother and child during pregnancy, childbirth and post-partum.	X		X						X	CAN, CHE, COL, CRI, CYP, CZE, DEU, FRA, HRV, HUN, JPN, LVA, MLT, PRT, ROU, SWE
A, B	Understand and address the specific health needs of elderly women, promoting **active and healthy ageing** to minimise the likelihood of poor health in old age.	X		X						X	MLT, JPN
A, B	Create **women's community centres** and/or mobile health units with dedicated medical services teams to ensure equal access to lifelong, gender-sensitive advice on health and well-being.	X		X						X	FRA, HUN, LVA
A	Better **target health advice** and resources to the unique circumstances of women and men, including through advanced technologies that support greater personalisation of support.			X		X				X	ISL, LTU
A, B	Offer **training** to officials (e.g. coaches, referees) **on gender sensitivity** in sports and/or on **health issues specific to women athletes.**	X	X	X						X	HRV, JPN
Build strong and inclusive care and social protection systems											
A	Launch **preventive healthcare programmes** and/or **accessible screening** with a gender-specific focus (e.g. breast cancer screening, men's mental health).	X		X						X	DEU, HUN, NOR, SVN
A, B	Expand access to high-quality affordable **long-term care** to offer older people – who are majority women – better care as they age.		X	X						X	Many countries
A, B	Provide flexible, high-quality, accessible, affordable, and available **childcare,** including out-of-school care and on-site services, which can support women and men who require regular or continued hospital services and those engaging in physical activity and sports.		X	X						X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
					Likely Ministries Involved						
A, B	Provide **paid parental and paternity leave**, supporting take-up by fathers, including among men athletes, who can serve as role models supporting gender equality.		X							X	Many countries
Embed gender equality considerations into decision-making and leadership											
A	Introduce interventions to facilitate the **advancement of women into leadership positions**, including in public and private hospitals (see Chapter 6).		X	X						X	Many countries
A, B	Invest in **women coaches** to ensure athletes are trained by someone who understands the impact of women-specific life events (e.g. puberty, motherhood) on physical activity and performance (including pathways to resume performance post-birth).	X	X	X						X	PRT
B	Provide **awards and recognition** to sports federations and organisations advancing gender equality.		X	X						X	CYP
A, B	Promote better representation of **women on boards** of central athletic organisations and other sports alliances and organisations.		X	X						X	CYP, HRV, JPN
B	Provide **training to sports media representatives** on the specific issues faced by women athletes (e.g. greater focus on their appearance as opposed to their performance) and/or encourage and incentivise equal and predictable **media coverage of women's sports**.	X		X						X	HRV
Build gender-sensitive funding mechanisms											
A, B	Ensure **recipients of government funding** (e.g. health research institutions) mainstream gender in policy and programme development, design and implementation.			X						X	CHE, FIN, MLT
B	Promote or mandate equal pay in sports, including in **private funding and prize money**.		X	X						X	AUS
Foster safety and inclusion											
A	Prevent and **eliminate gender-based violence** and violence against women to prevent related physical and mental health impacts on women (see Chapter 8).										Many countries
A	Mainstream gender into **occupational health and safety**.		X	X						X	CRI, ROU, SLV
B	Design **sport guidelines and revise laws** to prevent and combat sexual harassment, unequal treatment and bullying in sports and provide support to victims/survivors.		X	X				X		X	CAN, CZE, JPN

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A	Design and manage hospitals and healthcare settings to **prevent violence against healthcare workers**, including nurses and doctors, the majority of whom are women.			X						X	PRT
A, B	Ensure **sports infrastructure, parks and recreational spaces** are well-maintained and designed with safety in mind (e.g. lighting, panic buttons).			X			X			X	CYP
A	Ensure girls and boys with **mental health conditions and neurological disorders** are adequately and accurately identified at an early age and have **access to inclusive, affordable and integrated health, social and education systems** (e.g. reduce administrative barriers, develop teacher capacity, offer additional resources and support staff, include all relevant actors in decision-making, tackle stigma around mental health supports, etc.).	X	X	X						X	AUS, GRC, ITA, NOR, PRT, SWE
Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation											
A, B	**Mainstream gender** into all health policies and programmes.			X	X					X	CAN
A, B	Continue to **close gender data, research and measurement gaps** to support gender budgeting and the development of gender-sensitive policies. Some examples include: • access to perinatal and post-natal care; • chronic conditions related to the reproductive system; • menopausal care; • health-support for victims/survivors of gender-based violence; • pay gaps in professional sports, including national teams and Olympic sports; • gender diversity of sports and athletics organisations; and • girls' and women's reasons for non-participation in sport.		X	X		X				X	CZE, ISL, MLT

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.
Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, Brussino (2020[38]), Lewis (2023[115]) and Government of Canada (2024[116]).

7.1.1. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to advance gender equality in health. Case studies are provided below.

Improving gender equality in physical and mental health

- Health is one of the priorities of **Czechia**'s Gender Equality Strategy for 2021-30. The manager and co-ordinator of the fulfilment of the strategy is the Czech Office of the government, with expected co-operation and sharing of information between the state administration, local governments, social partners, academic workplaces and non-governmental organisations. The strategy includes several goals, such as reducing gender inequality in access to healthcare, improving the system of assistance for victims of gender-based and domestic violence, increasing the capacity for gender-sensitive health and social services, enhancing the working conditions of healthcare professionals, and raising the satisfaction level of mothers with maternity care. As part of its policy combination, the strategy promotes awareness activities targeted at men, encouraging them to engage more actively in their health. A methodology for risk prevention has also been developed to ensure that the specific needs of women and men are considered. Around motherhood, the strategy prioritises maternal and child health by creating a unified concept of care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the post-partum period. This initiative includes boosting the variability of obstetric services and ensuring these services are reimbursed by public health insurance. The strategy also ensures the regular publication of health statistics disaggregated by gender, supporting the monitoring of health disparities and directing necessary policy adjustments.

- In **France,** support to women's health is mainly led by the Ministry of Health with support from the Ministries of Solidarity, Education and Equality. The approach targets specific health needs at different life stages. Around childbearing age, for instance, the Ministry of Health focuses on improving access to contraception, particularly for young women in vulnerable circumstances, to empower them to make informed reproductive choices and reduce unplanned pregnancies. This is complemented by improved access to abortion to ensure timely and safe procedures. For women in middle adulthood, the ministry has enhanced comprehensive care and psychological support following miscarriages, recognising their emotional and physical impact. At the same time, the Ministries of Health, Gender, Solidarity and Education have co-ordinated action to ensure that all women have access to menstrual products, especially those in economic hardship. The Ministry of Health has also prioritised the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis by increasing awareness and improving care for affected women. Additionally, to improve overall healthcare access, the Ministries of Health and Equality are expanding outreach services to reach women in remote or underserved areas – with 30 mobile health units designed for gynaecological and cardiovascular screening and prevention. Other initiatives have also been put in place in France to improve access to healthcare and reduce health disparities, including "1 000 premiers jours" (1 000 first days), a programme to provide pregnant women and young mothers, particularly those in precarious situations, with enhanced support; the rollout of "Maisons de santé pluridisciplinaires" (multidisciplinary health centres) to provide access to healthcare for isolated populations; and the "Stratégie nationale de santé mentale et de psychiatrie 2018-23" to focus on prevention and access to appropriate care for vulnerable populations. In addition, specialised units in hospitals to support victims of domestic violence have been introduced. In January 2024, there were 74 dedicated units for women victims of violence attached to hospital structures also known as "women's health centres." Additional funding was allocated in 2024 to create new ones, with the aim of covering the entire country.

- **Latvia** has implemented initiatives aimed at addressing gender-specific health needs across different stages of life. These measures, led by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control under the Ministry of Health, contribute to promoting gender equality in health outcomes. Young adults' health is supported via awareness raising of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination for girls and boys, as well as the provision of health guidance and self-examination materials. Latvia also addresses the mental health needs of new parents through information packages of support for postpartum mental health conditions, and specific supports for both mothers and their partners.

Additionally, campaigns promote safe practices in beauty care services to address the risks associated with invasive procedures. These efforts are complemented by awareness campaigns for cancer screenings to ensure early detection of gender-specific cancers such as breast, cervical, and prostate cancer. Information materials on sexual and reproductive health for women and men over 50 provide guidance on managing the physiological and emotional changes associated with ageing. Finally, Latvia's harm reduction programmes, including HIV prevention points and mobile units, provide critical services to high-risk populations.

Box 7.8. Applying a life course approach to national women's health strategies

Australia's National Women's Health Strategy 2020-30 outlines a comprehensive life course approach to improving the health and well-being of women and girls. Key objectives include achieving health equity, enhancing access to health services and supporting preventive health measures. The strategy focuses on empowering women in their healthcare and promoting gender-sensitive practices within the health system.

The Women's Health Strategy for **England, the United Kingdom** aims to address health disparities, improve health outcomes and support women's and girls' overall well-being through a life course approach. It focuses on prioritising women's voices, addressing the impact of violence, improving access to health services and tackling specific health issues, such as reproductive health, menopause and mental health. The strategy also emphasises research and data collection to better understand women's health needs and promote gender-sensitive care within the healthcare system.

Reducing gender gaps in physical activity, including at all levels of sport

- The National Programme of Sports 2019-26, promoted by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports in **Croatia**, includes gender equality as one of its specific objectives. In addition, the "Action plan for the inclusion of a greater number of women in sports" supports women's representation in management bodies of sports organisations, as well as in other decision-making positions in sports. At the same time, the "Women in sports" project, implemented in Croatia, promotes campaigns supporting gender equality in sports, including how sport is covered in social networks and the media. It targets specific stakeholders – managers, referees and athletes – as well as the general public. The project has been implemented through co-ordination between several stakeholders including the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of Croatia, the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, the Electronic Media Council, and the Croatian Olympic and Paralympic Committees.

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Annex 7.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 7.A.1. List of Chapter 7 Online Annex Figures

Figure no.	Figure title and subtitle
Figure 7-A1	**Income is positively associated with self-perceived health, especially for women** Share (%) of women and men with very good or good self-perceived health by income quintile, EU-27 average, 2024 or latest
Figure 7-A2	**Boys have a higher prevalence of mental health conditions and neurological disorders than girls, but adolescent girls and young women have higher rates than adolescent boys and young men** Prevalence of mental health conditions and neurological disorders by age group, population aged 0-24 years, rate per 100 000 population, OECD-38 averages, 2021
Figure 7-A3	**Common causes of cancer deaths for women are breast and lung cancer** Standardised mortality rates per 100 000 population, women and men, by cause of death, average of 39 EU and OECD countries, 2022 or latest
Figure 7-A4	**Women are more likely than men to consult or visit medical practitioners** Share (%) of women and men who report consulting or visiting specific medical practitioners in the past 12 months (Panel A) or using specific preventive healthcare (Panel B), EU-27 average, 2019
Figure 7-A5	**Men are less likely than women to use prescription and non-prescription medicines** Share (%) of women and men reporting using prescribed (Panel A) and non-prescribed (Panel B) medicines by age group, 2019
Figure 7-A6	**Women are less likely than men to be overweight or obese** Share (%) of women and men who are overweight or obese, self-reported (Panel A) and self-reported versus measured (Panel B), 2023 or latest year
Figure 7-A7	**Men engage in physical activity more than women** Share (%) of women and men (18+) reporting spending at least 150 minutes per week on physical activity, 2019
Figure 7-A8	**Health-reducing risky behaviours, such as heavy smoking and drinking, are more common among men than women** Share (%) of women and men engaging in risky behaviours, EU-27 average, 2019
Figure 7-A9	**Health-reducing behaviours are more common among those with less income, especially men** Share (%) of women and men who smoke cigarettes daily, EU-27 average, 2019
Figure 7-A10	**High-income women are more likely to engage in physical activity than low-income women** Share (%) of women and men engaging in at least 150 minutes or more of physical activity by income quintile, EU-27 average, 2019
Figure 7-A11	**More than half of long-term care recipients in institutions and in homes are women** Share (%) of long-term care recipients (65+) in institutions and in homes who are women, 2023 or latest

Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 7 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink 🖳 https://stat.link/pm8gfz

Notes

[1] Estimates use a minimum cell size of 10 observations. Only 22 countries met this criterion.

8 Violence against women remains pervasive

This chapter takes a life course approach to review key statistics relating to gender-based violence, with a focus on violence against women, covering topics such as childhood maltreatment and abuse, intimate partner violence, workplace sexual harassment, perceptions of safety in public spaces and technology-facilitated violence. The chapter closes with policy options to eradicate gender-based violence and violence against women.

Key findings

- Gender-based violence (GBV) is a worldwide phenomenon. The majority of victims/survivors of GBV are women and the majority of perpetrators are men. Most EU and OECD countries report that tackling GBV (including violence against women) is a top policy priority for gender equality.

- Estimating the prevalence of GBV is complicated by several factors, including underreporting. Despite this challenge, the data that do exist show that gender-based violence is pervasive. In EU countries, 36% of ever-partnered women report having experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime and 34% of ever-working women report having experienced sexual harassment at some point in the workplace. Violence and the threat of violence affect the day-to-day lives of millions of women across the EU, with only 68% of women report feeling safe when walking alone at night.

- Data on experiences of violence for children and older people are limited. Based on the little evidence that is available, girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys. For older people, abuse remains an issue and may require more focused attention as populations age.

- The causes and consequences of GBV are complex, and addressing such violence – including workplace harassment, IPV and sexual assault – requires concerted, co-ordinated and collaborative efforts across policy domains that provide interventions across the life course (i.e. childhood, adulthood, old age). Policy combinations to tackle GBV should focus not only on providing support to victims/survivors, but also on preventing violence, addressing the perpetrators of violence, and building capacity across society to comprehensively prevent, identify and respond to violence. This means involving educational institutions, healthcare providers, social protection systems, employment supports, justice institutions, frontline service providers, and more. Emphasising integration and information sharing (while protecting data and privacy) across actors can help victims/survivors navigate a seamless network of supports and services without feeling re traumatised at every re telling. Campaigns on the prevalence and impacts of GBV, including sexual harassment in the workplace, may help raise awareness that such issues persist in all EU and OECD countries.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined by the European Commission as "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately" (European Commission, n.d.[1]). GBV may manifest itself in many different settings, forms, and relationships; it may be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, financial, economic or technology-facilitated; it may take place within the home, at work, at school, online or in public spaces; it may occur between intimate partners, family members, friends, acquaintances, employers and employees, and strangers; and it may be experienced in childhood, adolescence, adulthood, or in old age. GBV is a worldwide phenomenon, cutting across countries as well as social, economic and demographic groups (Beck et al., 2023[2]), and it has massive implications for women's employment, health, economic security, housing, well-being and more (OECD, 2023[3]).

In many cases, "GBV" is used interchangeably with "violence against women," reflecting that most victims/survivors of GBV are women and most perpetrators of GBV are men. Yet, GBV can also include violence against men, boys and gender-diverse individuals. Violence against women is, therefore, one manifestation of GBV, and violence against other groups may often be a result of similarly harmful inequities and gender norms (Council of Europe, 2019[4]). According to the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, violence against women is defined as "all acts of gender-based violence directed against a woman or a girl because she is a woman or a girl or that affect women or girls disproportionately, that result in or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic

harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (European Union, 2024[5]).

Given that women represent the vast majority of victims/survivors of GBV, this chapter focuses on violence against women. It proceeds as follows. Section 8.1 reviews key indicators of GBV over the life course to better understand the experiences of girls and women in private, semi-public and public spaces. Section 8.2 explores policy options to address GBV, with a particular focus on intimate partner violence and workplace harassment and sexual assault.

Box 8.1. Drivers of gender-based violence

A growing body of research has identified a number of risk factors for (and contributors to) GBV, with much research focusing on risk factors for IPV. In this research, risk factors consistently associated with perpetuating and/or being a victim/survivor of GBV (or IPV) include exposure to violence in childhood; social and cultural norms that support violence (e.g. high acceptability of violence); rigid gender norms and harmful ideas of masculinity (e.g. masculinity means strength, dominance and control); and mental health problems and harmful substance use (e.g. depression and alcohol abuse, respectively). Much remains to be learned about whether and how these factors causally "drive" violence, though research is paying growing attention to these questions.

While violence can affect anyone, some social and demographic factors have been linked to a heightened risk of violence. Poverty, for example, can directly and indirectly contribute to violence, including by heightening household stress, limiting women's options outside of violent relationships, and/or keeping victims/survivors trapped in violent relationships. However, the link between poverty and violence is complex and context dependent. Increased income is not *always* a risk or protective factor. Extreme poverty has been shown to limit opportunities for intra-personal conflicts over household finances in some settings, while increases in women's income in contexts of high gender inequality has sometimes led to "backlash" and increased violence. In these cases, the increase in women's income and/or autonomy can be perceived as a threat to masculinity or a challenge to established social and/or power structures. The complex interplay between violence and indicators of income and poverty has led some researchers to argue that the relative income (or empowerment) of women and men is more important than their absolute individual level of income (or empowerment). In other words, economic inequality in the context of poverty is more "important" in explaining violence than poverty alone (Jewkes, 2002[6]).

Systems-level factors may further perpetuate GBV, such as low (or no) moral or legal sanctions for violence, weak punishment of perpetrators and poor law enforcement practices.

Given the complex risk factors for violence – and the interplay between them – Heise (1998[7]) has developed an influential ecological approach to violence against women that emphasises the importance of intervention at multiple levels, including individual, inter-personal and societal levels. In this approach, GBV is an expression and reinforcer of inequitable power relations between women and men, and efforts to address gender inequality play an important part in addressing GBV. At the same time, theories of GBV that emphasise violence as an expression of inequitable power relations can fail to explain why some men commit violence when others do not (Heise, 1998[7]).

A comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach is therefore needed to effectively address the varied and inter-related risk factors for GBV, with integrated action across government ministries – social, labour, health, justice and other – that effectively addresses the causes and consequences of violence.

Source: Gibbs et al. (2020[8]), Cesur et al. (2022[9]), Oram et al. (2022[10]), University College London (2025[11]), and Heise (2011[12]).

Box 8.2. The prevalence of GBV is underreported and difficult to analyse

Estimating the prevalence and incidence of GBV is extremely challenging, and there are considerable limitations to the availability and international comparability of existing prevalence estimates (OECD, 2023[3]; OECD, 2020[13]; OECD, 2017[14]). Some reasons for this include:

Underreporting

Whether estimates are based on survey data (e.g. data on experiences of violence collected from a sample of (representative) respondents) or administrative data (e.g. records of violence as reported to police, health providers, etc.), underreporting is a persistent problem and leads to low estimates of the prevalence and incidence of GBV (Beck et al., 2023[2]). For example, in the EU, only 68% of women who report (in an anonymous survey) having experienced IPV say they told someone – either a person or service – about their experience, with only 17% telling the police and 33% telling a health, social or support service (Eurostat, 2024[15]). In this same survey, only 37% of victims/survivors of sexual harassment at work say they told an official body (e.g. support, health or social service, policy or officials at work), while 78% say they told an unofficial person (e.g. colleague, close person) (Eurostat, 2024[16]).

There are many reasons for underreporting. Victims/survivors may be reluctant or unable to disclose the abuse due to fear, feelings of shame, or concerns that their disclosure would not be believed or taken seriously (OECD, 2023[3]). In the case of survey data, specifically, victims/survivors may not recognise or identify their experiences as violence. In addition, victims/survivors may be unable to disclose abuse due to coercive and controlling surveillance and monitoring by their abuser. Coercive control of victims/survivors can extend to correspondence, including online and digital platforms, such as social media profiles and email (Harris and Woodlock, 2018[17]). In the case of administrative data, often drawn from police records, victims/survivors may be reluctant to report violence due to a fear of retribution and a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system (see Chapter 5 in OECD (2023[3])).

Novel methods for measuring the incidence and prevalence of violence using internet search records may help to overcome some underreporting issues and increase the accuracy of the measurement of prevalence (Anderberg, Rainer and Siuda, 2021[18]; Berniell and Facchini, 2021[19]). Research using internet search data points to much greater increases in domestic violence during COVID-19 lockdowns than estimates would suggest based on police records (Anderberg, Rainer and Siuda, 2021[18]).

Cross-country heterogeneity in measurement

Heterogeneity within and across countries in survey question wording, sampling, definitions, interview methods (e.g. in person, online) and timing affects the propensity and accuracy of reporting (Beck et al., 2023[2]; OECD, 2020[13]). Countries also vary in the frequency and intensity of data collection, with some countries systematically surveying every few years, while others survey much less frequently and/or in an ad hoc fashion. Administrative reporting procedures may also differ within and across countries for a variety of reasons, including the lack of a centralised body for regulating data collection, differences in legal definitions of violence, and variations in the existence and application of laws (EIGE, 2016[20]). This can further complicate the measurement and comparability of the prevalence of GBV.

Cross-country heterogeneity in norms and stigma

Even in cases where survey methods are harmonised across countries, differences in norms and stigma around GBV can affect perceptions and understanding of violence, as well as willingness to report. For instance, there may be cross-country differences in the social acceptability of disclosing acts of violence, as well-harmonised cross-country European surveys seem to suggest (OECD, 2020[13]).

8.1. Background: Key outcomes relating to gender-based violence

This section uses a life course approach to explore experiences of violence in private spaces (e.g. home), semi-public spaces (e.g. work, school) and public spaces (e.g. transit, park). Cyber spaces are also briefly discussed.

8.1.1. Childhood and adolescence: Child sexual abuse is devastatingly high, and particularly high amongst girls

Childhood maltreatment may take many forms – including physical, sexual or emotional abuse, as well as neglect and exposure to (including witnessing) family violence and IPV (McTavish et al., 2016[21]; Sethi et al., 2018[22]) – and is linked to many lifelong problems, such as "substance misuse, high-risk sexual activity, noncommunicable disease, mental illness and interpersonal violence" (Sethi et al., 2018[22]) and disrupted emotional, social and cognitive development (McTavish et al., 2016[21]; Mueller and Tronick, 2019[23]). Eliminating childhood maltreatment could, therefore, confer significant benefits to society.

There is, however, limited consistent and harmonised data on childhood maltreatment (Box 8.3), making it difficult to assess the extent to which girls and boys are exposed (and may be differently exposed) to childhood maltreatment, both overall and by type. Based on the available data, girls report considerably higher rates of sexual childhood maltreatment. In Belgium, for example, the prevalence of sexual childhood maltreatment is estimated at 20% for girls versus 10% for boys, while in Norway, rates are estimated at 10% for girls and 4% for boys. Girls and boys in Norway are, by contrast, estimated to have similar prevalence rates for physical childhood maltreatment (Sethi et al., 2018[22]).

Box 8.3. Survey data measuring childhood maltreatment are limited

Survey-based estimates of childhood maltreatment are hard to come by and difficult to compare. Indeed, as reported by 49 out of 53 countries in the European Region responding to a WHO questionnaire, only 35 countries have representative national child maltreatment surveys and only 20 conduct regular surveys (Sethi et al., 2018[22]; Mathews et al., 2020[24]). Even in those cases where estimates are available, results are limited to only one or a few types of maltreatment and come from surveys with varied samples and methods and which may not use standardised instruments. Given the significant personal and social benefits that could be derived from eliminated childhood maltreatment, governments should work toward introducing regular surveys measuring and tracking childhood maltreatment at the national level, with results disaggregated by type of abuse and by social, demographic and economic characteristics – such as gender, race and ethnicity, urban or rural status and income. Surveys on childhood maltreatment can be administered to adults reflecting on historical experiences (see Box 8.4 for an example from Canada), but may also be administered to children. In the United Kingdom, the government is currently assessing the feasibility of a survey to measure the prevalence of child abuse, with recommendations that the survey take place in schools among children aged 11-15 years (UK Office for National Statistics, 2024[25]).

Source: Sethi et al. (2018[22]) and Mathews et al. (2020[24]).

These results are mirrored in the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Violence Info Database. This database – which provides weighted averages of prevalence estimates across available studies – finds that the estimated prevalence of childhood physical abuse for girls and boys is roughly similar, while the estimated prevalence of sexual abuse is nearly double for girls compared to boys (Figure 8.1). These figures, however, aggregate estimates from relevant studies and do not represent global (or even regional)

averages. Recent estimates from the EU suggest that, in 2021, 7% of women self-report having experienced sexual violence in childhood, defined as before the age of 15 years (Eurostat, 2024[26]). Estimates for men in the EU were not available at the time of writing, but Eurostat will soon publish statistics on men from the 11 EU countries that included men in their most recent EU-GBV survey.

Figure 8.1. Girls are more likely to experience sexual and psychological abuse in childhood than boys

Weighted average across studies of estimates of lifetime prevalence (%) of childhood physical abuse, sexual abuse and psychological abuse for girls and boys
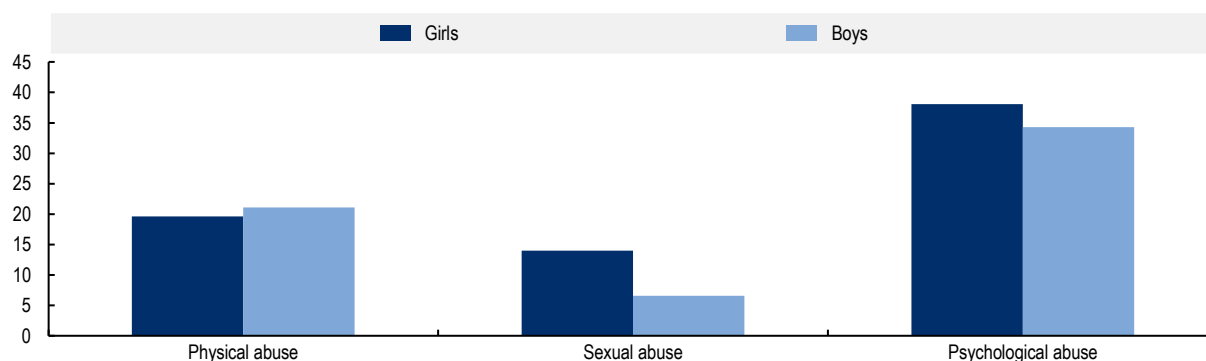
Note: The WHO Violence Studies Database on Child maltreatment is a collection of 3 293 studies on child maltreatment. These estimates do not represent global prevalence estimates, but instead, the mean of the set of estimates from the selected studies. Estimates are weighted by sample size. For physical abuse, there are 164 studies with estimates for girls and 96 studies with estimates for boys contributing to the mean. For sexual abuse, there are 515 studies for girls and 324 for boys. For psychological abuse, there are 71 for girls and 53 for boys. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: WHO Violence Info, Violence Studies Database, Child maltreatment (https://apps.who.int/violence-info/child-maltreatment).

Box 8.4. Spotlight on intersectionality: Childhood maltreatment among underrepresented groups

While GBV can affect anyone, gender may intersect with other identity characteristics to contribute to a higher risk of violence. In Canada, First Nations and Métis women and men are more likely to report experiences of childhood abuse than non-Indigenous women and men (Figure 8.2). A history of socio-economic marginalisation, territorial dispossession, and intergenerational trauma have contributed to complex and inequitable outcomes for Indigenous people, including "higher rates of serious physical health problems, issues with mental health and cognitive impairment, suicide, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, interpersonal violence, family breakdown, and involvement both as victims/survivors and accused/convicted persons in the criminal justice system" (Department of Justice Canada, 2024[27]).

Gender gaps are also larger for people with disability and sexual minorities. As in the case of Indigenous women and men, this reflects differences in underlying drivers (Box 8.1), including socio-economic marginalisation and systemic discrimination as well as differences in trust in justice systems and willingness to report.

Figure 8.2. In Canada, Indigenous women are more likely than Indigenous men to report experiences of childhood sexual abuse

Share (%) of women and men reporting experiences of physical and sexual abuse as children, Canada 2018
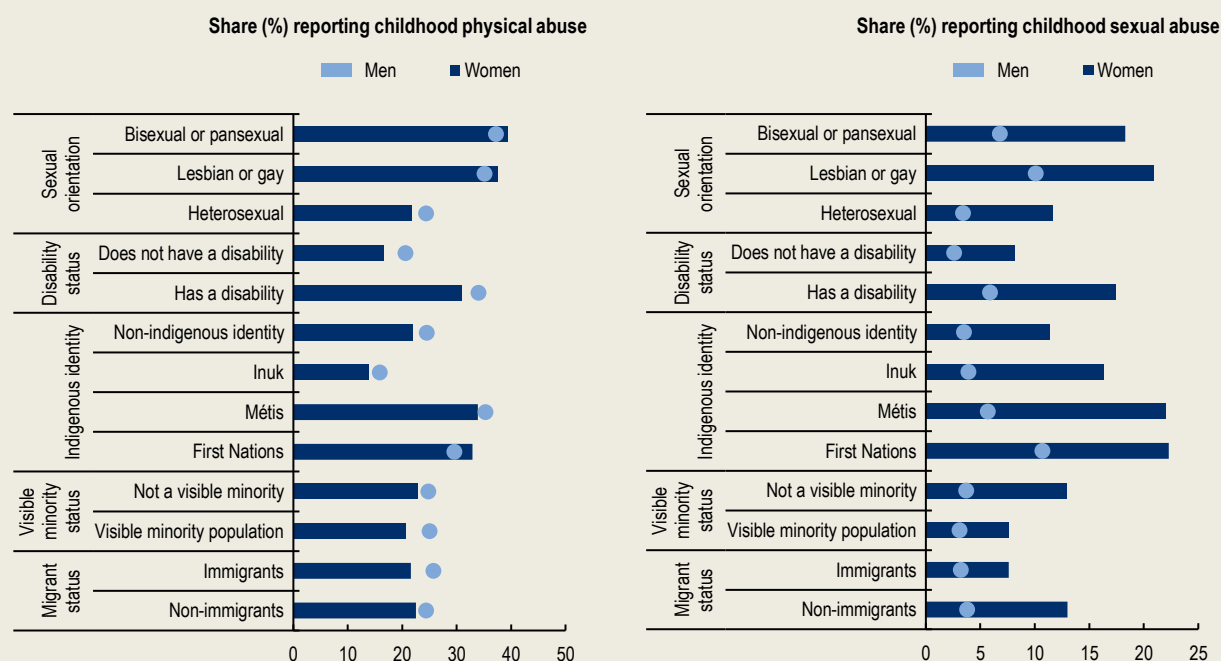
Note: The 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces has a sample size of 145 000 individuals. The survey was delivered to non-institutionalised persons 15 years of age or older, not living on an Indigenous reserve, living in the 10 provinces or 3 territories of Canada. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Statistics Canada Table 35-10-0167-01 "Self-reported physical and sexual abuse during childhood" based on 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510016701).

Box 8.5. Cyber spaces: Cyberbullying is more common among girls than boys

Cyberbullying is the product of technological developments creating new and/or amplified avenues for harassment, especially among children and teenagers. Exposure to cyberbullying can lead to mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression and self-harm (Lindert, 2017[28]). Among EU and OECD countries, cyberbullying is reported more often among girls than among boys (see Online Annex Figure 8-A1) (OECD, 2022[29]). Since digitalisation across all areas of life – education, employment and leisure, etc. – will continue apace, it is imperative to find ways of making the online space safe for all people (OECD, 2019[30]).

8.1.2. Adulthood: Many women experience violence

This section focuses on violence against women across several spaces – private, semi-public and public – presenting statistics on the prevalence of violence and perceptions of violence.

Private spaces: Many women report experiences of intimate partner violence

Women may be exposed to many types of violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, spiritual, financial, economic and technology-facilitated, among others. Such violence may be carried out by intimate partners, family members, friends, colleagues or strangers.

Recent estimates from a cross-EU survey suggest that, on average, 36% of ever-partnered women have experienced psychological, physical (including threats) and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (Figure 8.3). Of these three types of IPV, psychological violence alone is reported by 34% of women, and physical or sexual violence is reported by 20%.

Figure 8.3. Over one in three ever-partnered women in the EU report having experienced intimate partner violence in their lives

Share (%) of ever-partnered women who have ever experienced violence committed by an intimate partner, by type of violence, EU-27 average, 2021
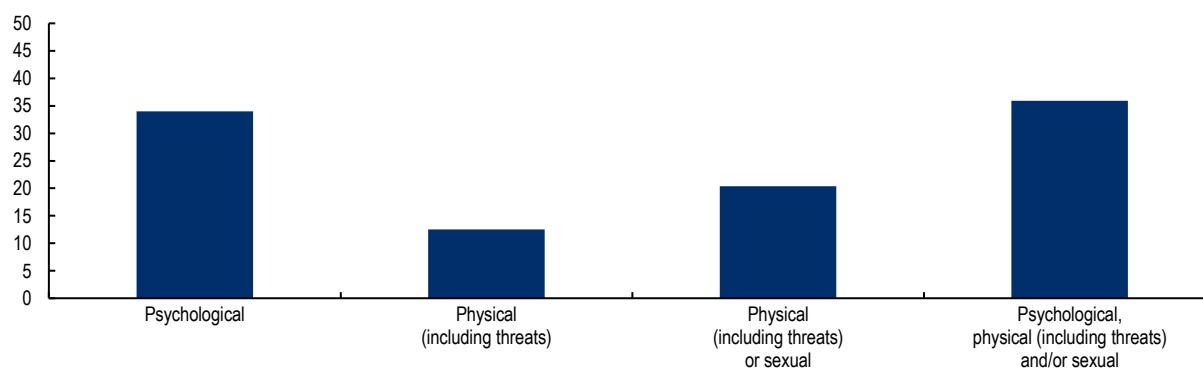
Note: EU-27 average is unweighted. Violence by an intimate partner covers psychological, physical (including threats) and sexual violence. Intimate partners are persons with whom a respondent has or had an intimate relationship. Prevalence of intimate partner violence is calculated out of women who have ever been in an intimate partnership. For more details on definitions and methodology, see Eurostat (2024[31]). For results for each EU-27 country by occurrence of last episode, see Online Annex Figure 8-A2. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Eurostat "Ever-partnered women who have experienced violence by an intimate partner, by type of violence" (https://doi.org/10.2908/GBV_IPV_TYPE).

Many women report experiencing such violence recently, with 14% reporting occurrence(s) in the past 5 years and 6% reporting occurrence(s) in the past 12 months (see Online Annex Figure 8-A2) (Eurostat, 2024[32]; WHO, 2024[33]). And repeat offenses are common. Looking at women in EU countries who have reported experiencing physical (including threats) or sexual violence from an intimate partner, an average of almost 80% report that they were abused repeatedly, not just once (see Online Annex Figure 8-A3) (Eurostat, 2024[34]).

The consequences of intimate partner violence can be significant, including potential negative impacts on the physical and mental health of victims/survivors and their families, and on victims/survivors' safety, employment, economic security, housing, and social well-being (Loxton et al., 2017[35]; Stewart, MacMillan and Wathen, 2013[36]; Karakurt, Smith and Whiting, 2014[37]; Hing et al., 2021[38]). This violence can also be fatal.

Box 8.6. Men experience violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV)

According to a recent survey in the EU, men are on average more likely than women to report experiences of physical violence in the past five years and in the past 12 months (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020[39]) and men account for the majority of victims of homicide in most EU countries (Eurostat, 2024[40]). But unlike women, men are less likely than women to be partnered with or related to their perpetrator.

Although statistically less likely, many men are still victims/survivors of IPV. In 2023, for example, men accounted for about one-third of all people who experienced domestic abuse in the United Kingdom according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (UK Office for National Statistics, 2023[41]). And in Spain in this same year, 39% of victims/survivors registered in domestic violence matters were men according to the Central Register for the Protection of Victims of Domestic and Gender Violence (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2024[42]).

As with women, underreporting of IPV is an issue for men and these figures are not necessarily accurate representations of the true gender distribution of IPV (see Box 8.2). Whatever the true distribution may be, it is a fact that both women and men may experience IPV and that both women and men victims/survivors of IPV face many barriers to reporting and accessing services and support – such as fear, shame and a lack of appropriate resources. In addition, recent evidence suggests that women and men may not experience the same barriers in the same way and that there may be gender-specific barriers (Taylor et al., 2021[43]). Men, for instance, may have to confront cultural norms that associate masculinity with strength and self-reliance, making them reluctant to admit to their vulnerability for fear of being labelled weak. In addition, men may feel isolated when trying to find help since many services and supports are targeted toward women (and their children), including much online information and many hotlines and shelters (Taylor et al., 2021[43]).

Recognising that women and men may experience IPV differently, governments should work toward implementing comprehensive policy packages that support both women and men equally and address their unique needs and barriers in the context of IPV. This includes ensuring men have access to shelters and counselling services and working toward eliminating harmful norms and stereotypes that prevent men from seeking supports, such as through anti-stigma awareness campaigns.

Box 8.7. EU survey on Gender-Based Violence against Women and Other Forms of Inter-Personal Violence

In the most recent EU survey on Gender-Based Violence against Women and Other Forms of Inter-Personal Violence (EU-GBV) (Eurostat, 2024[31]), the following definitions are used when aggregating the data by category of violence.

- **Psychological violence** encompasses acts of emotional abuse and controlling behaviour, such as belittling and humiliation; restrictions on friends, family, hobbies or other activities; tracking via GPS, phone or social network; forbidding leaving the house without permission or being locked up; constantly receiving accusations of unfaithfulness; facing anger after speaking to another person; forbidding or restricting work; controlling family finances and victim/survivor spending; keeping or taking away identification as a means of control; yelling and smashing things or behaving in a way to scare or intimidate; threatening to hurt the children or people close to the victim/survivor; threatening to take away the children or to deny custody; and threatening to harm themselves.

- **Physical violence** refers to behaviour or acts involving harm and fear, such as threatening harm; pushing or shoving, pulling hair, slapping or throwing objects; punching or beating with an object; kicking; burning (with fire, acid or any other means); trying to choke or strangle; threatening to use or actually using a knife, gun, acid or something similar; or using force in some way with the aim of hurt or harm.

- **Sexual violence** includes unwanted sexual intercourse through force or physical violence or by exploiting a situation where refusal of sexual intercourse is not possible due to the influence of alcohol or drugs, fear or force. Attempts to carry out any of the above acts or any other unwanted sexual behaviour perceived as degrading or humiliating are also included. Sexual violence in childhood covers experiences before the age of 15 perpetrated by any person, such as posing naked in front of another person, unwanted sexual touching or sexual intercourse.

Intimate partner violence in Eurostat (2024[31]) includes psychological, physical (including threats) and sexual violence. Violence by non-partner, domestic perpetrator and any perpetrator covers physical (including threats) and sexual violence.

Data collection for the first wave took place between September 2020 and March 2024 in EU countries based on their national timetables. Eurostat collected data in 18 EU countries. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) collected data in eight EU countries not covered by Eurostat following the EU-GBV manual.

Source: Eurostat (2021[44]), "Methodological manual for the EU survey on Gender-Based Violence against Women and Other Forms of Inter-Personal Violence (EU-GBV)" and Eurostat (2024[31]) "Reference metadata for EU survey on Gender-Based Violence against Women and Other Forms of Inter-Personal Violence (EU-GBV)."

Although existing estimates are not directly comparable to one another due to differing methodologies and questions, evidence across surveys points to a continued acceptance of violence against women in EU and OECD countries. For example, across OECD countries with available data, 19% of people believe it is justifiable under at least some circumstances for a man to beat his wife, 8% of people believe that it is acceptable for a man to occasionally slap his wife or girlfriend, and 5% believe that a man can have sex with his wife or girlfriend without her consent (Figure 8.4). But the prevalence of such beliefs is likely *underestimated* due to social desirability bias – meaning that true acceptance in the population is in all probability higher. Indeed, much research has shown that survey respondents tend to overreport socially

desirable characteristics and underreport socially undesirable ones when asked sensitive questions in surveys, especially on taboo topics (Krumpal, 2023[45]), such as IPV (Sugarman and Hotaling, 1997[46]).

Figure 8.4. Some people continue to believe intimate partner violence is acceptable

Share (%) of respondents who believe certain forms of IPV are justifiable or acceptable according to various sources, EU and OECD averages, 2024 or latest
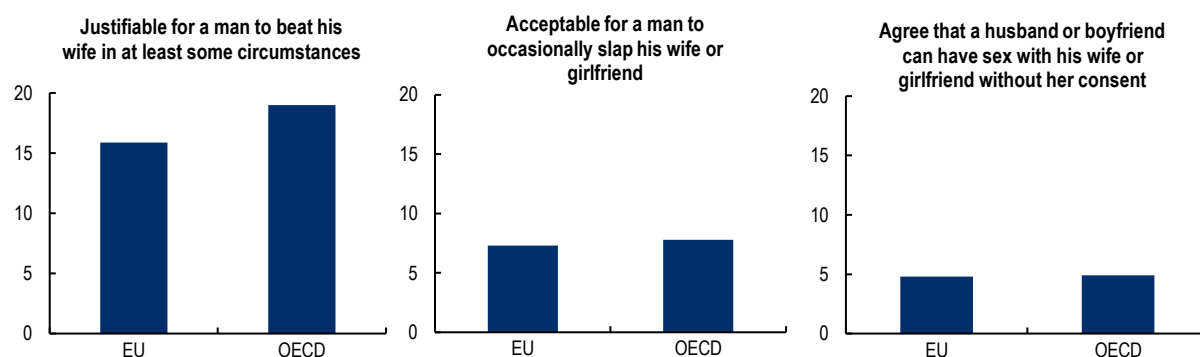
Note: EU and OECD are unweighted averages. For "justifiable for a man to beat his wife" (World Values Survey), there are 7 EU and 15 OECD countries with available data. Countries belonging to both the EU and the OECD are counted toward both averages, so there is overlap in membership in the averages. For "sex without her consent" and "slapping wife or girlfriend" (Eurobarometer), there are 27 EU and 22 OECD countries. For "justifiable for a man to beat his wife, respondents rate on a scale from 1 to 10 whether it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife. Response options range from "Never justifiable" (1) to "Always justifiable" (10). Estimates include all responses from 2 to 10 as evidence of believing there are some circumstances under which it is justifiable to beat a wife. Data refer to the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (WVS), which took place between 2017 and 2022. The majority of surveys were completed between 2018 and 2020. WVS must cover the population aged 18-85 years, but age ranges may be lowered as long as the minimum required sample of 1 200 for the population aged 18 years and over is achieved. For "sex without her consent," respondents are asked to what extent they agree or disagree with various statements, including "A husband or boyfriend can have sex with his wife or girlfriend without her consent." Response options are "Totally agree," "Tend to agree," "Tend to disagree," "Totally disagree," and "Don't know/prefer not to answer." Shares reflect the sum of "Totally agree" and "Tend to agree," For "slapping wife or girlfriend," respondents were asked what they think about various situations, including "A man occasionally slapping his wife/girlfriend." Response options were "I find it unacceptable," "I find it acceptable under certain circumstances," "I find it acceptable" and "Don't know/prefer not to answer." Shares reflect the sum of "I find it acceptable under certain circumstances" and "I find it acceptable." Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.

Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using European Commission "Flash Eurobarometer FL544: Gender stereotypes Violence against women" (https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s3252_fl544_eng) and World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-22) Cross-National Data-Set (www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp).

Box 8.8. Spotlight on intersectionality: Intimate partner violence and disability

Much research has found that people with disability are at greater risk of violence than people without disability, and this is no different for women with disability (Savage, 2021[47]). According to a recent EU survey, around half of all women with a severe disability have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime (51%) compared to a third of women without disability (33%) (Figure 8.5).

Figure 8.5. Women with disability are more likely to experience intimate partner violence than women without disability

Share (%) of ever-partnered women who have experienced violence by an intimate partner by level of disability, EU-23 average, 2021
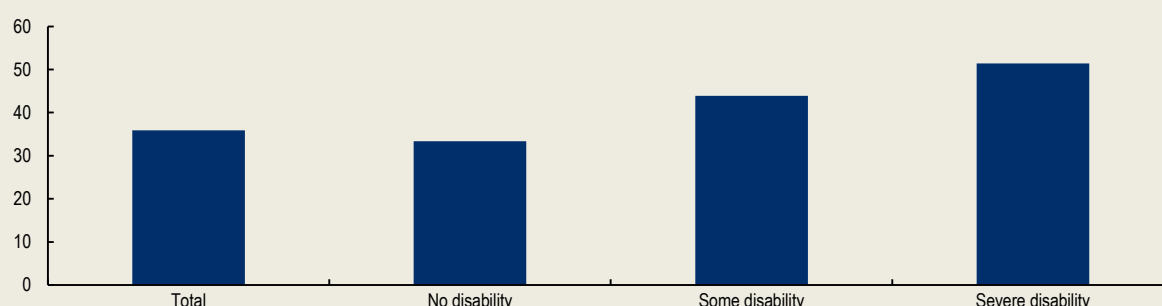
Note: EU-23 is an unweighted average. Hungary, Slovenia, and Ireland do not have data for "severe disability," and as a result, have been excluded from the averages. Disability status is measured through a concept of general activity limitation (limitation in activities people usually do because of health problems for at least the past six months). See Figure 8.3 and Box 8.7 for more details on definitions and methods. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Eurostat "Ever-partnered women who have experienced violence by an intimate partner, by level of disability (activity limitation)" (https://doi.org/10.2908/GBV_IPV_LIM).

Similar results emerge in Mexico in the *Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares* 2021 ("National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships 2021"), which finds that women with disability (49%) are more likely to have experienced violence from a partner in their lifetime than women without disability or limitation (35%) (INEGI, 2021[48]).

Intimate partners are, however, only one type of perpetrator. Many women experience violence – physical and sexual – at the hands of other types of perpetrators, including non-partners and other domestic perpetrators. Looking at all women in the European Union and specifically at *physical or sexual violence* (including threats), 12% of all women report such experiences from someone they know but to whom they are not related, 9% from someone who is a stranger and 5% from a family member (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6. Many women report violence from non-partner perpetrators

Share (%) of women who report experiences of physical or sexual violence (including threats) by type of perpetrator, EU-26 average, 2021
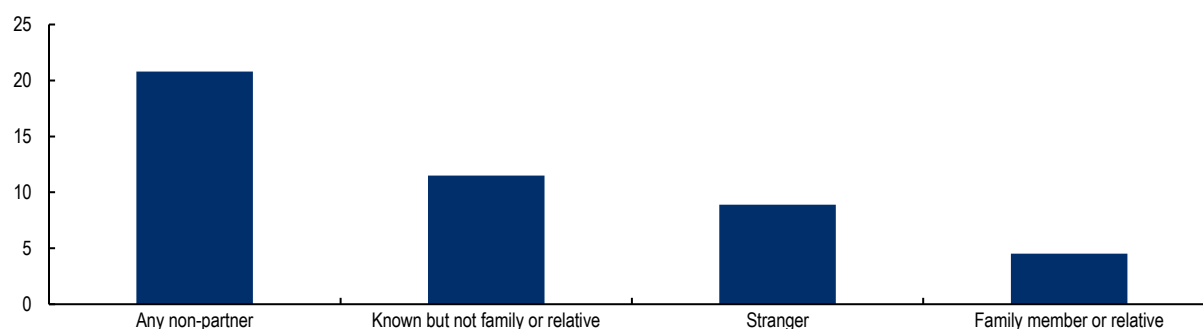
Note: EU-26 is an unweighted average. "Non-partners" are all perpetrators with whom a respondent does not have or has never had an intimate relationship. "Family member or relative," Known but not family or relative," and "Stranger" are an average of 26 EU countries, as data for Italy are missing for these categories. See Box 8.7 for more details on definitions and methods. Categories do not aggregate since respondents may experience violence from more than one type of perpetrator. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Eurostat, "Women who have experienced violence by a non-partner, by type of perpetrator" (https://doi.org/10.2908/GBV_NPV_PERP).

Box 8.9. Challenges comparing administrative data on GBV

Just as it is challenging to compare survey-based estimates of GBV across countries (Box 8.2), it is also challenging to compare GBV estimates based on administrative data, such as judicial records from police or the courts. Several factors complicate comparability, including:

- **Cross-country differences in reporting violence to police**: In the EU, a recent survey finds that only 19% of women who had experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime reported it to the police, and only 11% reported violence by non-partners (including family or relatives, known people who are not family or relatives and strangers) to the police (see Online Annex Figure 8-A4) (Eurostat, 2024[15]; Eurostat, 2024[49]).

  There are many reasons why women do not report incidents to the police, such as a lack of faith in the criminal justice system, limited or no "hard" evidence, confusing evidence requirements, unclear procedures for reporting incidents, potential re traumatisation through reporting, fear of retaliation, self-blame and knowing the perpetrator (see Online Annex Figure 8-A5) (Stewart et al., 2023[50]; Johnson, 2017[51]; Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2020[52]; Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020[39]). A lack of faith in the criminal justice system may stem, in part, from the fact that many women who have come forward to the police with cases of sexual assault have had their cases dismissed as baseless or deemed unfounded, facing "insensitivity, blaming questions, lack of investigation and lack of follow-up" (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2020[52]). Though difficult to measure, confidence in the police (and willingness to report) (Box 8.2) as well as norms and stigma around violence and reporting (Figure 8.4) may systematically vary by country, contributing to measurement error in cross-national estimates.

- **Cross-country differences in legal treatment of violence against women**: There are differences in the legal treatment of sexual assault and rape across countries. In 17 EU and OECD countries, the legal definition of rape is not based on a lack of consent and in 11 EU and OECD countries, the legal definition of rape does not include marital rape (see Online Annex Figure 8-A6 based on OECD (OECD, 2024[53]).

> • **Cross-national variation in governments' aggregation and publication of judicial records on GBV**: Governments may have different capacity and effectiveness in aggregating administrative records on GBV at the national level. Countries in which policing is largely governed regionally or locally, for example, may have less capacity and/or authority to produce and publish accurate national estimates of GBV.

Semi-public spaces: GBV persists in workplaces and in educational institutions

As in private spaces, there are many different forms of violence that may be experienced in semi-public spaces, such as the workplace or school.

Many women experience violence and harassment in the workplace

According to the most recent EU survey on GBV, 34% of women who have ever worked report experiencing sexual harassment at work in their lifetime and 5% report such experiences in the last 12 months (Box 8.10) (Figure 8.7, Panel A). When looking at the type of perpetrator, this 34% is inclusive of the 29% of ever-working women who report workplace sexual harassment from a perpetrator who was male, the 16% who report it from a male co-worker and the 8% who report it from a male boss (noting that these values sum to greater than 34% because women may experience sexual harassment from more than one type of perpetrator) (Figure 8.7, Panel B).

Figure 8.7. Experiences of sexual harassment at work are common for women

Share (%) of ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work by occurrence of the last episode (Panel A) and by type of male perpetrator (Panel B), EU-27 average, 2021
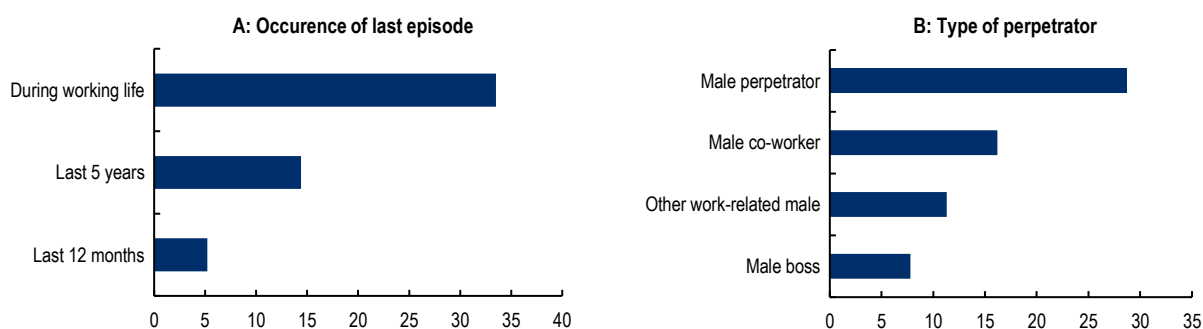
Note: EU-27 average is unweighted. See Box 8.10 for the definition of sexual harassment at work. In this figure, types of perpetrators are defined according to relationship and power: "Co-worker" is a person with whom one works, typically someone in a similar role or at a similar level within an organisation. "Boss" is a job title of a management position that is primarily based on authority over a worker or being in charge of a workplace. "Other work-related person" is someone with whom the respondent has a professional relationship but who does not work in the same workplace as the respondent (e.g. client, customer, patient, student, passenger, etc.). In both Panel A and Panel B, the top row is a total, and therefore inclusive of the subsequent categories. In Panel B, respondents may have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace from multiple types of perpetrators, so categories are not additive. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Eurostat "Ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by occurrence of the last episode" (https://doi.org/10.2908/GBV_SHW_OCC) and "Ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by type of male perpetrator" (https://doi.org/10.2908/GBV_SHW_PERP).

Although sexual harassment at work may only be a single instance, for many women it is a recurring problem. In fact, almost one in five ever-working women in EU countries report having experienced *repeated* occurrences of sexual harassment in the workplace (Eurostat, 2024[54]). This reflects in part that an average of 20% of people in EU-27 countries believe it is acceptable under at least some circumstances

for men to make suggestive comments or allusions about a woman colleague's appearance at work (Eurobarometer, 2024[55]). As with perceptions of IPV, these figures are likely low due to social desirability bias.

Despite this evidence of persistent and continued sexual harassment at work, in EU-27 countries in 2019, an average of 33% of women and 40% of men believed there was too much attention on issues like sexual harassment in the workplace (see Online Annex Figure 8-A7) (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020[39]).

Box 8.10. Defining sexual harassment at work

As with other forms of violence against women, definitions of sexual harassment at work vary across sources and surveys. In the most recent EU survey on GBV against women, sexual harassment at work was defined to cover the following unwanted behaviours with sexual connotations that happen in a work context: inappropriate staring or leering; being exposed to sexually explicit images or videos; indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about a person's body or private life; inappropriate invitations to go out on a date or suggestions for sexual activity of any kind; unsolicited physical contact; inappropriate advances on social networking websites or sexually explicit emails or text messages; threatening with unpleasant consequences if sexual proposals or advances are refused; and any other similar behaviour with sexual connotations that took place at work or in work-related settings and that offended, humiliated or intimidated the respondent (Eurostat, 2024[31]).

Gender-based violence and violence against women persist in educational institutions

Schools, universities and research institutions are another semi-public space where violence against women persists. In a recent (non-representative) EU survey spanning 46 participating universities across 15 countries, UniSAFE found that 66% of women reported some form of violence within their academic or research environments compared to 56% of men (Lipinsky et al., 2022[56]). This includes physical, psychological, economic and sexual violence, as well as sexual harassment and online violence.

Psychological violence was the most prevalent form of violence, followed by sexual harassment. As with violence in other settings, few victims/survivors reported their experiences of violence, with many noting that they were unsure whether the behaviour was serious enough to report, that they did not recognise the behaviour as violence at the time it was perpetrated, and that they did not think that anything would result from reporting.

The survey also found significant negative impacts among staff and student victim/survivors, including feeling dissatisfied with work or school, reduced productivity or academic achievement, and having considered leaving the academic environment.

Given that such experiences persist for both staff and students within educational settings, governments should (continue to) work toward eliminating violence on campuses and ensure victims/survivors receive adequate supports and services, such as counseling and legal assistance.

Public spaces: Women feel less safe in public than men

Even though violence toward women may be more likely to come from within the family, women continue to face violence and the threat of violence in public every day in the EU and the OECD. This, unsurprisingly, translates into a lower sense of safety. Indeed, in OECD-38 countries, only 68% of women report feeling safe when walking alone at night, while 82% of men report the same (see Online Annex Figure 8-A8) (OECD, 2024[57]).

Reflecting this lower sense of safety, many women adapt their behaviour in public spaces out of fear of being harassed or assaulted, including avoiding places where there are no other people around, avoiding certain streets, and avoiding being alone with a person who arouses fear (Figure 8.8).

Figure 8.8. Women are more likely than men to avoid certain areas for fear of assault or harassment

Share (%) of respondents who report various preventative behaviours sometimes, often or all of the time out of a fear of being assaulted or harassed, by gender, EU-27 average, 2019
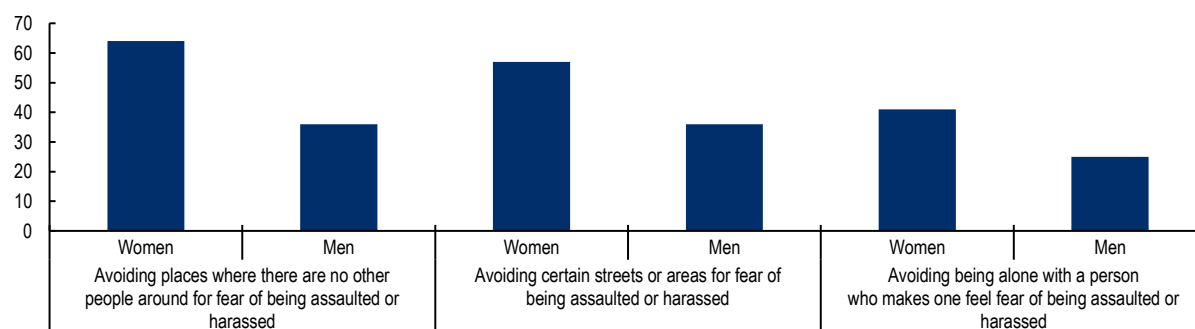
Note: EU-27 average is weighted. Data are based on 34 948 respondents, interviewed between January and October 2019. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: Fundamental Rights Agency, Fundamental Rights Survey 2020 (https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/2021/frs).

Gender gaps in perceived public safety – and women's related preventive and protective behaviours – highlight the importance of public safety measures, including adequate street lighting, and safe, affordable and reliable public transportation options. Without such investments in public spaces, women's real and perceived lack of safety can limit their access to education, jobs and healthcare services (ITF, 2018[58]).

Box 8.11. Spotlight on intersectionality: Sense of safety and minority status in Canada and Australia

In countries where data is publicly available, evidence shows that women's perceptions of safety vary across different social and demographic groups. In **Australia**, for example, women with disability are more likely to feel unsafe while walking alone in their local area after dark (23%) than women without disability (13%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023[59]). Women belonging to the lowest quintile of the socio-economic index of disadvantage are also more likely to report feeling unsafe (25%) than women in the highest quintile (12%). Similar results emerge for visible minority women in **Canada**, who are 4 percentage points more likely than women who are not a visible minority to feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhood alone after dark (18% versus 14%). There are also important differences between visible minority groups. Only 12% of Latin American women felt unsafe, compared to 28% of Southeast Asian women (Statistics Canada, 2024[60]). Although based on a slightly different question, results from the third EU-wide survey on the experiences of immigrants and their descendants show that "Muslim women who wear religious clothing in public face more harassment than those who do not (27% compared to 16%)" (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2024[61]). Muslim men wearing religious clothing also reported discrimination (24%), but slightly less than Muslim women wearing religious clothing.

> ### Box 8.12. Cyber spaces: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
>
> Since the means for technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) are ever evolving with technology advancements, there is currently no standardised, widely used definition for TF-GBV. It can be considered to refer to a form of violence where perpetrators use digital technologies (e.g. social media, messaging apps, online forums, gaming platforms, etc.) to intimidate, harass, threaten or otherwise cause harm (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2024[62]). Digital technologies may be used to commit violence on their own, but may also be used to assist, aggravate or amplify other forms of violence (Government of Australia, 2024[63]).
>
> Based on available data, women and girls may be disproportionately at risk of TF-GBV (Dunn, 2021[64]), especially those who are in public spheres (e.g. celebrities, politicians).
>
> In a study by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), 85% of women report witnessing online violence against other women (including from outside their networks), 65% report knowing other women who have been targeted online from their personal or professional networks, and 38% report personal experiences with online violence (EIU, 2021[65]). In the EIU study, misinformation and defamation – defined as the spreading of rumours and slander to discredit a woman's character – are the most commonly reported type of online threat to women. This is followed closely by cyber harassment (i.e. repeated behaviour using textual or graphical content to frighten and undermine self-esteem) and hate speech (i.e. sexist or hateful language designed to attack or humiliate). This may, in part, reflect the normalisation of violence toward women in online settings. In a recent survey run in EU countries, for example, 21% of respondents agreed that when a woman shares her opinion on social media, she should accept that it may elicit sexist, demeaning and/or abusive replies (Eurobarometer, 2024[55]).
>
> Recognising the significant negative impacts of TF-GBV, the Government of Australia has conducted an audit of key government systems to identify areas where they are being weaponised by perpetrators of violence, and the eSafety Commissioner has developed advice on Safety by Design (Government of Australia, 2024[66]; Government of Australia, n.d.[67]). This exercise recognises that violence can also be "system abuses," defined as "the manipulation of legal and other systems by perpetrators of family violence, done so in order to exert control over, threaten and harass a current or former partner" (Government of Australia, 2022[68]).

8.1.3. Later life: Abuse of older people requires particular attention as populations age

As with abuse in earlier stages of life, abuse of older people may take many forms (e.g. neglect, psychological, physical, sexual and financial), may be perpetrated by various individuals (e.g. family members, friends, informal or formal caregivers, co-residents in homes or institutions, acquaintances and strangers), and may take place in any number of settings (e.g. home, community establishments, public spaces and healthcare institutions) (Bolkan, Teaster and Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2023[69]).

Consistent, harmonised and timely data on abuse of older people is scarce, but country- and time-specific evidence suggests that abuse of older people is pervasive. One meta-analysis finds that, over the past year, 33% of older adults in institutional settings reported psychological abuse, 14% reported physical abuse, 14% financial abuse, and 2% sexual abuse (Yon et al., 2018[70]). Another meta-analysis found a pooled prevalence rate of 10% among older people using population-based studies and 34% using third party- or caregiver-reported studies, suggesting "third parties or caregivers [are] more likely to report abuse than older abused adults" (Ho, Wong and Ho, 2017[71]). The most common subtype of abuse is emotional abuse. Other research, including surveys of staff in long-term care institutions, also reveals that neglect

and abuse are alarmingly common (Myhre et al., 2020[72]; Malmedal, Ingebrigtsen and Saveman, 2009[73]; Drennan et al., 2012[74]).

Since rigorous data on abuse of older people are lacking (WHO, 2024[75]), it is perhaps not surprising that data disaggregated by gender is also lacking. In one meta-analysis, women are found to be more at risk than men (Ho, Wong and Ho, 2017[71]). Another meta-analysis, using 50 studies from community settings and focused on older women, found that 14% of older women reported experiencing abuse in the past 12 months (Yon et al., 2017[76]), with psychological abuse as the most common.

Box 8.13. Additional data sources on GBV and violence against women

Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:

- **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps**: Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance, health and well-being and private and public leadership.

- **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database**: Includes gender-disaggregated indicators from a range of topics relating to violence against women and GBV, including various types of violence, female genital mutilation, human trafficking and attitudes and perceptions toward violence.

- **Fundamental Rights Agency Fundamental Rights Survey 2020**: Contains questions relating to crime victimisation and safety, data protection and privacy, functioning of democracy, views on human rights and experiences with public services.

- **Eurobarometer 2024 Survey on Gender Stereotypes Toward Violence against Women**: Includes questions aimed at gaining a "better understanding of EU citizens' attitudes towards violence, and relativisation of violent or humiliating behaviours" (Eurobarometer, 2024[55]).

- **WHO Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates**: Provides a comprehensive database drawing on population-based, nationally or sub-nationally representative surveys and studies.

- **WHO Violence Studies**: Draws on 8 419 published scientific studies to provide data on "the prevalence, consequences, risk factors and effectiveness of prevention and response strategies" concerning violence against children, youth and older people, intimate partner violence, sexual violence and homicide (WHO, 2022[77]).

- **EU Survey on GBV against Women and Other Forms of Inter-Personal Violence (EU-GBV)**: Provides data on the prevalence of violence, including psychological, physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment at work, violence experienced in childhood and stalking.

- **Women, Business and the Law**: Presents information on laws pertaining to protections against discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace.

- **OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index**: Contains information on laws, social norms and practices relating to discrimination in the family, restricted physical integrity, restricted civil liberties and restricted access to productive and financial resources, including measures of women's protections from intimate partner violence, rape, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation and protection of new-born girls against discrimination.

8.2. Policy combinations to tackle gender-based violence

Eliminating violence against women remains a top-cited gender equality priority for most OECD countries (Figure 8.9). According to the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and the 2021 OECD Gender Equality Questionnaire – combined covering all 43 EU and OECD countries –

37 countries mentioned violence against women as one of their top three priorities for gender equality, with 24 mentioning it as their first priority. The United Kingdom even noted that "violence against women and girls is a national emergency" and the government has set out the ambition to halve violence against women and girls in a decade.

Violence against women has become an increasingly pressing issue since the OECD began surveying governments on gender equality priorities in 2016 (see Figure 1.6 in OECD (2017[78])), jumping from a top-three priority for 68% of the 31 OECD countries responding to the OECD questionnaire in 2016 to a top-three priority for 86% of the 43 OECD and EU countries responding in 2024. The continued prevalence of violence on the ground suggests that this prioritisation has not resulted in adequate policy (including budget) commitments.

Figure 8.9. Violence against women is cited as the top priority area for gender equality by over half of EU and OECD national governments

Number of EU and OECD countries identifying specific policy issues as their first, second or third priority for gender equality, 2024 or latest
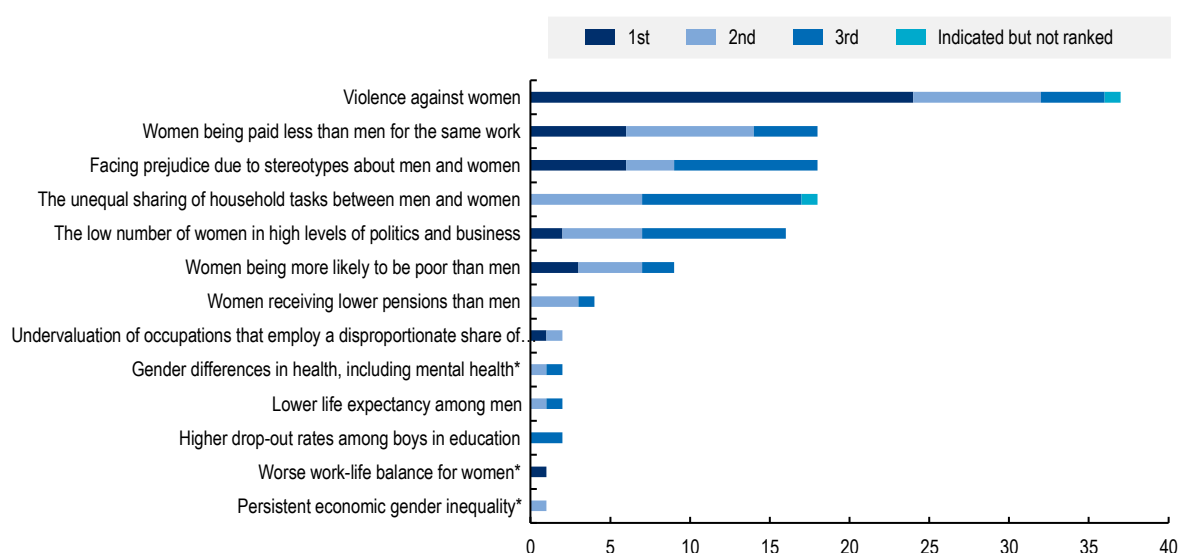
Note: OECD and EU countries selected priority issues in gender equality from a list of topics based on the OECD Recommendation on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship. The horizontal axis indicates the number of respondents that ranked the issues among their top three priorities for gender equality (or in some case listed them without ranking). Respondents also had the possibility to suggest additional priorities. These categories are indicated with a star. In total, 35 countries responded to the questionnaire, with 32 countries providing a ranking of three items, one country providing a listing of two items, one country providing a ranking of four items and one country providing a ranking of five items. Responses for the eight remaining EU and OECD countries are obtained from responses provided to the 2021 Gender Equality Questionnaire, including responses for Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. A total of 43 countries responded to the 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and/or the 2021 Gender Equality Questionnaire. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 8.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat using the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and the 2021 OECD Gender Equality Questionnaire.

As EU countries work toward implementing the provisions of the 2024 EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (see Box 8.14), significant policy developments on GBV are expected.

Box 8.14. Tackling GBV: International and EU initiatives

Council of Europe "Istanbul Convention"

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known as the "Istanbul Convention," was established in 2011 and sets a global standard for addressing GBV. Aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, it sets legally binding standards for signatory countries to protect women, prosecute perpetrators, and implement preventive measures. The Convention covers various forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It also emphasises gender equality and the protection of victims/survivors through services such as shelters and legal assistance. The convention was signed on behalf of the EU in 2017, and it entered into force for the EU in 2023 (Council of Europe, 2011[79]).

EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence

The EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, adopted in 2024, establishes common minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and penalties in the areas of sexual exploitation of women and children and computer crime; the rights of victims/survivors of violence against women or domestic violence before, during and after criminal proceedings; and the protection and support of victims/survivors, prevention and early intervention.

The Directive defines violence against women and domestic violence and mandates the criminalisation of acts like female genital mutilation, forced marriage, non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, and cyber incitement to violence or hatred. It also requires Member States to provide support services for victims/survivors, such as shelters, healthcare services and helplines, and implement legal protections such as protection orders and individual assessment to identify victim's protection needs. The Directive places significant emphasis on prevention, including through public awareness, education and targeted measures for those at heightened risk, along with specialised training for law enforcement and judicial authorities. It additionally mandates enhanced data collection and co-operation between national authorities. Member States are expected to comply with this Directive by 14 June 2027 (European Union, 2024[5]).

Using Table 8.1, this section applies the **priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality in educational attainment and skills by exploring three **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1): eradicating GBV (Outcome A), eliminating workplace sexual harassment (Outcome B) and supporting victims/survivors (Outcome A and B). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 8.1 and additional sources.

Table 8.1 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying the range of cross-portfolio policy and programme *combinations*** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 8.1 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes.

To **eradicate GBV**, policy combinations should focus both on providing support to victims/survivors and on prevention, addressing harmful norms and stereotypes, rehabilitation of aggressors and raising awareness among citizens, lawmakers, service providers and other institutions (Beck et al., 2023[2]). This requires concerted efforts in policy areas relating to education, health, employment, justice, media and more. Implementing such policy combinations will also require efforts across numerous actors – national

and subnational governments, healthcare providers, employers, frontline justice, service providers, collective bargaining units, online platforms, etc. (OECD, 2023[80]).

Educational institutions, for example, play an important role in preventing violence at the outset by ensuring the adequate provision of curriculum and education concerning consent, respectful relationships and positive masculinities. Sexual education (including campaigns) can also help to ensure the development of a healthy understanding and application of consent among both girls and boys.

Justice institutions should additionally be involved as perpetrators must both be adequately and appropriately punished and given opportunities for social rehabilitation and reintegration. Governments may also look to therapeutic (problem-solving) justice to address the root causes of criminal behaviour instead of simply punishing behaviour. This often involves collaboration between courts, social services, and other community-based organisations to help perpetrators overcome issues like substance abuse, mental health problems and poverty (OECD, 2016[81]). Moreover, justice services should be accessible and people-centred, so that victims/survivors are able to achieve justice outcomes that respect their priorities and concerns, in line with the OECD Recommendation on Access to Justice and People-centred Justice Systems.

At the same time, a range of integrated services must be made available to victims/survivors to ensure they have access to physical and mental health care, housing, employment and justice in a co-ordinated and joined-up way – see OECD (2023[3]) and Box 8.15. This would mean understanding the legal and justice needs of the victims/survivors. To ensure that victims/survivors are not re-traumatised with the re-telling of violence upon every interaction with a service provider, such services should be integrated into a network that enables information sharing, while simultaneously protecting data and privacy. This may mean providing longer-term housing, financial assistance and re-employment support as victims/survivors seek to leave violent situations. Clear and accountable (anonymous) reporting mechanisms and follow-up procedures may build trust and increase women's sense of safety. Mental health supports can help ensure that victims/survivors can properly manage the trauma of their experiences. Awareness campaigns on the prevalence and impacts of GBV, including sexual harassment at work, may also be needed, especially since many women and men in the EU believe that there is too much attention on issues such as sexual harassment in the workplace (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2020[39]).

Box 8.15. OECD research on integrated service delivery for victims/survivors

The OECD report *Supporting Lives Free from Intimate Partner Violence* (OECD, 2023[3]) focuses on integrated service delivery for women victims/survivors of IPV. Based on questionnaire responses from 35 OECD governments and extensive consultation with non-governmental service providers, the report finds that integrated survey delivery (ISD) is most frequently introduced at entry points in healthcare, emergency housing and police services. These sectors are increasingly interconnected and have linkages to income support, child-related services and legal assistance. Many of these ISD practices rely on case management, referral systems and/or physically co-located delivery. The report stresses the need for trauma-informed, victim/survivor-centred approaches, where clear lines of communication must connect local service providers with national policy makers to enable better and more victim/survivor-centred policy design and service delivery. The report also highlights the need to a) focus on perpetrators, b) engage stakeholders for the co-creation of good policies, c) strengthen data-sharing capabilities across agencies, and d) conduct rigorous evaluations of ISD strategies. All work "on the ground" should, of course, be embedded in well-designed, whole-of-government strategies to address GBV (OECD, 2023[80]).

Table 8.1 also highlights the importance of **feedback loops** between policy goals. Gender differences in labour market outcomes may reflect that women are more exposed to GBV, but GBV may also impact the

extent to which women are able to obtain an education (see Chapter 4), participate in the labour market (see Chapter 5) and advance to leadership positions (see Chapter 6). GBV may also contribute to poorer physical and mental health for women compared to men (see Chapter 7).

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes outlined in** Table 8.1 varies across countries and across time. Continuous monitoring and evaluation that incorporates a gender perspective is essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended outcomes; identify strengths and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the causes and consequences of violence span across many sectors, involving a complex interplay of individual, household, societal and structural factors. As such, interventions to prevent and stop GBV have been wide-ranging, focusing on individuals (e.g. programmes targeted to people who use or may use violence, or programmes targeted to individuals to prevent victimisation, such as financial education or empowerment programmes for women and girls), couples/households (e.g. income support, relationship strengthening, parenting programmes), and societies/systems (e.g. interventions to address social norms and attitudes, ensuring access to services).

Yet, robust causal evaluations of interventions to stop violence against women are far too rare, linked to persistent funding, research and data gaps. Some international frameworks have sought to consolidate the evidence base on what works to stop violence, including the 2019 RESPECT framework, developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women, which outlines the state of evidence on specific interventions to stop violence in high and low-income countries (WHO and UN Women, 2019[82]). In World Bank higher-income countries, promising actions (i.e. those where evaluations show significant reductions in violence outcomes) include labour force interventions such as employment policies, livelihood and employment training; couples counselling and therapy; empowerment counselling or psychological support to improve access to services (i.e. advocacy); measures to prevent child and adolescent abuse (specifically, home visitation and health worker outreach, parenting interventions and psychological support interventions for children who experience violence and who witness intimate partner violence). Some perpetrator interventions have also been found to be effective in reducing violence, though high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of perpetrator programmes remains scarce.

High-quality studies published in recent years have expanded and nuanced this evidence base, and have highlighted the importance of context-specific factors in mediating the impact of interventions on reducing violence. For example, **access to services**, such as health and police services, can improve the identification of violence and can help to reduce violence, at least in the short term. Looking at a 2012 healthcare reform in Spain that prevented access to the public healthcare system by undocumented migrants, Bellés-Obrero, Rice and Castello (2023[83]) found a 12% reduction in IPV reporting and application for protection orders amongst foreign women driven entirely by regions with stronger enforcement of the reform, highlighting the importance of healthcare access as a pathway to the identification/reporting of violence. Looking at police services in England (United Kingdom), Amaral et al. (2023[84]) found that arrest leads to a 51% reduction in future domestic violence calls in the ensuing years, driven by a decline in repeat victimisation.

Income and employment support can contribute to reducing violence, including through reductions in household stress and the empowerment of women (by increasing women's options outside of the relationship, heightening their bargaining power and/or making it easier for them to leave the relationship). Looking at the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the United States between 1992-2000, Cesur et al. (2022[9]) found that an expansion in the EITC reduced physical and sexual assault, with the effects highest

amongst groups more likely to both be eligible for the ETIC and experience IPV. Yet, the causal mechanisms underlying the relationships between income, employment and violence are complex, and it is important that interventions are tailored (and evaluated in) local contexts, so that mechanisms (and any limitations to mechanisms) are elucidated. For example, increases in women's employment/empowerment has been shown to lead to increases in violence in some settings, which may be particularly the case where negative masculinities are prevalent, and where increases in women's empowerment are perceived as a threat to men's authority. In a similar way, interventions which seek to reduce violence through increases in income may be effective, but might do little to change the underlying norms which make violence an acceptable response to stress (i.e. they remove the stressor but do not make violence a less acceptable response to that stressor, which may mute their potential to lead to long-term, sustainable reductions in violence).

Evidence also points to the role of **adequate social protection** in reducing violence. While most studies have found that motherhood increases the risk of violence, Bergvall and Rodríguez-Planas (2024[85]) found that in Sweden, violence decreases around pregnancy and early motherhood, driven by women who are able to leave a violent relationship after the birth of the child. Strong social protection systems that support financial independence are therefore key to enable victim/survivors to leave violent relationships. In countries with limited social protection, institutions which prevent the dissolution of relationships (e.g. restrictive social norms and/or divorce laws) and lack of contraception, the link between motherhood and (increased) violence seems to be higher.

As countries scale up their efforts to address GBV, including in line with the EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, there is significant opportunity for improved evaluations of interventions to help strengthen the evidence base on what works to stop violence.

8.2.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 8.1. Existing policy options to eradicate gender-based violence (Outcome A), eliminate workplace sexual harassment (Outcome B) and support victims/survivors (Outcome A and B)

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
							Likely Ministries Involved				
A, B	Implement, amend and/or strengthen laws to **prevent and address violence against women** and to protect women and men from all forms of **harassment and violence in the workplace**.		X							X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Implement measures to prevent GBV											
A, B	Roll out primary prevention programmes (e.g. **mandatory sexual education** and/or **education and training modules on consent, respectful relationships** and positive masculinities)**,** targeting the harmful social and gender norms that underpin GBV, including acceptability of violence.	X	X	X						X	Many countries
A, B	Run **awareness campaigns** and/or **launch education programmes** to prevent and address GBV, increasing awareness of violence, its impacts and the supports available to those affected.	X	X	X				X		X	Many countries
A, B	Offer comprehensive and targeted **perpetrator programmes** for men who use or are at risk of using violence, including **dedicated schemes** to combat recidivism among perpetrators.	X	X					X		X	JPN, LTU, LVA, POL
Invest in justice systems sensitive to GBV											
A, B	Improve **access to justice** for victims/survivors and strengthen the justice system's response to perpetrators of violence (e.g. improved access to protection orders, alternative pathways for justice, harsher sentencing, stricter monitoring of offenders).							X		X	AUS, CHL, DNK, ESP, FRA, FIN, JPN, MEX, MLT, USA
A, B	Strengthen the capacity of the justice system to appropriately manage cases related to GBV, including intimate partner violence (IPV) (e.g. development of **specialised judicial units** or courts).							X		X	AUS, CHL, CZE, HRV
A, B	Increase the share of **women on police forces**.		X					X		X	CZE, ISL
Design victim/survivor-centred, integrated and accessible supports and services and ensure access to justice											
A, B	Offer (financial and non-financial) **support** for the re-training, re-location, re-housing, and re-employment of victims/survivors who are leaving violent relationships.		X							X	AUT, CHE, CRI, ESP, ITA, KOR, SWE
A, B	Facilitate the **intake of victims/survivors into support services and justice** systems (e.g. through helplines, panic buttons, digital tools such as chat lines and websites, drop-in services, crisis intervention units, etc.).		X	X						X	Many countries
A, B	Ensure **equitable access** and/or provide **specialised and targeted supports and services** to vulnerable population subgroups (e.g. age, race, ethnicity, migrant status, region).		X	X				X		X	CYP, GRC

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
		Likely Ministries Involved									
A, B	Improve the **provision and take-up of integrated services** (e.g. single point of access, data sharing, network structures, sub-national co-ordination, etc.) across areas like physical and mental health care, justice, housing and income support to support victims/survivors and minimise re-traumatisation.		X	X				X		X	CHL, DNK, FRA, LTU, USA
A	Provide preventive measures, early intervention services and/or specialised **support to children and adolescent** victims/survivors (including those affected by GBV in the family) to break intergenerational cycles of abuse.	X	X	X						X	DNK, FIN, GRC, HUN, ISL, KOR, LVA, NOR, POL
A, B	Ensure supports and services for victims/survivors are prepared for and adequately financed during **climate-related emergencies**.		X	X				X		X	TUR
Build capacity of service providers to identify and address GBV											
A, B	Provide **training and tools** – including (**digital**) **risk assessment tools** – to relevant actors (e.g. employers, schools, unions, medical staff, legal practitioners, service and support organisations, law enforcement, etc.) to improve identification of GBV, facilitate early and targeted support and provide an appropriate response.	X	X	X				X		X	CAN, CHE, CHL, COL, CRI, CYP, CZE, DNK, FIN, GRC, HRV, ISL, JPN, KOR, NOR, PRT, SWE
A, B	Ensure robust **referral pathways** are in place to enable frontline actors to connect those affected by violence with appropriate supports.	X	X	X				X		X	Many countries
A, B	Develop digital capacities of **frontline workers** (e.g. identification of TF-GBV, digital supports of victims/survivors).	X	X	X						X	HRV
Ensure employer support of victims/survivors of GBV											
B	Implement **national regulations pertaining to online harassment in the workplace** and/or encourage employers to adopt **policies** around online harassment, recognising the unique situations presented by telework settings.		X							X	AUS, GBR
B	Introduce or strengthen **employers' obligations** and/or regulations regarding sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace (including in telework settings), ensuring **continued guidance and support** for employers throughout implementation.		X							X	AUS, CAN, DNK, GBR, ISL, JPN, KOR, LTU, PRT, SLV

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A, B	Encourage employers to take **comprehensive action to address GBV** through guidance, support and/or incentives (e.g. developing robust policies; increasing awareness and providing training to employees on protections, services and legal options; offering paid leave and/or flexible working arrangements for victims/survivors).		X							X	AUS, CAN, CRI, CYP, CZE, FRA, GRC, JPN, KOR, NOR
B	Encourage **social partners** (e.g. employer organisations and trade unions) to advocate for better workplace practices around sexual harassment and discrimination.		X							X	AUS, CAN, DNK, SLV
	Ensure women's social and economic independence										
A, B	Promote **gender equality in social and economic life** and ensure women's equitable access to resources and the labour market (see Chapter 5).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
	Build a strong and inclusive care and social protection system										
A, B	Implement measures to **maintain victims/survivors' economic security and employment**, including ensuring that social protection systems are responsive to victims/survivors' needs (e.g. **paid leave**, **unemployment benefits** for victims/survivors who need to leave a job to escape abuse, **financial contributions** to support economic and housing independence).		X							X	AUS, CAN, FRA, GRC, ITA
A, B	Provide **economic and social development programmes** and/or establish **partnerships with employers** to support the economic autonomy of women affected by violence.		X							X	CRI, ESP
	Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation										
A	Prioritise **GBV as a standalone issue** with specific strategies, action plans and/or roadmaps and integrate GBV into **national strategies, plans or roadmaps** on **gender equality**.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries
B	Design a **national strategy** or **policy package** against sexual harassment and violence at work.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	AUS, CAN, GRC
A	**Mainstream gender** into policy and decision-making processes, urban planning, procurement and infrastructure development (e.g. better lighting in parks and public spaces, emergency call boxes in public transit hubs).			X		X	X			X	CYP, CZE, MEX
A, B	Invest in research to further **develop the evidence base on policies and interventions** for successful prevention of GBV and violence against women, including in the workplace.	X	X	X				X	X	X	Many countries

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A, B	Continue to close gender data, research and measurement gaps. Some examples include: • gender norms and stereotypes around violence; • childhood maltreatment and abuse; • abuse of older women; • femicide; • TF-GBV; • workplace harassment and sexual assault; • the scope and nature of IPV, as well as access to and use of support services and justice systems; and • experiences of violence among groups of women who could be at increased risk of violence due to intersecting characteristics, such as migrant status and disability status.	X	X	X				X	X	X	Many countries

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and OECD (2022[86]) and European Union (2015[87]; 2024[88]).

8.2.2. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to tackle GBV, including intimate partner violence and sexual harassment at work. Case studies are provided below.

Tackling GBV and supporting victims/survivors

- **Chile**'s National Plan to Address Violence Against Women (2022-30) is central to its broader strategy for gender mainstreaming. The plan was developed through a participatory process, involving representatives from the government, public services, the police, the judiciary, the Public Ministry, international organisations, higher education institutions, civil society and experts in GBV. It supports prevention, protection, legal reform, cultural change, intersectoral co-ordination and civil society's active participation under different strategic lines of action: promoting the right to a life free from GBV, fostering a cultural shift through public awareness campaigns and educational programmes; preventing GBV through nationwide prevention programmes in schools, workplaces, and communities; articulating and strengthening institutional responses, including enhancing intersectoral and inter-institutional co-ordination in law enforcement, the judiciary, and public health services; ensuring that all victims/survivors have access to justice by strengthening legal frameworks, creating specialised courts, providing legal aid and support services, as well as providing training for judicial and law enforcement personnel to handle cases related to GBV; and supporting data collection, research, and the dissemination of knowledge to inform policies and practices that effectively address GBV.

- To eradicate GBV and support victims/survivors, **Finland** uses a life course approach that aims to provide targeted support and protection at every life stage. This approach is co ordinated mainly by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Justice and informed by Finland's Action Plan for the Istanbul Convention (Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022[89]). The policy mix encompasses legal frameworks, support services, and professional training, providing protection and support throughout an individual's life. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health implements the Barnahus model to support children victims/survivors of violence (including enhanced investigation of suspected violence towards children as well as support and care for children who have experienced violence), while the Ministry of Justice enforces strict legislation on sexual offences, ensuring children are protected with severe penalties for offenders. As individuals transition through youth and young adulthood, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health supports victims/survivors aged 16 and above through a nationwide network of support centres, providing psychosocial care and legal assistance. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health oversees shelters and the Nollalinja helpline, offering immediate support for victims/survivors of IPV. The ministry also educates professionals through the "Intervene in Violence" programme, ensuring effective frontline responses. Overall, the Ministry of Justice maintains robust legal protections under the legislation on sexual offences, ensuring continued safety for individuals of any age.

- **Lithuania** has placed co ordination and co operation among various stakeholders at the centre of its fight against domestic violence. Its policy combination integrates legal reforms, support services, public awareness campaigns, training and multi-level co ordination mechanisms. A key mechanism is the Council for Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. This public advisory body includes representatives from different institutions, NGOs and municipalities to address domestic violence issues through policy proposals and implementation support. Based on such co operation, the revised Domestic Violence Protection Law has introduced targeted measures, such as the domestic violence protection order, which allows for the temporary removal of individuals posing a risk of violence in a close relationship. Lithuania has also improved its system of direct assistance to victims/survivors of domestic violence, with a network of 25 accredited comprehensive assistance centres to provide targeted support to GBV victims/survivors, with a focus on accessibility for individuals with disability. These centres are supported by a methodological centre, ensuring consistent service quality across the country. Public awareness campaigns and training are also critical components of Lithuania's approach, challenging harmful gender stereotypes. For instance, the National Information Centre on Sexual Violence provides training and methodological support regarding sexual violence, ensuring that professionals are equipped to effectively assist victims/survivors.

- **Australia** has introduced a joint federal, state and territorial government document that sets the national policy agenda for addressing violence against women and children for the next 10 years. The National Plan addresses violence across the intersecting domains of prevention, early intervention, response, and recovery and healing. Through the National Plan, the Australian, state and territory governments have collectively committed to the vision of ending gender-based violence in one generation. More than 3 000 people were engaged through various consultation methods to drive development of the National Plan, with voices of victim/survivors at the centre. The National Plan is supported by a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25, the First Action Plan 2023-27, the Activities Addendum to the First Action Plan, and the Outcomes Framework 2023-32. Work to progress policy priorities of the Action Plans is co ordinated through a governance structure comprised of several bodies and groups providing oversight, strategic direction and progress tracking. These include the National Plan Advisory Group, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and the Lived Experience Advisory Council.

Eliminate workplace harassment and support victims/survivors

- **Canada** has acted to create a single, integrated framework to protect federally regulated employees (about 6% of all employees in Canada) from harassment and violence in the workplace. Some of the non-legislative initiatives include an awareness campaign, education and training programmes, and a Harassment and Violence Prevention Hub. A tri-partite working group comprised of government, employer and employee representatives was also established to co-develop harassment and violence prevention tools and resources for federally regulated workplaces. To assess the reduction in occurrences of harassment and violence in federally regulated workplaces, employers are now required to report annually to the Head of Compliance and Enforcement on the number of occurrences that were related to sexual and non-sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. The data are compiled and analysed to determine whether there is an overall reduction in occurrences over time and to evaluate the effectiveness of this regime.

- In **Iceland**, the Administration of Occupational Safety and Health started an action campaign in 2023 against sexual harassment in the workplace under the title "Let's work Together" (#TökumHöndumSaman). The campaign includes new educational materials and tools that were developed with the aim of supporting workplaces in preventing and responding to sexual harassment in the work environment. The tool includes material to support both employees and employers. In addition, the Directorate for Equality offers an educational course on sexual harassment to workplaces, with the aim of building employers and employees' capacities and knowledge regarding the manifestations and consequences of sexual harassment, as well as available tools to combat it.

Eradicate IPV and support victims/survivors

- The Ministry of Digital Government and Gender Equality in **Denmark** launched a National Action Plan to Combat Intimate Partner Violence and Intimate Partner Killings 2023-26 (Danish Ministry of Digital Economy, 2023[90]). The Plan refers to various forms of violence against women – including physical, psychological, sexual, digital and honour-based violence, and promotes initiatives around three pillars: co-ordination and early detection; early and effective action; and a focus on perpetrators. To ensure co-ordination and early detection, Denmark has invested in capacity building, upskilling, and developing a systematic detection tool for health personnel in meetings with new and expectant parents; municipal preparedness for detecting and handling domestic violence; information campaigns; research on IPV incidence; and a nationwide annual creative competition to prevent IPV among young people. To support early and effective action, Denmark has introduced outpatient courses and services for adults exposed to violence; targeted support in the healthcare system for pregnant women and new parents exposed to violence; crisis centre services for men exposed to violence; interventions for children and young people who grew up with domestic violence; protections for children in relation to custody and visitation; psychological treatment for children with the consent of only one parent; protections for children in crisis centres who change schools; guidance on support for children and relatives of partner homicide; and extended violence provisions in the law. For perpetrators, Denmark has focused on enhancing parole criteria for inmates convicted of partner violence or partner murder; building nationwide outpatient treatment for perpetrators and their families; increasing treatment capacity of the Danish Stalking Centre; designing a national guide on digital security and stalkerware (i.e. software installed on devices that allows a third party to secretly track device location and activity); reforming penal codes for a stricter stance against violence; strengthening follow-up on domestic violence.

- On 19 December 2024, **Latvia** approved The Plan for the Prevention and Combatting of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2024-29. The Plan includes measures to prevent violence against women and domestic violence (e.g. teaching young people about healthy relationships, respect, and gender equality), to ensure protection and support for victims/survivors (e.g. expanding crisis centres, developing risk assessment tools), and to strengthen perpetrator accountability, support and rehabilitation services (e.g. electronic monitoring systems for offenders, violence reduction programmes). The Plan also includes commitments toward a coherent, co ordinated and inclusive policy and legal framework on violence against women and domestic violence, including the establishment of single mechanism to promote co operation at the national, regional and municipal level.

Box 8.16. Spotlight on intersectionality: Indigenous women, migrant women and women with disability

Indigenous women, migrant women and women with disability may face additional disadvantages or barriers in disclosing violence or accessing supports and services for victims/survivors. Government should take care to ensure that policies, programmes and interventions are sensitive and adapted to the needs of key population groups.

- For migrant women, this may mean ensuring that benefits and protection are provided to women regardless of visa status and that women in abusive relationships who migrated on spousal visas have rights and are aware of their rights to stay (Chadambuka and Essue, 2024[91]; Alsinai et al., 2023[92]; OECD, 2024[93]).

- For Indigenous women, this may mean delivering place based, trauma aware and culturally responsive programmes. **Australia**, for example, has a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25 underneath their National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32 and is currently developing a standalone national plan to end violence against First Nations women and children (Government of Australia, 2023[94]).

- For women with disability, this may mean improving accessibility for persons with disability in shelters for victims/survivors of GBV (**Canada**), conducting specific analyses on violence against women with disability in facilities (**Germany**), offering specialised comprehensive assistance to women and girls with disability who have experienced violence (**Lithuania**) or preparing a guide on ethical and professional behaviour for workers in social care structures for women and girls with disability who are victims/survivors of GBV (**Greece**). It may also mean ensuring that government documents apply a disability lens. In **Australia**, for example, the government has invested AUD 0.5 million to apply a disability lens to the First Action Plan 2023-27 under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32 to identify how each action will address the needs of women and girls with disability. A stakeholder engagement strategy has also been developed to ensure that women and girls with disability will be involved in developing the action plan. Legislation may need to be adjusted as well to better protect women with disability. In 2022, only 13 of 43 EU and OECD countries had domestic violence laws that explicitly addressed women with disability, only 8 of 43 EU and OECD countries had domestic violence laws that established accessibility to services for women with disability, and only 6 EU and OECD countries had legislation on sexual harassment against women with disability (World Bank, 2022[95]).

Source: OECD Secretariat based on 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality.

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Annex 8.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 8.A.1. List of Chapter 8 Online Annex Figures

Figure no.	Figure title and subtitle
Figure 8-A1	**Girls are more likely to report experiences of cyberbullying in most EU and OECD countries** Share (%) of children aged 11-, 13- and 15-years old who report having experienced cyberbullying at least once in the previous couple of months, 2021-22
Figure 8-A2	**About 1 in 3 women report experiencing IPV in their lifetime** Share (%) of ever-partnered women who have experienced violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime, in the last 5 years and in the last 12 months, 2021 or latest
Figure 8-A3	**Most women who experience IPV suffer repeated occurrences** Share (%) of ever-partnered women who have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime by frequency of violence, 2021
Figure 8-A4	**Few women victims/survivors of violence report their experiences to the police** Share (%) who have experienced IPV (ever-partnered women) and non-partner violence (all women), by person or support service to whom the violence was reported, 2021
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Figure 8-A7	**Many women and men believe that sexual harassment in the workplace receives too much attention** Share (%) of women and men who think there is too much attention today on issues like sexual harassment in the workplace, 2019
Figure 8-A8	**Women are less likely to feel safe walking alone at night than men** Share (%) of women and men reporting feeling safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live, pooled average, 2010-22

Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 8 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink ⋙ https://stat.link/tr8a47

9 Looking ahead: Gender, the green transition and the digital transformation

This chapter starts with an overview of key gender equality considerations relating to the green transition (e.g. the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation) and the digital transformation (e.g. the impacts of digital tools and technologies, automation and artificial intelligence). Topics covered include employment, health and well-being, and representation in leadership and innovation. The chapter closes with policy options that are integral to improving gender equality in the context of the green transition and the digital transformation.

Key findings

Green transition

- Occupational and industrial segregation means that job losses linked to the green transition are expected to be more pronounced for men than for women, while women are less likely to benefit from growing job opportunities in expanding sectors. The net gendered impact is unclear ex ante and requires close monitoring through gender-disaggregated data.

- Women are more likely than men to make more sustainable consumption choices, which may reflect gender differences in concern for the environment, in preferences and in available (financial) resources. Such gender gaps are found to emerge early in life.

- Environmental degradation, natural disasters and climate change can lead to increased morbidity and mortality for both women and men. Current estimates suggest that men are more likely to die from air pollution, while women are more likely to die from natural disasters.

- Women are underrepresented in leadership relating to the green transition, including in government ministerial positions related to environment and in management positions in environmentally sensitive sectors.

Digital transformation

- Occupational and industrial segregation mean the digital transformation will have gendered impacts, with women and men experiencing different degrees of change at work and in the labour market and having different capacities to deal with such change. There is little consensus yet on the net gendered effects.

- Digital technologies in the workplace that facilitate flexible working arrangements and telework are expected to have gendered impacts, but the direction of impact is unclear *ex ante*. Flexible working arrangements and telework may entrench existing patterns of unpaid care and household responsibilities, but may also support greater take-up among men.

- Women are underrepresented in research and innovation at the digital frontier.

- While opportunities and risks exist for women and girls in digital environments, an important risk relates to technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Although data are still limited, existing data show that women and girls are at greater risk than men and boys. In a recent survey in the EU, 27% of respondents agree that when a woman shares her opinion on social media, she should accept that it may elicit sexist, demeaning and/or abusive replies.

Promoting gender equality through policy combinations

- Promoting gender equality in the green transition and the digital transformation requires policy options that span across government and across all stages of people's lives. Key policy measures relate to tackling gender stereotypes and norms from an early age. Re-training and re-skilling are needed to address changing skill needs, including for women who exited the labour market for caregiving. Embedding gender considerations into infrastructure and emergency planning could further enhance women's safety, particularly by reducing the risk of gender-based violence when using public transportation and during crises, including climate-related disasters. Continually improving the availability and accessibility of gender-disaggregated data relating to the green transition and the digital transformation is equally necessary for evidence-based policy making as conditions and contexts continue to evolve.

Both women and men will experience the effects of the green transition and the digital transformation in their work, health, and well-being, but the extent of positive and negative impacts is likely to vary by gender. Such differences stem from a range of factors, including unequal access to resources, gendered representation in leadership and research and development, physiological factors, discrimination, consumption and employment patterns and socio-economic characteristics. Many of these factors relate back to gender norms and stereotypes.

This chapter proceeds as follows. Section 9.1 and Section 9.2 explore key indicators relating to the gendered nature of the green transition and the digital transformation, respectively, putting forward likely explanations for observed outcomes. Section 9.3 explores policy options and combinations to advance gender equality in the green transition and digital transformation.

Box 9.1. Defining the green transition and the digital transformation

Green transition

Climate change and environmental degradation are a major threat to economic growth and well-being. To mitigate its consequences requires collective action – including from consumers, producers and policy makers – to shift toward more sustainable and environmentally friendly behaviours (Causa, Nguyen and Soldani, 2024[1]). This shift is generally referred to as the green transition and it may have both positive and negative impacts for individuals, households, communities, economies and societies.

Digital transformation

OECD (2019[2]) defines digitisation as the conversion of analogue data and processes into a machine-readable format. Digitalisation is the use of digital technologies and data as well as interconnection that results in new or changes to existing activities. Digital transformation refers to the economic and societal effects of digitisation and digitalisation.

9.1. Background: Gender gaps in key outcomes in the green transition

This section explores gender gaps in key indicators relating to the green transition using a life course approach. The section starts with results on childhood and youth, deriving principally from Borgonovi et al. (2022[3]), before exploring results relating to adulthood, including on the labour market, health, leadership and innovation.

9.1.1. Childhood and youth: Gender gaps in environmental competence, preferences, awareness and behaviours emerge early

Gender differences in concern for the environment emerge early, with girls aged 15 years more likely than boys to report that they care about the environment throughout both EU and OECD countries (Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]). Girls are also slightly more likely to demonstrate *foundational* levels in environmental sustainability competence (see Online Annex Figure 9-A1) (OECD, 2023[4]; Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]), which is defined as having basic science proficiency (i.e. Level 2 in the PISA science test), environmental awareness and concern, confidence in explaining environmental issues, and pro-environmental behaviour. By comparison, there is a near-zero gender gap in *advanced* environmental sustainability competence, which is defined similarly to foundational sustainability competence, except that students must achieve at least Level 4 in the PISA science test (OECD, 2023[4]). This suggests that the closure of the gender gap when moving from foundational to advanced sustainability competence is driven by the fact that girls have

lower levels of achievement in the PISA science test, especially at the top of the distribution (OECD, 2023[4]; Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]), in part due to gender stereotypes and norms (see Chapter 4).

Girls and boys also have differing levels of awareness of environmental problems depending on the nature of such problems (Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]). Boys report higher levels of awareness of environmental issues related to nuclear waste, greenhouse gases, genetically modified organisms and deforestation. By contrast, girls have greater awareness of environmental issues related to water shortages, air pollution and plant and animal extinction. This awareness aligns with academic performance: boys score higher in physical and earth science areas, while girls perform better in biology (Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]). It also maps into fields of study in tertiary education, with women better represented in biology than physics and engineering (McNally, 2020[5]).

In most EU and OECD countries, 15-year-old girls report engaging in individual forms of pro-environmental behaviours (such as energy saving at home) more than similarly aged boys (Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]). At the same time, girls are less optimistic about potential improvements in the state of the environment over the next 20 years across all issues, with the largest gender gaps around air pollution and nuclear waste (Borgonovi et al., 2022[3]).

Gender gaps in environmental competence, preferences, awareness, and behaviours may evolve due to shifting social, economic, environmental and policy contexts. To track progress and inform action, governments must (continue to) regularly collect and monitor gender-disaggregated data.

9.1.2. Adulthood: Gender gaps on the green transition exist in the labour market, health, leadership and innovation

This section explores gender gaps in key indicators relating to the green transition in adulthood, including gender differences in potential job losses and health impacts and the underrepresentation of women in leadership and innovation.

Men are more likely than women to lose their jobs as a result of the green transition

To meet international climate targets, and in response to demand, many labour markets will undergo a significant transition to greener, more sustainable jobs. This is expected to shift jobs within existing industries and establish entirely new sectors (OECD, 2023[6]). These shifts are expected to have gendered impacts for two reasons.

- **Women are underrepresented in "green" jobs:** Increased spending on the green transition will create more "green" jobs. Although defining these jobs is difficult (OECD, 2023[7]; 2024[8]), women are underrepresented across different definitions. In 2021, for example, women accounted for only 28% of green-task jobs (OECD, 2023[7]), defined as occupations where at least 10% of the tasks directly support sustainable development. According to another definition, on average between 2015 and 2019, only 12% of women were in green-driven occupations, compared to 29% of men, where green-driven occupations are defined as new jobs that emerge due to the green transition, jobs whose demanded skills and tasks will be changing because of the transition and jobs producing goods and services that are key inputs for lower-emission activities (OECD, 2024[8]).

- **Men are overrepresented in "polluting" industries and occupations:** "Polluting" jobs are at the greatest risk of disappearing due to the green transition. Although different definitions of "polluting" jobs exist, all definitions point to a large overrepresentation of men. For instance, when "polluting" jobs are defined as those in the upper two deciles of the average greenhouse gases (GHG) intensity distribution in at least 10 out of 32 countries, men account for 81% of employment (OECD, 2024[8]). When defined as those jobs in industries in the top 95th percentile of emissions of at least 3 out of 8 contaminants, men account for 83% of jobs (OECD, 2023[7]).

Gender differences in the employment impacts of the green transition are largely driven by occupational and industrial segregation (i.e. women and men tend to work in different jobs) (see Chapter 5) (OECD, 2023[7]), with men over-represented in carbon-intensive extractive industries, like mining, oil and gas.

This occupational and industrial segregation is rooted in gender stereotypes and norms (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Because low-paid men may be more likely to lose their jobs, the green transition may also slow down the closure of the gender wage gap, but the effect is likely to be minimal given the relative size of GHG-intensive employment (OECD, 2024[8]).

To ensure that both women and men benefit from the growing opportunities in the best-paying, expanding sectors, governments must work toward combatting gender segregation by field of study and occupation and industry and ensure that both women and men have access to re-training and re-skilling opportunities linked to the green transition (OECD, 2024[8]; Frey, Thomas and Alajääskö, 2024[9]; OECD, 2021[10]).

Box 9.2. Gendered impacts of the green transition in local economies

At a local level, the transition to green jobs and green sectors may *directly* impact men's jobs since polluting industries and occupations are typically dominated by men (OECD, 2024[8]). The displacement of men's employment may, however, *indirectly* impact women's employment (OECD, 2022[11]). In the United Kingdom, for example, the closure of coal mines in the 1980s heavily impacted men at the outset. But, over time, women working in the manufacturing sector in regions near coal mines were crowded out as men took on jobs previously performed by women (Aragón, Rud and Toews, 2018[12]).

Women are more responsive than men to environmental concerns

Across countries, climate change is a salient issue, but women are more likely to be concerned than men (Wellcome, 2020[13]; OECD, 2023[4]; Asai, Borgonovi and Wildi, 2022[14]; Ballew et al., 2018[15]). In the 2024 OECD Risks that Matter (RTM) Survey, for example, 73% of women report being somewhat or very concerned about climate change in the next year or two, compared to 63% of men (Figure 9.1), with statistically significant gaps in 22 out of 27 participating OECD countries. Similar findings emerge in the OECD Survey on Environmental Policy and Individual Behaviour Change (EPIC) (OECD, 2023[16]; forthcoming[17]).

Women also have different policy preferences regarding government action around climate change, with 51% of women respondents to the 2024 RTM Survey believing the government is not doing enough to tackle climate change – bearing in mind the costs and benefits of policy action – compared to 43% of men (see Online Annex Figure 9-A2).

Figure 9.1. Women are more concerned about climate change than men

Share (%) of women and men somewhat or very concerned about climate change in the next year or two, 2024
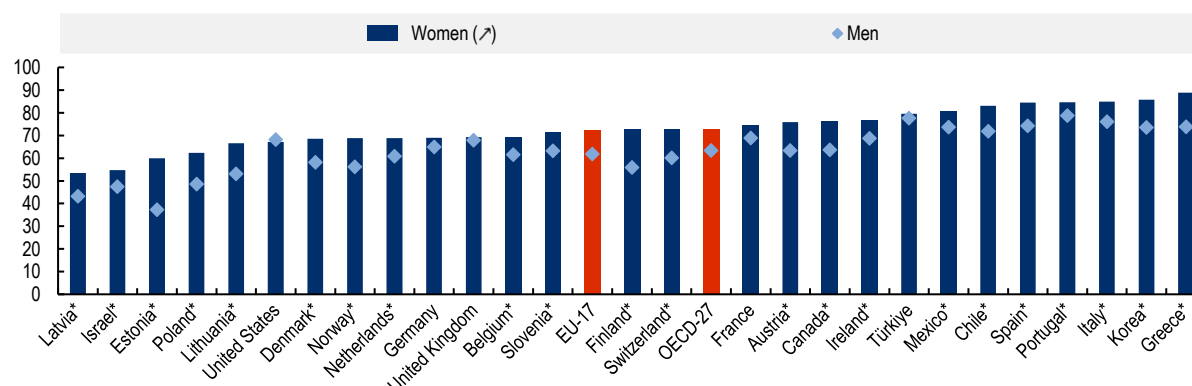
Note: EU-17 and OECD-27 averages are unweighted. ↗ indicates that the data is sorted according to this series in ascending order. * indicates that the difference between women and men is statistically significant at the 10% level. Respondents were asked "Thinking about the next year or two, how concerned are you about climate change?" Response options were "Not at all concerned," "Not so concerned," "Somewhat concerned," "Very concerned," and "Can't choose." "Concerned" in this figure includes "Somewhat concerned" and "Very concerned." Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 9.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using OECD 2024 Risks that Matter Survey microdata (https://oe.cd/rtm).

Research additionally finds that women are more likely to (or be willing to) engage in environmentally sustainable behaviour than men. In a 2023 cross-national survey in EU-27 countries, for example, women are more likely than men to report cutting down on consumption of disposable items, reducing waste and regularly separating recycling, buying and eating more organic food and buying and eating less meat (see Online Annex Figure 9-A3) (European Commission, 2023[18]). Preliminary results from an OECD survey on consumer attitudes toward sustainable consumption also show that women (62%) are more likely than men (58%) to report that they would be willing to make sacrifices to protect the environment. Women (21%) were likewise more likely than men (16%) to report that their last purchase of a large household appliance, electronic device, furniture piece or apparel item in the past 12 months was second hand. Even when purchasing such products new, women were slightly more likely than men to consider the product's environmental impact as at least "important" (52% vs. 50%) and less likely to consider this impact "not important at all" (18% vs. 22%) (OECD, forthcoming[19]).

Beyond consumer purchases, women also tend to use modes of transportation that result in lower emissions, such as public transport and walking, while men are more likely to drive a car (see Online Annex Figure 9-A4) (European Union, 2020[20]). But safety remains a critical issue in public transport and spaces, with many women feeling unsafe using public transportation and walking home alone at night (see Chapter 8) (OECD, 2023[6]; 2019[21]; ITF, 2018[22]).

Higher concern about climate change and the environment, higher levels of environmental action and stronger preferences for government action among women relative to men stem from several factors. One such factor may be that sustainable consumption and pro-environmental behaviour is associated with femininity (Brough et al., 2016[23]; Zhao et al., 2021[24]) Another factor may be that, as a result of their experiences with injustice, women are more likely than men to reject hierarchical values in favour of egalitarian values and are more likely to be "concerned about social justice, unity with nature, and social and environmental accountability, while men are more likely than women to ascribe importance to self-enhancement values" (e.g. power, achievement, hedonism, success, capability and ambition) (Bloodhart and Swim, 2020[25]). Gender differences in behaviour may also partly reflect differences in access to

resources and lower levels of income among women, particularly around issues such as car ownership and second-hand purchasing.

Box 9.3. Higher energy poverty among women could be amplified by climate change mitigation policies

Structural inequalities in socio-economic status and unpaid care and household responsibilities mean that women – especially single mothers, older women, and those in low-income households – are disproportionately energy poor and less able to invest in improving the energy efficiency of their homes. Applying a gender lens to climate policies, especially income-regressive policies such as carbon pricing, in therefore key to avoid inadvertently burdening lower-income individuals and households, where women are overrepresented. Without targeted mitigation strategies – such as energy subsidies, investment in energy-efficient social housing, or direct rebates – the introduction of income-regressive policies could exacerbate energy poverty among certain groups of vulnerable women.

Source: European Parliament (2023[26]; 2017[27]), Azimi et al. (2023[28]), Murauskaite-Bull et al. (2024[29]), Linden, O'Donoghue and Sologon (2024[30]), EIGE (2023[31]) and Pradhan Shrestha et al. (2025[32]).

Gender gaps in harms related to the green transition

Poor environmental stewardship may affect both women's and men's health, but impacts are not identical across genders (Zavala et al., 2024[33]). Using available internationally-comparable data, this section provides an overview of gender gaps in mortality as a result of air pollution, natural disasters and heat waves.

Mortality alone is a very narrow scope for this section, but gender-disaggregated data on the health impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation are scarce. Going forward, to better understand the gendered health impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation beyond mortality, governments must invest in effective monitoring and in the production of gender-disaggregated data. Indeed, although there is a growing recognition of the intersection between gender and health more broadly (see Chapter 7) and in the context of the green transition, there is currently limited explicit acknowledgment of the relationship between gender, climate change and health in the national policies and action plans of OECD countries.

Air pollution is more likely to kill men than women

Air pollution – tiny particulate matter small enough to be inhaled into the deepest part of the lung – harms human health by causing or worsening existing respiratory, cardiovascular and other diseases, and in the worst of cases, air pollution may lower life expectancy by contributing to early mortality. From a gender perspective, women and men may face different risks of mortality and morbidity from air pollution (OECD, 2020[34]). In 2021, for example, air pollution was associated with slightly higher mortality rates among men than among women (see Online Annex Figure 9-A5) (IHME, 2021[35]). These higher levels of mortality among men may derive from gender differences in exposure to air pollution due to occupational and industrial segregation (see Chapter 5), different daily movements between home, work and other locations, as well as gender differences in vulnerability to air pollution due to underlying health issues (see Chapter 7) (OECD, 2020[34]).

Box 9.4. Spotlight on intersectionality: Air pollution and income

Within countries, low-income and marginalised populations are more likely to be exposed to air pollution, reflecting occupational, industrial and residential segregation. Lower-paying jobs, for example, are more likely to require outdoor physical labour, increasing exposure to air pollution, and low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to host industrial plants and busy highways and roads, important sources of pollution (Rentschler and Leonova, 2022[36]; Jbaily et al., 2022[37]). Although much research exists on the link between marginalisation and exposure to air pollution, it rarely focuses on intersectionalities, such as gender and race and gender and income (Michelson, 2022[38]).

Women are more likely than men to die from natural disasters

Often coming without warning, natural disasters have the potential to significantly disrupt lives and livelihoods. Although natural disasters do not discriminate, women have slightly higher mortality rates attributable to exposure to forces of nature – i.e. earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, avalanches, storms, lightning strikes and floods (IHME, 2021[35]). Greater mortality among women as a result of natural disasters may reflect pre-existing socio-economic gaps between women and men, with women tending to experience higher vulnerability in everyday life (Neumayer and Plümper, 2007[39]) and "gender gaps in access to information on disaster preparedness, access to public shelters and limits to mobility" (Erman et al., 2021[40]). But not all natural disasters are the same. For instance, evidence suggests that men account for 70% of flood-related deaths in Europe and the United States, potentially reflecting their greater likelihood of participation in rescue efforts (Erman et al., 2021[40]).

Besides mortality, natural disasters also impact a wide range of social, economic and health outcomes, and these impacts may vary between women and men. Several studies, mainly focused on lower-income or developing countries, show negative implications for women's labour supply, mental health, and gender-based violence (Erman et al., 2021[40]). After a natural disaster, for example, research finds that women are at greater risk of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety. Women may also be more likely to face unemployment after a disaster, potentially reflecting increased unpaid household and care responsibilities (e.g. flood clean up, childcare due to school closures). Gender-based violence, too, has been found to increase post-disaster, including both stranger-perpetrated sexual violence and intimate partner violence (Erman et al., 2021[40]).

Box 9.5. Spotlight on intersectionality: Disasters may amplify disadvantage

Women with disability, migrant women, women from racial and ethnic minorities and low-income women can face compounded disadvantages (see Chapters 4 through 8), which risk being exacerbated during crises. Yet, little research on gendered intersectional disadvantages in the context of natural disasters is available for EU and OECD countries, with most available evidence coming from developing countries. For example, women with disability are found to face elevated rates of death and greater risks of gender-based violence after natural disasters in Cambodia and Bangladesh (Gartrell et al., 2020[41]; Le Masson, 2022[42]). Greater risks of death reflect that women with disability face a "triple burden of poverty, gender and disability," in addition to their role as carers, which limits their ability to access the political, economic and social resources required to prepare for disasters (Gartrell et al., 2020[41]). Greater risks of violence reflect that even outside of disaster contexts, women with disability who are victims/survivors may face additional barriers to accessing supports (see Chapter 8). During

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and immediately after disasters, disrupted support systems and weakened protections may leave women with disability even more exposed and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The lack of evidence from EU and OECD countries presents an opportunity going forward. To ensure inclusive and accessible services, disaster preparedness must take intersectionality considerations into account, and outcomes before, during, and after natural disasters must be monitored using an intersectional lens (e.g. disability, race and ethnicity, Indigenous identity, income, education, age).

Gender differences in mortality from exposure to heat may depend crucially on age

All over the world, populations are increasingly exposed to hot days for longer periods of time. Gender differences in exposure to hot weather largely stem from differences in time spent outdoors (e.g. due to occupational segregation or differences in propensity to engage in outdoor leisure), access to indoor cooling methods, or differences in pre-existing conditions.

Given the various potential factors behind gender differences in exposure to extreme temperature – many of which may differ across countries, time periods, and specific events – there is no consensus on whether men or women are at greater risk of heat-related illnesses or deaths (van Steen et al., 2018[43]; Gifford et al., 2019[44]). Estimates from the OECD Environment Statistics Database suggest that premature deaths due to high temperatures are slightly higher among men than among women, but differences are non-existent or quite small in most cases (see Online Annex Figure 9-A6) (OECD, 2020[45]). By comparison, recent research based on the 2022 heat wave in Europe finds that, overall, women experienced more heat-related deaths than men. This gender gap, however, depended crucially on age, with men more likely to die than women when aged below 80 years and women more likely to die than men when aged 80 years and over (Ballester et al., 2023[46]).

Gender gaps may also be driven by gendered physiological differences and socio-cultural factors (Ballester et al., 2023[46]; Leach et al., 2024[47]), as well as gender disparities in health and healthcare access (e.g. unmet healthcare needs) (see Chapter 7) and economic security (e.g. higher risks of poverty) (see Chapter 5).

Gender gaps in leadership and innovation in the green transition

Politics: Women are underrepresented as climate change and environment decision-makers

By designing policy to shape incentives, governments play a critical role in leading the transition away from fossil fuels. But women are underrepresented as legislators and as ministers in nearly all EU and OECD countries (see Chapter 6), including in environment-related portfolios. In EU-27 countries, for example, women accounted for only 34% of members of the government or political executive in national ministries dealing with environment and climate change in 2024 (Figure 9.2). This is similar to the share dealing with basic, economic and infrastructure functions, but significantly less than the share dealing with socio-cultural functions (EIGE, 2024[48]).

Figure 9.2. Women are underrepresented as leaders in politics around climate and the environment

Share (%) of members of the government or political executive in national ministries dealing with environment and climate change who are women, 2024
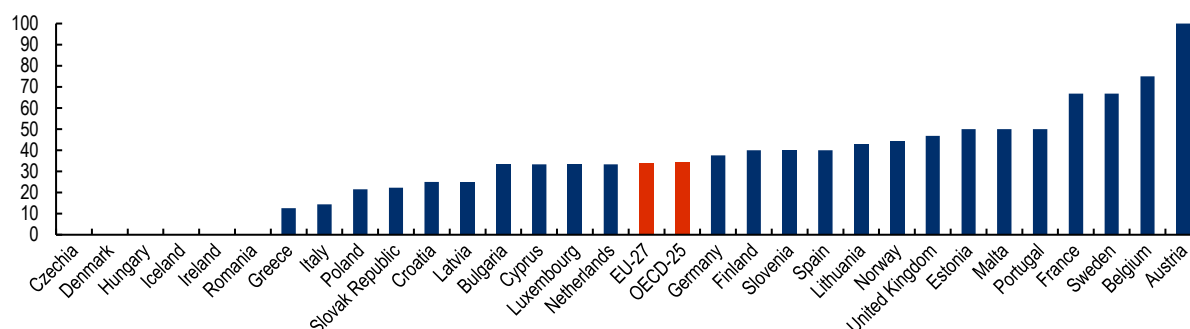
Note: EU-27 and OECD-25 averages are unweighted. Data refer to national ministries or departments of national governments with competences in environment, climate change, energy and transport. Note that the names of the ministries may vary between countries. Members of government or political executive in national ministries refers to the sum of senior and junior government ministers with competences in environment, climate change, energy and transport. Senior ministers are ministers who have a seat in the cabinet or council of ministers, junior ministers do not. See EIGE (2023[49]) for a list of ministries included and for more details on data sources, data collection and methods. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 9.A.
Source: EIGE "National ministries dealing with environment and climate change: ministers by seniority," (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs).

In the context of the green transition, research shows that greater representation of women in decision-making positions is related to a heighted focused on environment-related topics (D'souza, 2018[50]), more ambitious climate goals and more effective climate actions (Strumskyte, Ramos Magaña and Bendig, 2022[51]; Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi, 2019[52]), stronger support for environmental legislation (Ramstetter and Habersack, 2019[53]), improvements in environmental quality (DiRienzo and Das, 2019[54]; Salahodjaev and Jarilkapova, 2020[55]), greater focus on gender-specific environmental impacts (OECD, 2021[56]), and an increased likelihood of ratifying international environmental treaties (Norgaard and York, 2005[57]).

This may reflect that, in OECD countries, women are more likely to be concerned about climate change (Figure 9.1) and to report that the government is not doing enough to tackle climate change (see Online Annex Figure 9-A2).

Business: Women are less likely than men to be managers in environmentally sensitive industries

In the green transition, businesses also have a key role to play in adopting sustainable practices, ensuring that climate targets are met in a just and inclusive way, and supporting employees through the transition.

As in the world of business at large, women are underrepresented at all levels of leadership in energy-related or environmentally sensitive sectors (European Union, 2019[58]; McKinsey, 2021[59]). Bringing more women into management and leadership positions in business could have important implications for climate action. Research has shown, for example, that a critical mass of women on boards and in senior management can lead to improved corporate social performance, better climate governance, and increased dissemination of information to stakeholders and decision-makers on environmental matters (Hafsi and Turgut, 2012[60]; Arayssi, Dah and Jizi, 2016[61]; Di Miceli and Donaggio, 2018[62]; Hossain et al., 2017[63]; Post, Rahman and Rubow, 2011[64]; Sasakawa Peace Foundation and BloombergNEF, 2020[65]; Velte, 2016[66]; Yarram and Adapa, 2021[67]), as well as more renewable energy consumption (Atif et al., 2021[68]) and environmental and climate change innovation (Moreno-Ureba, Bravo-Urquiza and Reguera-Alvarado, 2022[69]; García-Sánchez et al., 2023[70]).

Innovation and research: Women are less likely to be researching and innovating in the area of climate change and the environment

Science-related jobs, especially in research and development, are crucial in leading the transition away from fossil fuels. But women continue to be underrepresented in most science-related fields (see Chapters 4 and 5), including those related to the climate and the environment. In the field of climate research, for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is seen as an "authoritative and influential source of reports" (Gay-Antaki and Liverman, 2018[71]), yet women represented only 33% of authors in the Sixth Assessment Report in 2021-23. Gender gaps are similar among authors of other publications in environmental science (see Online Annex Figure 9-A7) (De Kleijn et al., 2020[72]).

Women-founded climate tech companies also received only 58 funding deals in 2023 worldwide, compared to 826 for companies founded by men (Garden, 2024[73]). Other research paints a similar picture (Furness, 2022[74]; Sqalli et al., 2021[75]). And, across OECD countries with available data, only 8% of patents relating to environment management, 10% of patents relating to climate change mitigation, 10% of patents relating to climate change adaptation technologies, and 15% of patents relating to a sustainable ocean economy had at least one female inventor in 2022 (see Online Annex Figure 9-A8) (OECD, 2023[76]).

9.2. Background: Gender gaps in the digital transformation

This section explores gender gaps in key indicators relating to the digital transformation using a life course approach, looking specifically at the labour market, gender-based violence, leadership and innovation.

9.2.1. Childhood and youth: Girls may be more negatively impacted by the digitalisation than boys

Digitalisation penetrates all aspects of life – including school, work, socialisation and leisure. While digitalisation can create new opportunities for healthy, productive and fulfilling lives, it can also exacerbate existing risks and create new ones (OECD, 2024[77]).

New risks largely reflect that digital environments and online communication are markedly different from face-to-face interaction. Online interactions are, for example, often anonymous, which allows individuals to express themselves more freely, often bypassing social filters. Digital environments also lead to disembodiment (i.e. absence of physical presence), which can diminish empathy. Disinhibition is another common feature of online settings, with individuals more likely to engage in candid or extreme behaviour (OECD, 2024[77]). These features combined can create situations where harmful behaviours thrive, such as cyberbullying. Digital environments and online communication are also often designed to exploit psychological triggers that make it difficult to disengage, especially for young people, contributing to the rise of problematic internet and social media use (Pérez-Torres, 2024[78]).

Cyberbullying and problematic internet and social media use are linked to mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (OECD, 2024[77]), and research suggests that these negative behaviours in digital environments may disproportionally affect girls. Girls are, for example, more likely to report problematic social media use (see Online Annex Figure 9-A9) and since 2017, the overall rate of young people reporting problematic social media use increased by 49% across 37 countries and regions, with the share of girls increasing more than twice as much as boys (OECD, 2022[79]; OECD, 2024[77]). In addition, in OECD countries with available data, 17% of girls aged 11-, 13- and 15-years old report having been a victim of cyberbullying at least once in the previous couple of months. This compares to 14% of boys (see Online Annex Figure 9-A10).

Generative AI tools have also been found to create "overtly sexualised digital avatars or images of women while portraying men as more professional and career oriented" (Caira, Russo and Aranda,

2023[80]). Generative AI can also perpetuate other types of biases in visual representation of certain careers and occupations. In one study in Australia, for example, generative AI "included a disproportionately high proportion of white male medical students which is not representative of the diversity of medical students in Australia" (Currie et al., 2024[81]). This could reinforce or further entrench gender equality issues, including harmful gender stereotypes and norms, and requires close monitoring and potentially policy action (OECD, 2024[82]).

At the same time, digital technologies are also associated with a range of positive experiences and outcomes around access to education and mental health resources, social connections, creativity, self-expression and civic engagement. This means that all actors – parents, governments, teachers, communities – must help young people maximise the benefits of digital transformation while minimising the risks.

9.2.2. Adulthood: Digitalisation presents both opportunities and risks for gender equality

Through the lens of the digital transformation, this section considers gender differences in potential job losses, teleworking, technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV) and the underrepresentation of women in innovation and research relating to digitalisation.

Employed women and men are differently impacted by the digital transformation

Recent improvements in digital technologies – especially artificial intelligence (AI) – have expanded the traditional view of automation (i.e. robots taking over repetitive, manual tasks, often in manufacturing) to encompass automation of more complex, cognitive tasks that were previously considered beyond technological reach (e.g. problem-solving, language comprehension and decision-making) (OECD, 2023[83]).

These developments have the potential to reshape labour markets, change management practices, and completely alter the type and extent of interactions between machines, computers, managers and colleagues. Impacts could be positive, including, for example, improved work-life balance, increased workplace safety, a reduction in undesirable tasks, and increased demand for human-only skills (e.g. communication, customer service, leadership, creativity, originality, complex social interaction and dealing with uncertainty) (Brodnitz, 2024[84]; Raman and Flynn, 2024[85]; UNESCO/OECD/IDB, 2022[86]). At the same time, impacts could be negative, including reduced demand for certain skills and/or jobs and increased levels and/or durations of unemployment.

As in the case of the green transition, occupational and industrial segregation by gender (see Chapter 5) means that women and men may face different degrees of positive and negative impacts from the digital transformation. Women and men may also have different capacities to respond to or deal with the digital transformation (e.g. learn new skills or tools).

Women and men, for example, may have different opportunities to access and use remote working or teleworking arrangements – and employers and colleagues may perceive the use of such arrangements by women and men differently (see below) (OECD, 2023[6]). Women and men may also experience differences in changes to management practices (e.g. performance reviews, surveillance) and workplace health and safety (e.g. automation of dangerous tasks).

AI advances (particularly in generative AI) have recently attracted a lot of attention. Although empirical analyses do not suggest that overall employment levels have fallen due to AI (e.g. OECD (2023[83]), Lane (2024[87])), certain groups may be more likely to experience job losses and the future impact of AI could be different as the technology matures and diffuses and as new advances emerge. For this reason, researchers continue to estimate the (potential) impact of AI on different occupations and socio-economic groups (e.g. OECD (2024[88]; 2024[89]), Lane (2024[87]), Cazzaniga et al. (2024[90]), Gmyrek, Berg and

Bescond (2023[91]), Lassébie and Quintini (2022[92]), McKinsey Global Institute (2023[93]), Dabla-Norris and Khalid (2019[94]), Webb (2019[95]) and Cortes, Jaimovich and Siu (2018[96]), Nedelkoska and Quintini (2018[97]), Brussevich).

When looking at the gender angle, research comes to different conclusions due to the use of different methodologies and assumptions – including on the speed and nature of technological advances, the diffusion of these technologies throughout industries and sectors, and potential protective barriers (e.g. task mix, education level, employment protection, employer versus employee power, etc.), among others. Some studies suggest that men could be at higher risk of automation due to all technologies (not just AI) (e.g. Lassébie and Quintini (2022[92]), Webb (2019[95])) and some studies suggest that women could be at higher risk (e.g. Gmyrek, Berg and Bescond (2023[91])). Other studies suggest that women and men face roughly similar levels of occupational exposure to AI, but that effects differ by occupation. Clerical workers (where women are overrepresented) and science and engineering professionals and chief executives (where women are underrepresented) face particularly high exposure to AI (OECD, 2024[89]).

Despite the lack of consensus on gender differences in potential future impacts of the digital transformation, there is agreement that the digital transformation will be disruptive to those occupations exposed to it, that workers need to be prepared to adapt to change, and that impacts will be unequal across population subgroups. Not all workers are equally prepared to adapt to change, with evidence pointing to gender gaps in digital skills (e.g. programming) that could contribute to gender differences in the labour market impacts of the digital transformation (OECD, 2024[98]). This requires a close monitoring of developments in the labour market with a gender-sensitive lens and appropriate investment in public policies to assist both women and men who lose their jobs with retraining, re-skilling and re-entering the labour market.

Results from the 2024 OECD Risks that Matter Survey show that women and men are aware of the potential for both positive and negative impacts – but men are more likely to believe that technology will help them in some way over the next five years, such as by improving their work-life balance or reducing the repetitiveness of their work (Figure 9.3). Men are also more concerned about potential negative impacts than women, including being replaced by a robot, AI or a person providing a similar service on an Internet platform. They are also more concerned about losing employment due to a lack of or incompatible technical skills.

Figure 9.3. Gender gaps in perceptions of the impacts of the digital transformation on jobs

Share (%) of employed women and men who predict or anticipate certain employment outcomes as a result of automation and technological change, average of 27 OECD RTM countries, 2024
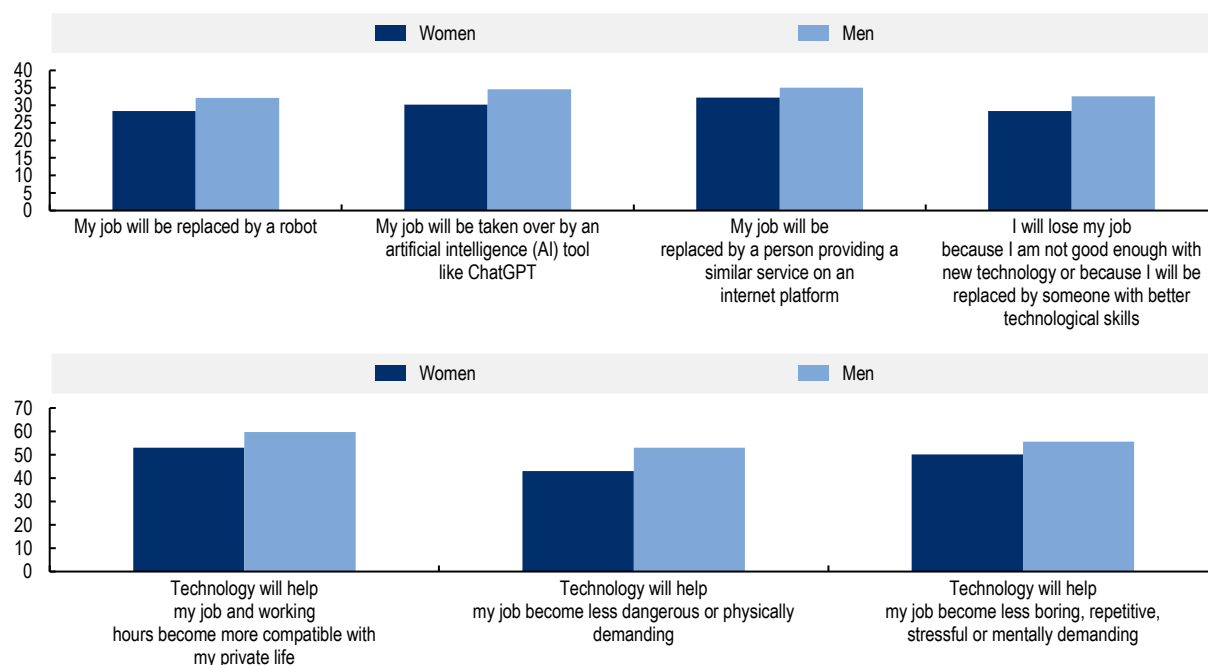
Note: All estimates are unweighted averages across RTM-27 countries. Respondents were asked "How likely do you think it is that the following will happen to your job (or job opportunities) over the next five years? (a) My job will be replaced by a robot, (b) My job will be taken over by an artificial intelligence (AI) tool like ChatGPT, (c) My job will be replaced by a person providing a similar service on an internet platform, (d) I will lose my job because I am not good enough with new technology or because I will be replaced by someone with better technological skills, (e) Technology will help my job and working hours become more compatible with my private life, (f) Technology will help my job become less dangerous or physically demanding, (g) Technology will help my job become less boring, repetitive, stressful or mentally demanding." Response items (a) through (g) were randomly rotated. Response options were: "Very unlikely," "Unlikely," "Likely," "Very likely" and "Can't choose." Estimates refer to the combined share of "Likely" and "Very likely." This question was only asked to those who reported that they were in paid work or temporarily away from paid work. Data for this figure can be downloaded via Annex 9.A.
Source: OECD Secretariat calculations using OECD 2024 Risks that Matter Survey microdata (https://oe.cd/rtm).

Box 9.6. Platform workers

Platform work – like self-employment – may support a better balance between work and care responsibilities, and like other self-employed workers, platform workers also "have limited access to social protection, are not covered by employment protection or minimum wages, and are typically not allowed to engage in collective bargaining" (OECD, 2024[99]). At the same time, unlike self-employed workers, platform workers have limited or no business capital, may be dependent on only a few clients (e.g. Uber), and do not always enjoy entrepreneurial freedoms, such as choosing their own prices (OECD, 2024[99]). Platform workers may also have poor or no career development options (European Union, 2020[100]; Eurofound, 2018[101]; Cirillo, Guarascio and Parolin, 2023[102]; OECD, 2024[99]). Just as women are, in general, less likely to be self-employed (see Chapter 5), evidence from the 2022 OECD Risks that Matter Survey suggests that women are also slightly less likely to engage in platform work than men (see Online Annex Figure 9-A11). Similar findings come out of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s 2020 Survey of Platform Workers, run in 10 EU countries, where women represented between 33% (Finland) and 48% (Poland) of platform workers (EIGE, 2022[103]).

Box 9.7. Content creation may generate new opportunities, but may also replicate existing gaps

In the last two decades, the creator economy has gained prominence, giving both women and men new opportunities to generate income, express creativity and build audiences. While the digital economy is often celebrated for its relatively low barriers to entry, which may help women enter the labour market, gender disparities remain an issue. A recent study focusing on Italy's YouTube ecosystem, spanning over 18 000 channels launched between 2006 and 2023, sheds light on these ongoing challenges and the evolving role of gender in this space (Gioia and Morabito, 2025[104]). The study finds, for example, that men entered the YouTube space significantly earlier than women, that there are gendered content niches (e.g. women content creators specialise in beauty and food, while men dominate areas such as technology and knowledge), that women tend to receive lower audience engagement compared to men, and that women tend to have shorter tenures on the platform.

Box 9.8. Challenges and opportunities in the use of AI in the labour market

The increasing use of AI in the labour market – including but not limited to job search, job advertisement, human resources management and performance management – presents both challenges and opportunities. AI could, for example, further entrench existing gender gaps, as it must be trained on existing data sets, which have implicit or explicit biases and assumptions regarding gender and other characteristics, such as race and ethnicity (Borgonovi, Hervé and Seitz, 2023[105]; Lazaro, 2022[106]). These biases can become embedded into programmes and software through unrepresentative datasets or through model weights in AI algorithms, leading to risks such as incorrect, differential and discriminatory treatment of labour market groups, including those who are underrepresented or vulnerable (EIGE, 2021[107]; UNESCO/OECD/IDB, 2022[86]; Borgonovi, Hervé and Seitz, 2023[105]). At the same time, with intentional effort, AI could be used to reduce gender bias and improve fairness, increasing job quality and inclusiveness (OECD, 2023[83]). Ensuring that AI systems are designed to

> appropriately address harmful embedded bias and discrimination this requires careful planning and review and the consideration and/or inclusion of women and other underrepresented groups at the early stages of and throughout the AI system lifecycle (UNESCO/OECD/IDB, 2022[86]; EIGE, 2021[107]; OECD, 2023[83]).

Teleworking may improve work-life balance, but could further entrench gender norms around unpaid care responsibilities

The digital transformation has facilitated teleworking, remote working and working from home, which can improve job satisfaction and work-life balance by reducing commute times, increasing autonomy and allowing for greater flexibility in working hours (Cazes et al., 2022[108]). Depending on the patterns of use of teleworking, remote working and working from home, there may be positive or negative impacts on gender equality (Touzet, 2023[109]).

On the one hand, teleworking, remote working and working from home may improve gender equality in the labour market by enabling both women and men to better reconcile work and life. Consider, for example, a randomised controlled trial in Italy where women and men workers could choose the location and timing of their work. Results showed that both women and men spent more time doing housework and care activities, suggesting that flexible working arrangements could help reduce or eliminate gender gaps in unpaid care and housework responsibilities (Touzet, 2023[109]; Angelici and Profeta, 2020[110]). On the other hand, teleworking, remote working and working from home may reinforce gender norms around unpaid care and household responsibilities (OECD, 2023[6]). This may be especially true if and when women dominate the use of such flexible working arrangements due to pre-existing responsibilities, which can create and reinforce expectations and assumptions that women can and should use flexible working arrangements to combine work and family. Teleworking, remote working and working from home may also lead to increased work intensity and (unpaid) overtime hours (Chung, 2022[111]), as well as social and professional isolation (Charalampous et al., 2018[112]; Tavares, 2017[113]).

Research has further pointed to a gendered stigma around workplace flexibility – where employees (particularly women) who use flexible worker arrangements (including teleworking, remote working and working from home, but also shifted hours, compressed weeks and job sharing) for caregiving purposes are perceived as less productive and less committed (Chung and Seo, 2024[114]; Chung, 2018[115]; Chung, 2018[115]; Chung, 2024[116]). This stigma may contribute to widening gender disparities in career progression and wages (Arntz, Sarra and Berlingieri, 2019[117]; Mas and Pallais, 2017[118]; Chung and van der Lippe, 2018[119]; Leslie et al., 2012[120]; Tomei, 2021[121]). This is despite the fact that this stigma appears to be based on perceptions, rather than actual productivity outcomes, since evidence suggests that flexible working arrangements and telework are not necessarily productivity-reducing and may, in fact, be productivity-enhancing (Brecheisen, 2023[122]; Bartik et al., 2023[123]).

These mixed results reflect that teleworking, remote working and working from home themselves may not lead to improvements or reductions in gender equality on their own. Instead, what matters is the interaction of teleworking, remote working and working from home with public and workplace policies (e.g. right to request rules that enable everyone, not just parents to telework), as well as gendered norms and stereotypes around unpaid care and household responsibilities.

Box 9.9. Understanding the impacts of constant connectedness

Digital technologies facilitate "constant connectedness" to employment, which may increase employers' expectations of employee availability outside of regular work hours (OECD, 2019[124]). This may lead to peer pressure and a race to the bottom among employees determined to show their work availability and outputs. Given that women are often responsible for more unpaid household tasks than men (see Chapter 5), women may be less able to meet such expectations of constant connectedness. Indeed, in 2019, 42% of employed men self-reported being contacted at least occasionally by their employer during their leisure time within the last two months, but only 35% of women reported the same (see Online Annex Figure 9-A12) (Eurostat, 2022[125]). Such gender differences in connectedness outside of working hours could differentially impact earnings growth and promotion opportunities (see Chapters 5 and 6). Evidence suggests that women tend to select jobs or firms (even within a given occupation or industry) that offer greater flexibility, but that may come with lower wages, reflecting "compensating differentials" (or a trade-off) in the labour market around pay and flexible working arrangements (Goldin, 2014[126]; Sobeck, 2024[127]).

Recognising the importance of the right to disconnect, the European Parliament called on the European Commission to "come up with a law granting employees the right to disconnect from work during non-work hours without consequences and setting minimum standards for remote work" (European Parliament, 2021[128]).

Box 9.10. Are digital tools, including AI, set to (continue to) reduce the burden of unpaid work?

Compared to centuries ago, automation has already massively reduced time spent on unpaid work – think washing machines, dishwashers and microwaves. Digital technologies are also increasingly being used by many in undertaking unpaid care activities. In a 2022 EIGE survey, for example, 50% of respondents stated they use digital tools and resources at least several times a month in their role as a carer for people who depend on help with daily living activities (e.g. e-health tools, web platforms, apps with reminders about medications), and 22% said they use them daily. 53% also reported using digital tools and resources in their childcare activities (e.g. online learning, childcare management apps and tools, leisure time tools) at least several times a month, and 24% reported using them daily. For housework tasks, 43% reported using digital tools and resources (e.g. vacuum robot, smart homes, robotic lawn mowers, ordering grocery delivery) at least several times a month, with 17% reporting using them daily.

Looking ahead, AI could continue to reduce the burden of unpaid care work. According to 65 AI experts from the United Kingdom and Japan, for example, among a specified list of 17 house and care work tasks, "39% of the time spent on a domestic task will be automatable within ten years" (Lehdonvirta et al., 2023[129]). Tasks relating to childcare and eldercare were deemed less automatable, while those related to housework (e.g. cooking, cleaning and shopping) more automatable. Among the experts consulted, women and men differed in their expectations about the automatability of domestic work, potentially reflecting gender differences in their lived experiences with technology as well as with house and care work. Another study that adapted the automation likelihood of paid work to domestic work tasks (e.g. cooking, dish washing, laundry, pet care) found that automation could save 50-60% of the total time spent on unpaid domestic work (Hertog et al., 2023[130]).

These results suggest that there are and could continue to be tremendous gains from using AI to reduce the burden of unpaid work. Policy could steer this process by spurring investments in research and development of new tools and technologies that reduce unpaid care and household responsibilities and by supporting better access to existing tools and technologies (e.g. robotic vacuums).

At the same time, many virtual personal assistants (e.g. Alexa and Siri) and advanced humanoid robots (e.g. Sophia, Ameca, Jia Jia, and Nadine) are animated with female voices, reflecting traditional gender stereotypes and norms of women as nurturers in supporting roles (OECD.AI Policy Observatory, 2023[131]). AI could therefore potentially reinforce pre-existing gender gaps.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence is a significant risk for women public figures

While opportunities and risks exists for women and girls in digital environments, an important risk relates to technology-facilitated gender based violence (TF-GBV) (OECD, 2024[82]), a form of violence where perpetrators use digital technologies – such as social media, messaging apps, online forums, gaming platforms and other digital communications tools – to intimidate, bully, stalk, harass, threaten or otherwise cause harm (Canadian Women's Foundation, 2024[132]; OECD, 2024[82]). Such violence may exist on its own or it may be used as an additional tool to further aggravate or amplify other forms of violence (Government of Australia, 2024[133]).

Although data on TF-GBV are still limited, the data that do exist show that women and girls – especially women public figures – may be at greater risk than men and boys (Dunn, 2021[134]). On average across EU and OECD countries, girls are more likely than boys to report being victims of cyberbullying at least once in the past couple of months (see Online Annex Figure 9-A10) (OECD, 2024[82]; 2022[79]; 2024[135]). A survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit additionally finds that 85% of women report witnessing online violence against other women (including from outside their networks), 65% report knowing other women who had been targeted online from their personal or professional networks, and 38% report personal experiences with online violence (EIU, 2021[136]). The most common types of online threats to women are misinformation and disinformation (Box 9.11), cyber harassment and hate speech. Other studies focusing on women public figures have further identified TF-GBV and have linked it to poorer retention of women in politics (OECD, 2024[82]). TF-GBV is also a growing concern within immersive technologies and environments, including virtual reality (OECD, 2024[82]).

According to a recent EU survey, the high prevalence of online violence against women is relatively normalised, with 27% of respondents agreeing that when a woman shares her opinion on social media, she should accept that it may elicit sexist, demeaning and/or abusive replies (see Online Annex Figure 9-A13) (Eurobarometer, 2024[137]).

Box 9.11. Misinformation and gendered disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation are gaining increasing attention internationally, especially in the context of democracy, citizen participation, and trust in government (Aïmeur, Amri and Brassard, 2023[138]; Pérez-Escolar, Lilleker and Tapia-Frade, 2023[139]; Muhammed T and Mathew, 2022[140]; OECD, 2022[141]; OECD, 2022[142]; OECD, 2022[143]; Lesher, Pawelec and Desai, 2022[144]), and research is increasingly exploring the interaction of these issues with gender.

- **Gendered targeting**: Famous women, especially women in politics, are targeted by a disproportionate amount of "gendered disinformation campaigns [featuring] fake stories and threats, as well as humiliating and sexually charged images" (Di Meco and Wilfore, 2021[145]). These campaigns aim to undermine women by framing them as "inherently untrustworthy,

unintelligent, or too emotional or too libidinous to hold office or participate in democratic politics" (Di Meco and Wilfore, 2021[145]). Examples abound (UK Government Stabilisation Unit, 2020[146]).

- **Gender differences in use of and trust across sources:** Women and men may react differently to the same information. For example, women are found to trust expert sources more and are less questioning of celebrity and citizen sources, while men perceive news with political sources and no sources as more credible (Martí-Danés et al., 2023[147]). The same may be true for the type of platforms through which information is obtained. According to the OECD Truth Quest survey, for example, women are more likely to get information from social media – which is the least trusted media source overall (OECD, 2024[148]). While there are only small gender differences in trust of information from social media on average, differences are notable in some countries (OECD, 2024[148]).

- **Gendered narratives:** Some disinformation campaigns use narratives around gender to divide public opinion, weaken social cohesion and sow fear. In many instances, these narratives are intersected with narratives on race, ethnicity, migrant status, beliefs and religion. For example, disinformation campaigns may manufacture information and data on controversial gender topics such as sexual violence perpetrated by migrants (UK Government Stabilisation Unit, 2020[146]).

- **Gender differences in confidence in identification of false and/or misleading information:** The OECD's Truth Quest Survey finds that men are more confident in their abilities to identify false and/or misleading information than women (OECD, 2024[149]). However, the survey also finds that confidence is not related to actual ability, with no sizeable gender differences in actual ability to identify false and misleading information across content types (e.g. disinformation, misinformation, contextual deception, propaganda and satire) and themes (e.g. environment, health, international affairs).

Note: According to the OECD taxonomy of false and misleading content online, disinformation is defined as verifiably false or misleading information that is knowingly and intentionally created and shared for economic gain or to deliberately deceive, manipulate or inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country. According to this same taxonomy, misinformation is defined as false or misleading information that is shared unknowingly and is not intended to deliberately deceive, manipulate or inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country (Lesher, Pawelec and Desai, 2022[144]).

Gender gaps in research and innovation in the digital transformation

Despite strong growth in AI and ICT-related jobs and skills (UNESCO/OECD/IDB, 2022[86]; Green and Lamby, 2023[150]; OECD, 2023[6]; Manca, 2023[151]; OECD, 2024[152]; OECD, 2024[148]), women are less likely to participate as developers in the digital transformation, in ICT task-intensive jobs, and in developing and maintaining ICT and AI systems (Green and Lamby, 2023[150]; OECD, 2024[148]). This is true no matter what indicator is used for measuring women's participation. For example:

- **ICT specialists:** In 2023, only 11-24% of all ICT specialists in OECD countries were women (OECD, 2024[148]).

- **ICT-related patents:** Most ICT patent inventors are men, with only 4% of ICT-related patent families attributed to women (only) and 20% attributed to at least one woman in 2018-21 (OECD, 2024[148]).

- **ICT-related businesses:** Over the last two decades, an average of 6% of start-ups in digital-related activities in OECD countries funded by venture capital were founded by only women and 15% were founded by at least one woman (OECD, 2024[148]).

- **AI skills**: Men are more likely than women to report AI-related skills on LinkedIn (Caira, Russo and Aranda, 2023[80]; World Economic Forum, 2025[153]).

- **AI research**: In 2022, about 45% of AI publications had at least one female author. For men, the same share is 89%. Turning to exclusive authorship, only 11% of AI papers were written only by women, compared to 55% written only by men (Caira, Russo and Aranda, 2023[80]). This underrepresentation exists also in fiction: out of 116 AI researchers in 142 influential films between 1920 and 2020, only nine were women (Cave et al., 2023[154]).

- **AI faculty:** On average, among top US-based university AI programmes, only 22% of faculty were women, ranging from a low of 8% at the University of Pennsylvania to a high of 43% at Harvard (Sey and Hafkin, 2019[155]).

- **AI developers:** In a 2022 Stack Overflow survey of over 70 000 developers, 92% of all respondents and 93% of professional developers identified as a man (Stack Overflow, 2022[156]).

Studies also find that encouraging women to enter STEM fields is only one part of the solution – retention is another. According to research in Canada, for example, even when women do pursue postsecondary education in STEM fields, they are less likely to work and persist in STEM occupations (Frank, 2019[157]).

Box 9.12. Additional data sources on gender equality in the green transition and the digital transformation

Beyond the indicators presented in this chapter and in the Online Annex, relevant data sources include:

- **OECD Dashboard on Gender Gaps**: Presents key indicators on gender inequalities in education, employment, governance and private and public leadership.

- **OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**: Features data on students' behaviours, experiences, expectations, and skills, with special content on environmental actions, knowledge of climate change and the use of digital technologies.

- **OECD Child Well-Being Data Portal:** Includes data on the experiences of children online, including problematic social media use and cyberbullying, among other indicators.

- **OECD Skills Outlook:** Offers insights into ongoing and forthcoming issues related to skills, including issues relating to the green transition and the digital transformation.

- **OECD Environment Statistics:** Provides statistics on air quality and health by gender and age, as well as data on patent development by gender.

- **OECD ICT Access and Usage by Households and Individuals Database:** Contains indicators on access to and use of the Internet.

- **OECD Going Digital Toolkit:** Presents key indicators by gender on use of the Internet, digital skills and abilities, and perceptions of digital technologies, among others.

- **OECD.AI Policy Observatory:** Features gender data on AI publications, AI skills, the prevalence of AI talent, and the demographics of AI professionals.

- **OECD Risks That Matter Survey:** Includes questions on perceptions of the risks of climate change and automation and preferences for related government policy.

- **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Statistics Database:** Contains information on gender equality, including women in decision-making positions linked to climate change and the environment.

- **Eurostat Digital Economy and Society Database:** Includes a variety of statistics on digitalisation from the perspective of individuals, households and businesses.

- **University of Oxford Digital Gender Gaps Web App:** Presents gender-disaggregated data on digital gender gaps and adoption levels for countries globally, including internet use and mobile phone ownership at the national and subnational level.

9.3. Policy combinations to advance gender equality in the green transition and the digital transformation

Using Table 9.1, this section applies **the priority considerations of the conceptual framework** included in Chapter 3 to advance gender equality by exploring two **examples** of *policy goals* (priority consideration 1) relating to gender equality in the green transition (Outcome A) and the digital transformation (Outcome B). These goals need to be accompanied by a *results framework* (priority considerations 1 and 4), whose indicators can be drawn from those presented in Section 9.1 and additional sources.

Table 9.1 is designed to assist policy makers in **identifying cross-portfolio policy and programme combinations** (priority consideration 3) and **planning for their *evaluation*** (priority consideration 2). While the list of policy options is extensive, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. At the same time, not all policy options apply in all settings or contexts. Overall, Table 9.1 aims to encourage the consideration of different policy options as part of a cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach that works towards the achievement of gender equality outcomes. The **green transition** and the **digital transformation** may impact various aspects of women and men's lives (education, employment, health, violence, etc.), meaning that policy options need to involve a range of ministries and reflect a life course approach.

Consider education, for example. In the earliest stages of life, learning materials that challenge gender stereotypes and norms around mathematics and science can ensure that girls and boys and women and men can equally see themselves pursuing careers in the green and digital economies. In later stages of life, **re-training and re-skilling** can enable equal access to **opportunities in those fields**. Similarly, in the context of the digital transformation, gender bias in AI may need to be specifically addressed through legislation to ensure more equal treatment of women and men across employment, health, social protection, justice and more. In the case of the green transition, embedding gender considerations into transportation and infrastructure planning and development may help to foster safety through, for example, better lighting and emergency call boxes in public transport hubs.

Table 9.1 also highlights the important **feedback loops** between policy goals, with both the green transition and the digital transformation linking back to gender gaps in educational attainment and skills (see Chapter 4), paid and unpaid work (see Chapter 5), leadership and representation (see Chapter 6), health (see Chapter 7) and gender-based violence (see Chapter 8).

The **effectiveness of the policies and programmes outlined in** Table 9.1 varies across countries and across time. Continuous monitoring and evaluation that incorporates a gender perspective is therefore essential for governments to understand the gendered effects of policies and programmes (see Chapters 2 and 3); ensure that policies and programmes are achieving their intended outcomes; identify strengths and areas for improvement; improve decision-making, resource allocation and accountability; and inform *future strategies* (priority consideration 6). While international evidence offers valuable insights on similar interventions, the effectiveness of each policy and programme will depend on their specific design and context – including interactions with other interventions, socio-economic and cultural factors, available resources, and institutional settings.

For instance, a study evaluating scalable programmes aimed at facilitating labour market transitions for women in technology found that targeted interventions, such as mentoring and job-training programmes, can enhance women's success rates in obtaining tech jobs (Athey and Palikot, 2022[158]). At the same time, a systematic literature review of initiatives to recruit and retain women in computing education, categorised into policy, pedagogy, support, and engagement, highlighted that most of them lack rigorous evaluation (Berry et al., 2022[159]). Similarly, policy analyses suggest that designing public spaces and transportation systems that are safe and accessible for women encourages their active participation in green economies (OECD, 2024[82]), but thorough academic evaluations are scarce.

The limited availability of evaluations of interventions to address gender gaps in the green transition and digital transformation poses challenges for designing successful policy responses. In fast-changing fields such as those related to the green transition and the digital transformation, embedding an evaluation perspective in public interventions is essential to generate timely lessons, ensure a better understanding of the effects of policies and programmes from a gender angle, and adapt public action as contexts and needs evolve.

9.3.1. Key policy actions across EU and OECD countries

Table 9.1. Existing policy options to promote gender equality in the green transition (Outcome A) and ensure gender equality throughout the digital transformation (Outcome B)

Outcomes	Policy options	Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	EU and OECD country examples
	Challenge gender stereotypes and norms										
A, B	Implement initiatives for girls and boys and women and men to support education and careers in non-traditional and high-demand sectors and **combat horizontal segregation** (see Chapter 4).	X	X			X	X			X	Many countries
A	**Integrate environmental education** into school curricula and/or develop **awareness campaigns** to promote **sustainable consumption** and/or educate young people about climate change and climate action, dispelling myths that sustainable and responsible consumption is "feminine."	X				X	X			X	CHE, CYP, CZE
B	Embed STEM, digital literacy and coding education into **preschool, primary school, secondary school and higher education curricula** and/or offer STEM-based extracurricular activities, focusing on dismantling gender norms.	X				X	X			X	CHE, CYP, CZE, DEU, GRC, HUN, JPN, LUX, LVA, PRT, SLV
B	Encourage girls' and women's participation in **coding competitions, hackathons, digital awards ceremonies** and/or **prizes**, including through girls- and women-only events.	X	X			X	X			X	CYP, DEU, HUN, MLT
A, B	Ensure an adequate representation of **women teachers and professors** in STEM fields.	X	X			X	X			X	CHE, CYP, HUN
	Expand investments in non-traditional learning opportunities										
B	Incentivise and invest in **bootcamps, innovation labs, short-term programmes** and/or **micro-credentials**, including girls and women-only options.	X				X	X			X	CYP, GRC

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
Incentivise and support selection into non-traditional fields											
A, B	Provide **re-training, re-skilling** and/or **up-skilling support**, particularly for unemployed or underemployed women, especially those who exited the labour market for caregiving, with a focus on **opportunities in the green transition and the digital transformation (see Chapter 4)**.	X	X			X	X			X	CZE
A, B	Encourage employers to **hire people from underrepresented groups**, such as through subsidies, grants and additional government funding tied to hiring, gender equality targets, and/or paid internships and apprenticeships.	X	X			X	X			X	CHL, DEU, GRC, HUN, TUR
Encourage gender equality within firms											
B	Combat **gender bias in AI and machine learning** (e.g. through audits, legislation), including in recruitment processes.		X			X	X			X	GBR, NOR, PRT
B	Ensure all workers have a **right to disconnect** and/or a **right to request flexible working arrangements**, alongside other policies and programmes to support gender equality at work (see Chapter 5).		X							X	BEL, CAN, CYP, DEU, ESP, FRA, GRC, HRV, ITA, KOR, LUX, PRT, SVK
A, B	Create **sectoral action plans** for the improvement of gender equality, including linking **sector-specific government support** (e.g. grants, financing, subsidies) to workplace policies or standards that promote gender equality, especially in industries not traditionally associated with women and where gender gaps are the largest.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	GBR, HRV
Build a strong and inclusive care and social protection system											
A, B	Provide high-quality flexible, accessible and affordable **childcare**, including out-of-school care, and **long-term and elderly care**, including independent living solutions.		X							X	Many countries
A, B	Provide **well-paid parental and paternity leave**, including to entrepreneurs, and support greater take-up by fathers.		X		X					X	Many countries
Foster health, safety and inclusion											
A	Embed **gender considerations** into urban planning and infrastructure development, including **public transit** (e.g. better lighting in parks and public spaces, emergency call boxes in public transit hubs).			X		X	X			X	CYP, CZE, MEX

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
A, B	Combat **workplace harassment, sexual assault, and toxic masculinity** in men-dominated industries like tech and STEM (see Chapter 8).	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CRI
B	Raise awareness about and tackle **negative behaviours in digital environments** associated with mental health risks and/or promote **media literacy**.	X		X		X				X	AUS
B	Develop **awareness campaigns** on the gendered impact of digitalisation, the digital economy and AI, including TF-GBV.	X	X	X		X		X		X	CRI, ESP
A	Increase the **representation of women among first responders** in disasters (e.g. firefighters, emergency medics).	X	X	X						X	JPN
A	Ensure **support services for victims/survivors** of gender-based violence are made visible, available and accessible during **climate-related emergencies**.		X	X		X		X		X	TUR
B	Tackle **online violence**, including **cyberbullying** and **TF-GBV** through prevention and detection and support of victims/survivors.	X	X			X				X	CRI, CYP, ESP, GRC, SVN
	Encourage gender equality considerations and improve gender representation within leadership										
A	Support women's **involvement as leaders and role models** in the context of climate change, including in politics (particularly as ministers of environment and climate) and in local communities, such as through women-led community-based approaches to local sustainability projects.	X	X			X	X			X	COL, CRI, DEU, GRC, JPN
B	Implement policies and programmes to **increase the representation of women on boards** and in senior management (see Chapter 6).	X	X			X	X			X	Many countries
A, B	Design and implement **national digital strategies, plans and agendas** aimed at promoting gender equality in climate action and/or closing digital gender gaps.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	CRI, CZE, GRC, HUN, ISL, JPN, LVA
	Build supportive environments for women entrepreneurs and innovators										
A, B	Provide financial and/or non-financial support (e.g. grants, loans, microfinancing, mentoring, counselling, etc.) to **women entrepreneurs, researchers and developers** in green and digital industries and occupations.	X	X			X	X			X	CRI, DEU, GRC, ESP, ISL, MLT
A, B	Support **gender-sensitive innovation**, **research and development**, particularly in green and digital fields, including through training and/or awareness raising, as well as through specialised funding streams and/or incubators.	X	X			X	X			X	CYP, CZE, GRC, LUX

Outcomes	Policy options	Likely Ministries Involved									EU and OECD country examples
		Education – Culture	Labour – Social – Family	Health – Sports	Economy – Finance	Science – Technology – Digital	Env. – Agri. – Transport – Energy	Foreign – Defence – Interior	National Statistical Offices	Gender – Justice – Human Rights	
	Ensure robust monitoring and evaluation										
A	**Mainstream gender into all policies designed to address climate change and the green transition (including mitigation and adaptation strategies) and support people through the digital transformation.**		X		X	X	X			X	ISL, JPN
A	Ensure recipients of government funding are promoting gender equality and supporting women leaders, especially in areas that are not traditionally associated with women, such as **innovation, digitalisation** and the **green transition**.		X			X	X			X	ISL
A, B	Continue to close gender data, research and measurement gaps. Some examples include: • employment impacts of the green transition; • environmental actions (e.g. sustainable consumption, recycling, reuse); • gendered health impacts of pollution (e.g. air, noise) and other environmental risks (e.g. fires, floods); • intersectional impacts of the green transition and the digital transformation; • impact of digital transformation on well-being; • impact of automation and AI on workers; • trust in online environments; • gendered misinformation and disinformation; and • use and effect of teleworking.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Many countries

Note: "Env." stands for Environment and "Agri." stands for Agriculture.

Source: OECD Secretariat based on desk research and the 2024 OECD Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality and OECD (2022[160]), OECD (2024[161]; 2024[89]; 2024[77]), Koshiyama et al. (2022[162]), Lerouge and Trujillo Pons (2022[163]), Jochecová (2023[164]), Eurofound (2023[165]) and European Union (2015[166]).

9.3.2. Country case studies of key policy combinations in EU and OECD countries

According to the OECD Secretariat's 2024 Questionnaire on Policy Combinations for Gender Equality, many EU and OECD countries have implemented policy combinations to advance gender equality in the green transition and digital transformation. Case studies are provided below.

Promoting gender equality in the green transition

- **Costa Rica's** National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Climate Action (2023-25) is a collaborative initiative by the National Institute for Women (INAMU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), and the Ministry of Women's Affairs. It seeks to close gender gaps in climate action by enhancing women's roles as change agents, increasing their resilience, and involving them in local climate decision-

making. The plan focuses on five strategic areas with approximately 40 actions, including promoting equality and sustainability, including integrating gender and environmental perspectives in strategic plans, creating a national network for gender equality in climate action, and increasing women's representation in decision-making bodies for climate action; empowering women's economic autonomy by expanding services supporting women's economic activities related to climate change and promoting women in non-traditional roles such as reforestation and blue and green jobs; building capacities and fostering innovation through capacity-building for institutional staff and women in key sectors related to climate change; managing climate-related risks; and generating data on women's diverse situations related to the environment. The plan establishes a shared governance model between INAMU and MINAE, co-ordinating the implementation of priority actions involving public institutions, the private sector, and local governments.

- The Task Force for the "Climate Crisis and Gender" in **Greece** was established by the Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family to address the gender-specific impacts of the climate crisis. Recognising that women face unique challenges in the wake of natural disasters, the Task Force aims to document these issues and promote gender-balanced representation in decision-making. By collaborating with NGOs, universities, and research institutions, it seeks to create a scientific report that will guide the development of effective policies to eliminate gender inequalities related to the climate crisis.

- **Japan**'s Fifth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2020-25) addresses gender inequality by promoting women's economic independence, work-life balance, women's participation in decision-making, and safety and security. It also integrates gender perspectives into disaster prevention, reconstruction, and environmental issues. Recognising the impact of natural disasters, and informed by past experiences like the Great East Japan Earthquake, the strategy advocates for gender-sensitive disaster management practices and environmental policies – including within Japan's national disaster prevention and reconstruction framework. Key initiatives include targeted training to disaster management personnel to raise awareness of the different impacts disasters have on women and men. The strategy also supports local governments in adopting gender-sensitive disaster management measures, promoting the use of the "Guidelines for disaster prevention and reconstruction from the perspective of gender equality." Japan aligns its efforts with global frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-30) and the UN's CSW resolution 58/2. In environmental policy, the strategy highlights the importance of women's participation in shaping industrial and energy policies, particularly those addressing climate change. To drive these initiatives, Japan has set targets, such as achieving 30% women's representation on Local Disaster Management Councils by 2025 and increasing the proportion of women firefighters and volunteer fire department members.

Ensuring gender equality throughout the digital transformation

- **Greece** enhances women's representation in the digital transformation with foundational education and professional development. In early education, digital technologies are used daily and are functionally integrated in all thematic fields. Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports has implemented pilot ICT projects in pre-schools to foster digital literacy among girls. It has also developed Innovation Centres in 13 regional directorates to connect schools with research institutions, universities, and businesses, with the aim to modernise vocational education and promote STEM careers, particularly for girls. Greece also applies gender-based approaches to ensure that educational content and career guidance are tailored to attract more women into advanced technology and digital innovation. At the same time, the Gender Innovation Lab for Women (GIL4W), launched with the support of the Ministries of Development, Social Cohesion and Family, and Interior, brings together over 25 academic, research, and commercial entities to create a collaborative ecosystem that promotes women's active participation in research, innovation, and

digital business. By focusing on best practices and strategies from Europe and globally, GIL4W seeks to increase women's roles as developers and inventors in the digital economy in Greece.

- **Hungary** promotes gender equality in digitalisation by addressing gender gaps at multiple levels – including in education, professional development, and representation. In early education, the National Core Curriculum, managed by the Ministry of Interior, introduced Digital Culture as a subject, replacing traditional ICT courses. This curriculum focuses on algorithmic thinking, programming and digital citizenship, ensuring that all students develop essential digital skills from an early age. At the same time, the "Your Future!" programme, managed by the Ministry of National Economy, increased the number of applicants to IT courses and involved over 60 000 students through digital experience centres, making digital skills accessible to those from less developed regions. This initiative also actively worked to break down gender stereotypes in the IT profession. The National Digitalisation Strategy 2022-30, led by the Prime Minister's Office, focuses on increasing the proportion of women in ICT by supporting their retention and success in tertiary ICT education. This includes specific measures to reduce dropout rates among women students. The DIMOP PLUS programme, also under the Prime Minister's Office, complements these efforts by supporting gender representation in digital transformation projects to increase the number of highly skilled women ICT professionals. The Hungarian Association of IT Companies and the Women in Technology Hungary Association also launched "40+ women role models in the digital economy" to showcase women who have made significant contributions to the digital economy, serving as role models for younger women and encouraging them to pursue careers in technology.

- Several ministries in **Norway**, including Culture and Equality; Children and Families; Trade, Industry and Fisheries, share responsibility for "Time for games – the government's gaming strategy 2024-26." The strategy points to the strengths and the potential of the gaming culture as a leisure activity, an expression of art and culture, for e-sport and as a tool for learning. It also highlights significant challenges related to hate speech, insults and harassment in gaming culture. The strategy's initiatives in this area will help strengthen knowledge and expertise, activity and content, and the infrastructure for safe and inclusive physical and digital meeting places. It will work toward the achievement of a diverse and impactful selection of high-quality computer games; equality and diversity in Norwegian games and the Norwegian gaming industry; professionalism and growth in the Norwegian gaming industry; and an inclusive, safe and accessible gaming culture.

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Annex 9.A. List of figures in Online Annex

Annex Table 9.A.1. List of Chapter 9 Online Annex Figures

Figure no.	Figure title and subtitle
Figure 9-A1	**Girls are more likely than boys to display foundational levels of environmental sustainability competence** Share (%) 15-year-old students who achieved foundational and advanced environmental sustainability competence, by gender, 2018
Figure 9-A2	**Women are more likely than men to believe the government is not doing enough to tackle climate change** Share (%) of women and men who think the government is not doing enough to tackle climate change, bearing in mind the costs and benefits of policy action, 2024
Figure 9-A3	**Women are more likely than men to adjust certain daily behaviours to fight climate change** Share (%) of women and men identifying having undertaken various actions to fight climate change over the past 6 months, EU-27 average, 2023
Figure 9-A4	**Women are more likely to use public transit and walk, while men are more likely to drive** Share (%) of women and men by main mode of transportation, EU-28 average, 2019
Figure 9-A5	**Mortality rates linked to air pollution are slightly higher among men than among women** Deaths (per 100 000 population) due to ambient particulate matter pollution, women and men, all causes, all ages, 2021
Figure 9-A6	**Men tend to be slightly more likely to die from high temperatures than women** Deaths (per 100 000 population) due to high temperatures, women and men, all causes, all ages, 2021
Figure 9-A7	**Women are underrepresented in environmental science research and authorship** Share (%) of active authors in environmental science who are women, 1999-2003 and 2014-18
Figure 9-A8	**Women are underrepresented as inventors of environment- and climate change-related technologies** Share (%) of patents with a woman inventor, 2022
Figure 9-A9	**Girls tend to report problematic social media use more than boys** Share (%) of girls and boys aged 11-, 13- and 15-years old who report having problematic social media use, 2021-22
Figure 9-A10	**Girls are more likely to report experiences of cyberbullying in most EU and OECD countries** Share (%) of girls and boys aged 11-, 13- and 15-years old who report having experienced cyberbullying at least once in the previous couple of months, 2021-22
Figure 9-A11	**Men are more likely than women to use platform services as a second job** Share (%) of employed women and men by platform work status, average of 27 OECD RTM countries, 2022
Figure 9-A12	**Men are more likely to be contacted about work during their leisure time than women** Share (%) of employed women and men (15-74) by frequency of work-related contact during leisure time in last two months, EU-27 average, 2019
Figure 9-A13	**Many believe online violence against women who share their opinion on social media is normal and expected** Share (%) who agree that when women share their opinion on social media, they should accept that they may elicit sexist, demeaning and/or abusive replies, 2024

Note: Supporting data for all Chapter 9 figures in the main text and the Online Annex are available in the StatLink below.

StatLink 🖳 https://stat.link/75nfz2

Gender Equality in a Changing World

Taking Stock and Moving Forward

Despite significant progress over the last century, women still fare worse than men in most economic, social and political outcomes in EU and OECD countries. Drawing on novel data and using a lifecycle approach, this report presents a comprehensive stocktaking of how women, men, girls and boys are faring across seven key policy areas – education and skills, paid and unpaid work, leadership and representation, health, gender-based violence, the green transition and the digital transitions. The challenges are significant. Recognising that closing gender gaps requires serious and co-ordinated policy commitments and actions, this report presents countries' good practices in gender mainstreaming, encourages breaking down silos, and identifies useful policy combinations to advance gender equality. A conceptual framework is included for governments seeking to assess their own legal, policy and budgetary measures, to help countries transform gender equality commitments into action.