

# Sweden is a champion of gender equality, but parity is not reached yet

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As shown in the Economic Survey, Sweden ranks among the OECD's frontrunners in terms of gender equality. Women have a high employment rate, outperform men in education and are well represented in government and parliament. These achievements were made possible by policies which for decades have been promoting equality, notably through childcare and parental leave arrangements, individual taxation and mainstreaming gender issues.

Nevertheless, without further policy measures, achieving parity is still a distant prospect in several areas. Wage differences between genders persist, even though a large part of the gap results from differences in age, education, occupation, sector of employment and hours worked. Women are under-represented on private company boards, in senior management positions, in many well-paid and influential professions and among entrepreneurs.



Source: OECD Employment database and ILO KILM database.

Hence, there is scope for further progress on gender equality. Paid parental leave has facilitated the rise in women's employment rate, which is now close to that of men. However, 75% of the leave is still taken by women, which has a detrimental impact on their careers. Last year's extension of the share of the parental leave reserved for each parent to three months is a move in the right direction, as it sends a signal which will contribute to shift social norms. Nevertheless, it would be desirable to move further in that direction to reduce the stigma associated with long leaves, even though there is a trade-off with the benefits of free choice.

The women's share of board members of listed companies is still below one third. The recent government proposal to impose quotas, as Norway did more than a decade ago, has not received the necessary support from other parties. Notwithstanding, firms should continue to increase their share of female board members, and perhaps even more importantly, to increase the representation of women in senior management, which research shows to generally enhance economic performance. Gender inequalities can also be reduced through the fight against stereotypes in education and further promotion of women's entrepreneurship.

Last but not least, special attention should also be paid to the integration of foreign-born women, whose employment rate is much lower than for their male counterparts. Helping foreign-born women to strengthen their contribution to the economy and society has to be a key ingredient of a more inclusive Sweden.

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