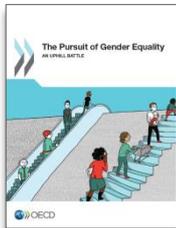


How does KOREA compare?



The 2017 OECD report *The Pursuit of Gender Equality: An Uphill Battle* explores how gender inequalities persist in social and economic life around the world. Young women in OECD countries have more years of schooling than young men, on average, but women are less still likely to engage in paid work. Gaps widen with age, as motherhood typically has negative effects on women's pay and career advancement. Women are also less likely to be entrepreneurs, and are under-represented in private and public leadership. In the face of these challenges, this report assesses whether (and how) countries are closing gender gaps in education, employment, entrepreneurship, and public life. The report presents a range of statistics on gender gaps, reviews public policies targeting gender inequality, and offers key policy recommendations.

Held Back: Gender inequality in Korea

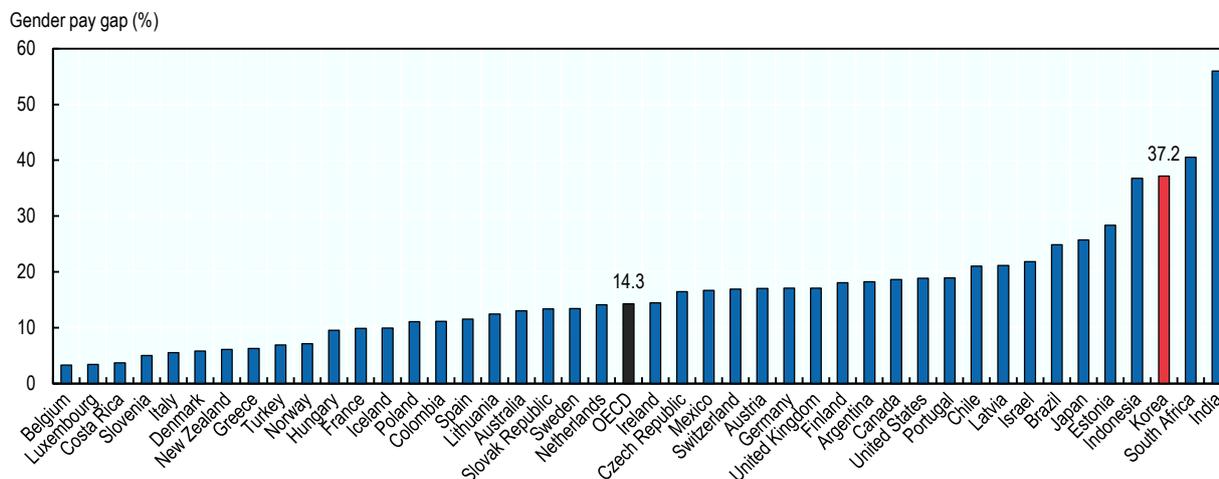
The pursuit of gender equality in Korea is an uphill battle, but one that the government is taking steps to address. Compared with other OECD countries, the situation in Korea appears quite daunting as there are major gender gaps in earnings, labour market participation, and representation in government.

The gender pay gap in Korea is the highest in the OECD: women working in Korea earn only 63% of what men earn. Only 56.2% of women in Korea are employed and many women withdraw from work when they have children. When women leave work temporarily or permanently, as is common in Korea, these career interruptions can also contribute to gender gaps in pension entitlements and consequent impacts on older women's poverty levels. Workplace culture and social expectations can still pressure

women to withdraw from the labour force, and it can be difficult for mothers returning to (re-) enter well-paid regular employment and resume their careers. Investments by successive governments in subsidised early childhood education and care (ECEC) since 2004 have led to a major increase in participation in early-years education among Korean children, and helps both parents to participate in the labour market if they so wish.

Other work-life balance policies, such as parental leave and workplace practices that avoid very long hours, will also help women to remain in the labour market and promote a better sharing of unpaid work, thereby advancing gender equality in Korea. Affirmative action policies to promote women in management positions, such as targets or quotas for company boards of directors and in politics, can increase the visibility of women in leadership roles.

Gender pay gap, 2015 or latest available year



Notes: Gender gap in median earnings for full-time employees. The gender gap is defined as the difference between male and female median monthly earnings divided by male median monthly earnings for full-time employees. See [Figure 1.3](#)

Summary indicators of gender equality

| | Gender gap in share that have attained tertiary education (25-34 year-olds, p.p) | Female share (%) of Bachelor's graduates in STEM | Gender gap (p.p.) in the labour force participation rate | Female share (%) of managers | Gender pay gap (median earnings, full-time employees, %) | Gender gap (p.p.) in the share of workers who are employers | Female share (%) of seats in parliament |
|--------------|--|--|--|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Korea | -9.0 | 29.7 | 20.8 | 10.5 | 37.2 | 4.4 | 17.0 |
| OECD average | -11.9 | 31.1 | 12.2 | 31.2 | 14.3 | 3.3 | 28.7 |
| OECD maximum | 0.6 (TUR) | 41.4 (POL) | 42.0 (TUR) | 44.3 (LVA) | 37.2 (KOR) | 4.6 (ISR) | 47.6 (ISL) |
| OECD minimum | -28.4 (LVA) | 15.4 (JPN) | 3.0 (FIN) | 10.5 (KOR) | 3.3 (BEL) | 1.7 (NOR) | 9.5 (JPN) |

Notes: BEL = Belgium, FIN = Finland, ISL = Iceland, ISR = Israel, JPN = Japan, KOR = Korea, LVA = Latvia, NOR = Norway, POL = Poland, SWE = Sweden, TUR = Turkey

In a survey carried out for *The Pursuit of Gender Equality*, governments identified the three most important gender inequality issues in their country as violence against women, the gender wage gap, and the unequal sharing of unpaid work. Many OECD countries are now prioritizing these issues in policy, and many are also pushing to get more women into public and private sector leadership.

Untapped talent and underpaid

The gender pay gap in Korea is the highest among OECD countries at 37.2%, contributing to making working life for women in Korea unappealing. Indeed, only 56.2% of Korean women are in paid employment – 20 points lower than the rate for Korean men [Chapter 11]. Korean women and girls have above-average scores in PISA and in PIAAC and younger women have higher levels of educational attainment than their male peers [Chapter 1]. As such, women's under-performance in the labour market likely reflects a lack of opportunity rather than a lack of ability, and it represents a waste of economic resources and human capital.

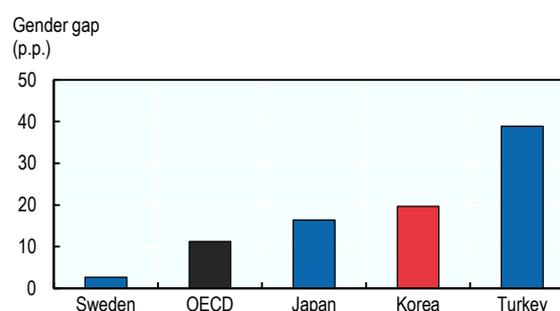
ECEC: A bright light in public policy

The availability of affordable ECEC is crucial if fathers AND mothers are to be given the opportunity to participate fully in the labour market. The gradual removal of the income test on subsidised ECEC in Korea has led to major increases in participation in early years childcare and in pre-primary education. Public spending on ECEC in Korea increased from 0.1% of GDP in 2004 to 0.9% in 2014, the largest increase in the OECD over the period. Korea now has 92% of children participating in pre-primary education and has the some of the lowest out-of-pocket childcare costs in the OECD [Chapter 17].

Women remain underrepresented in public life

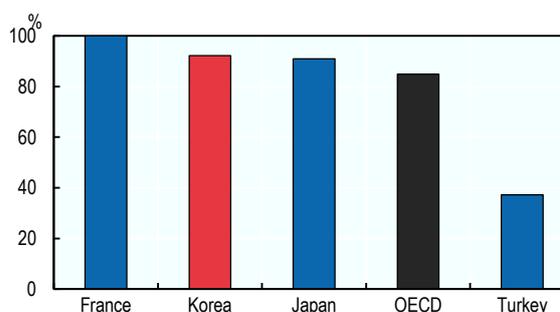
Women hold only 17% of seats in the National Assembly which is in the fifth-lowest among OECD countries. The imposition of female candidate quotas for political parties has had a positive impact on representation in public life, but there remain glaring gaps in leadership positions. In the private sector, women in Korea hold only 10.5% of management positions, the lowest in the OECD [Chapter 11] and Korea also ranks last for women's representation on company boards of directors [Chapter 14]. Reinforcing affirmative action policies in Korea will help create opportunities for women to take on leadership roles in public life.

Gender employment gap, 2016



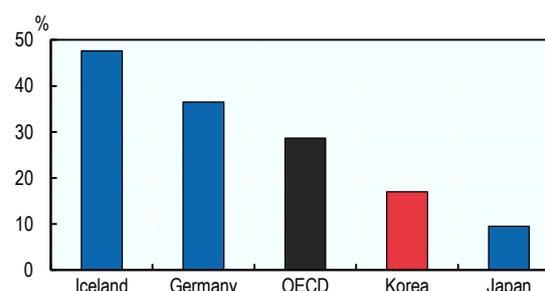
Notes: Male minus female difference in employment rates for 15-64 year-olds. See [Figure 11.1]

Pre-primary enrolment rates, 2014



Notes: Proportion of 3-5 year-olds enrolled in pre-primary education or primary education. See [Figure 17.1].

Women in parliament, 2016



Notes: Female share (%) of seats in parliaments, lower-house or single-chamber, 1st December 2016. See [Figure 1.8].