

SUMMARY RECORD

OECD EURASIA WEEK 2018

THEMATIC SESSION:

SHAPING THE FUTURE THROUGH BETTER POLICIES FOR
GENDER EQUALITY

19 November 2018

OECD Conference Centre
Paris, France

Thematic session: Shaping the Future through Better Policies for Gender Equality

The first of two thematic sessions of OECD Eurasia Week 2018, the *Shaping the Future through Better Policies for Gender Equality* panel brought together more than 80 high-level representatives of governments and international organisations to discuss ways to overcome the barriers to women's participation in shaping the future economies of Eurasia.

In his opening remarks, **H.E. Dr Abdullah Abdullah**, Chief Executive of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, highlighted the precarious and restrictive economic reality for women under the Taliban and underscored the importance of ensuring that such a situation never recurs. The Chief Executive spoke of the growing role of women in the political and economic life of Afghanistan, noting both the unprecedented rate of female participation in the country's legislative bodies, as well as the development of a number of institutions mandated to increase women's economic representation and power, such as the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The Chief Executive acknowledged that much remains to be done to improve gender equality in Afghanistan and described his government's continuing efforts to improve the lives of women in the country, drawing attention to the codification of gender equality commitments in a number of internationally-supported National Priority Programmes.

Moderating the session, **Elaine Conkievich**, UN Women Representative to Kazakhstan, began the panel discussion by noting that, although virtually all countries in the Eurasia region having relatively high levels of female educational attainment, a number of substantial barriers to women's economic participation remain.

Addressing Ms Conkievich's opening comments, **Valeriy Kovalkov**, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection of Belarus, outlined a number of initiatives currently being undertaken by the Belarusian government to address gender inequality. These range from the introduction of paternal leave – part of an effort to involve men more in childcare responsibilities – to modification of the country's labour code to provide greater remote working opportunities for women, with the aim of making it easier for women to balance work and family life.

Francis Malige, the EBRD's Managing Director for Financial Institutions, noted the low levels of female labour force participation across the Eurasia region and the lower hours and pay that characterise the opportunities available to many women. Mr Malige also drew attention to the problem of limited childcare service provision, which limits the ability of women to become economically active. The EBRD has invested more than 400 million Euro into gender initiatives, including both direct financing for women-led SMEs and programmes to address gender biases within government and lending institutions.

William Adema, Senior Economist in the OECD's Social Policy Division, emphasised the role of education in addressing gender imbalances. Mr Adema noted, for example, that with rising educational attainments for women in OECD countries, one could observe a concomitant increase in the economic contribution of the female labour force to their respective economies. He also addressed the recurring issues of limited childcare services and paid paternity leaves for men. Equally important, argued Mr Adema, was the need to mitigate a number of work culture issues – such as a proclivity for longer hours and low uptake of paternity leave – which serve to impede women's access to economic opportunities and career progression.

Kazakhstan's Minister of Labour and Social Protection **Madina Abylkassymova** noted the central importance of bridging gender inequalities if countries are to meet the Sustainable

Development Goals. Discussing the advances made by Kazakhstan in bridging the gender inequality gap, the minister highlighted rising female participation in all levels of government and across all public institutions and expressed her commitment to further progress with the assistance of two projects with UN Women, on gender budgeting and reducing violence against women.

Tatyana Teplova, Senior Counsellor for Gender and Inclusiveness in the OECD's Public Governance Directorate, outlined a number of ways in which the OECD addresses gender inequality in both member and non-member countries, as well as restating the economic and political importance of so doing. Ms Teplova noted, for example, that across OECD countries there is a strong positive correlation between the number of women in political power and the level of public trust in government institutions. Further, where an integrated, whole-of-government approach is taken to advancing gender equality in governance, the OECD observes higher standards in, and better decision making from, public institutions. Ms Teplova also highlighted the importance of gender mainstreaming policies – ensuring that policies and budgets are assessed and latterly monitored for both intended and unintended consequences on women.

Picking up on Ms Teplova's assessment of women and governance, **Mariarosa Lunati**, Head of Entrepreneurship, Productivity and Microdata of the Statistics and Data Directorate, OECD, highlighted the need for trusted, disaggregated data if the impact of policies on women, both good and bad, are to be properly understood and assessed. In addition to collecting gender disaggregated social and economic data, Ms Lunati noted the need for data-linking – for example, tying the gender of a firm's owner to levels of productivity or innovation – and better dissemination.

Following the panel interventions, **Ms Conkievich** drew attention to a recent IMF report that shows a strong positive correlation between rising gender equality and rising wages for *all* labour-market participants. **Mr Adema** drew attention to similar work by the OECD on economic gains from gender equality in Nordic Countries. Turning to the floor for comments, Ms Conkievich first introduced the European Union, which again underlined the importance of improving and expanding childcare services in improving gender equality in all societies. The session then heard from **Daniyar Imanaliev**, Head of Division on Economy and Investment at the Government Office of Kyrgyzstan, who drew attention to a programme on female entrepreneurship currently ongoing in the country and noted that the Kyrgyz government was committed to mainstreaming gender policies into their regional development strategies.

Closing this thematic session of OECD Eurasia Week 2018, **Richard Tarasofsky**, Deputy Director of Eastern Europe and Eurasia of Global Affairs Canada, highlighted the leading role played by Canada in raising the bar for gender equality. Mr Tarasofsky discussed, for example, Canada's 'feminist foreign policy,' whereby international policy is informed by humanitarian and development objectives, and drew attention to the use of legislative gender quotas – a strategy that is also in use in Kyrgyzstan. Finally, **Mr Tarasofsky**, echoing earlier comments by **Ms Teplova**, underscored the importance of gender budgeting, and noted the creation of a gender results framework by the Government of Canada to measure and improve the gender impact of policies and budgets – a move which could set a standard to be employed throughout the Eurasia region.