



# Determining the Three Major Factors Affecting Gender Equality: Evidence from 20 OECD Countries

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**Abstract.** In an era of integrated regional and international cooperation, gender equality, particularly female participation and contribution empowerment, has emerged as a top priority among OECD countries. Recently, it has been explicitly recognized as one of the most critical indicators for assessing the sound and sustainable development of societies. The study conducted a holistic review themed gender status under the guideline of PRISMA statement 2020, along with the statistics datasets correlated with gender equality, especially in the three major factors demonstrated at the aspects of adolescent birth rate, the share of seats in parliament, and labor force participation rate across OCED countries. Furthermore, the study intends to employ comparative analysis to generate a microscope for the future research concerning gender studies and provide more pragmatismal implementations for those countries lagging to achieve female's success in a more complex national and global atmosphere, while fulfilling the gap of gender inequality to attain a relatively comprehensive development constituted by male and female.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, OCED countries, comparative analysis, comprehensive development.

## 1 Introduction

With the advent of boosting economic growth and social well-being globally, gender equality has ultimately developed into a critical social issue, especially among these OECD countries. The gender equality, from its definition, refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys [1]. This concept has undergone several decades of dynamic development through its first launch in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and further formulation in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [2]. In corresponding with the call of the United Nations, OECD countries have collaborated on the Gender Forum 2012 and proactively launched the OECD Gender Initiative on the publication of "Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now", regarding it as the universal objective to eliminate the gender gap among the aspect of economic prosperity, political engagement, and social administration. Deepening into this, recent studies have presented the descriptive facts that gender equality and em-

powerment of women and girls is not only a problem attributed to economic value but also a severe issue concerning social morality [3]. This paper intends to employ the quantitative methodology to conduct a synchronic review of the status quo of gender equality among OECD countries and strives to reveal its implications in achieving the success of female groups in multiple contexts from individual to society as a whole.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (abbreviated as OECD) is a unique economic forum founded in December 1960, which was gradually developed into a well-organized international organization with a wide array of 37 countries ranging from European Union (EU) countries, the United States, and Canada on the convention initially proposed on the Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC). Aligning with the Marshall Plan proposed by the United States government in 1947, the fundamental goal of OECD countries was to revitalize the economy of the European continent, while boosting free trade, and improving people's well-being among member countries since World War II. Proceeding with its further development, the OECD, beneficial for its massive expansion, started to involve more member countries from South America and the Asian-Pacific Region to amplify its influence in the international community. Regarding its expansion, the objectives of the OECD gradually began to center on more diverse aspects with insights from the society of member countries including social warfare, gender equality, and the aging population. Currently, this globally recognized organization has attached great importance to gender equality after thoroughly looking at the economic growth reports, statistical datasets, and the forecasting of future development trends. Under the influential influence of UN Women, the government of OECD countries became aware of the prominence that females take in economic activities, the political arena, and social progress after numerous researches conducted regarding gender equality. Meanwhile, OECD countries have now aggregated their development into one of the major and reputable organizations in international society, which put drastic pertinent impacts on maintaining the policies and initiatives of eliminating gender discrimination and promoting better quality of gender equality. The study of proactive actions and insightful efforts that OECD countries raised in improving the living, political, and social standards of females will provide more opportunities for other countries and regions to minimize the gender gap and achieve gender equality from regionally to globally.

The existing literature on gender equality among OECD countries has emphasized a more holistic review to interpret the datasets on the micro effects of the gender gap. Regarding the evidence of system reviews, Page et al. (2021) conducted a research to examine its vital crucial role in providing syntheses of the state of knowledge in a certain field, ranging from the underlying research priorities identification, solutions for questions failed to be answered by individual studies, theoretical evaluation about ways and rationales of this phenomena occurred [4]. Under the guideline of Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), the literature review process contains the recent studies regarding gender equality as many as possible (Page et al., 2021)[4]. Aside from that, the analysis and conclusion have often been generated within systematic reviews are originated from a macroscopic dimension with the simple gender discrimination framework. Based on the previous studies, two opposing viewpoints

revealed that gender equality was correlated with the level of development among OECD countries. The first demonstrates that the increase in incomes (or economic growth more generally) will put an end to the gender differential, which Forsythe et al. (2000) defined this the modernization-neoclassical approach[5]. In this view, the fierce competition will drive out discriminatory practices, at least in the medium to long run (Becker 1985, O'Neill & Polachek 1993) [6][7]. Oppositely, another view is enduring patriarchal institutions that will undoubtedly hinder the progress of gender equality even in the face of economic advancement (Marchand & Parpart 1995, Parpart 1993) [8][9]. This has intrigued more investigations on the causes of gender inequality from the aspect of different political systems. Kim (2021) conducted studies of multi-level and multi-scopes to analyze the crucial factors and their degree of affecting gender inequality across 18 OECD and 16 non-OECD countries [10]. This research found that the factor of fertility rates from the macro-level and the perception of business executives from the micro-scope affected gender equality significantly, but it emphasized the combined level of analysis instead of delving deep into the micro-level end. Moreover, some previous studies limited their research context merely to gender equity exposure in the workplace. For example, Whitehouse (1992) conducted a series of statistics analyses on the gender equity issues among OECD countries with two models of liberal and collective to examine the inequity characteristics and effects on females in the workplace [11]. This study was expected to observe the micro-side of gender equity issues in OECD countries, while the research context hindered this study from exploring further and contributing more to the good of society. Moving to the most recent studies, Nguyen (2022) highlighted the effects that the severe consequence of uncertainty on gender studies [12]. The author investigated 22 indicators of gender inequality in four dimensions employment, health status, education availability, and legislative rights, however, these were focused on the five macro aspects of domestic, world, world trade, global, and geopolitical risks. Therefore, this study still failed to reach the micro-level of factors. Shittu et al. (2024) explicitly indicated in their studies that the factor of uncertainty critically impacts the standard of gender equality by employing the Generalized Method of Moment model with target data from 45 developing countries between 2005 and 2021 [13]. Concurrently, it was evident that policies from the scope of economic management, public sector, and society inclusion and equality had significantly promoted the status of gender equality. Nevertheless, this study still centered on the macro-perspective and the findings were not applicable to the OECD countries. In this case, it is assumed that very few studies have been conducted on the microscopic analysis of gender equality issues in OECD countries. To fill in this research gap, the study has incorporated a microscope and taken a close look at the datasets of the UN Women and World Bank and analyzed the policies and initiatives that OECD countries implemented to improve the standard of gender equality. Meanwhile, this study aims to address the critical social issue of gender equality among OECD countries by analyzing its correlations with three variables 1) female's work performance, 2) female's political participation percentage, and 3) social issues related to female abuse.

## 2 Methodology

Unlike other researches, this study has utilized the quantitative research methodology to analyze the datasets that we have collected all over the research process. The instruments that we selected to analyze the datasets are Microsoft Excel and SPSS (version: 29.0.1.0.0 (171)). During the process of analysis, the concept of standardized z-scores has been introduced and we have utilized it to build a data framework for the research. Starting from the previous studies, it was understandable that the Z score tells us how far above or below the mean an individual's score is, expressed in units of SD based on the formula for the Z score (Andrade, 2021) [14]. To move to the process of data analysis, the raw datasets were downloaded from the OECD database with the keywords of "gender equality" and "OECD countries", which were processed in a fully clean procedure to be saved in the individual laptop with an e-pass. The SPSS served as another crucial instrument in analyzing the data, with the steps of importing the target 20 countries of gender equality data, selecting the descriptive statistics under the button of "Analyze" to generate the z-score, which helps create meaningful indices. Technically, Z scores refer to the number of standard deviations a value (x) is above or below the mean of a set of numbers when the data are normally distributed. Using Z scores allows the translation of a value's raw distance from the mean into units of standard deviation. If the raw value (x) is below the mean, the z scores will be negative. Otherwise, the z score will become positive. To measure the level of gender equality, it is crucial to add the z-scores on the three different variables together and then obtain the final z-scores. The formula of standardized z-scores is listed below:

$$Z = \frac{x - \mu}{\delta}$$

According to the formula, Z stands for the standard score; X represents the observed value;  $\mu$  reflects the mean of the population; and  $\sigma$  is the standard deviation of the population. With the formula, the z scores are calculated and summarized in the table 1.

**Table 1.** Z-Score Summary: Partial and Overall Indices for the 20 OECD Member Countries

	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19)	Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	Labour force participation rate (% aged 15 and above)	Overall index
Netherlands	0.45	0.97	2.87	4.29
Iceland	-0.20	1.18	1.65	2.63
Sweden	0.41	1.72	0.28	2.41
Norway	0.25	1.18	0.45	1.88
Denmark	0.58	1.12	0.14	1.84
Switzerland	0.97	-0.17	0.41	1.22
Germany	0.74	0.39	-0.60	0.53
Austria	0.70	-0.01	-0.45	0.24

Singapore	0.47	-0.49	0.12	0.10
Belgium	0.39	1.10	-1.47	0.02
Australia	-0.26	0.04	0.10	-0.12
Canada	-0.56	-0.09	0.46	-0.19
Israel	0.25	-0.68	0.01	-0.43
France	0.51	-0.40	-0.94	-0.83
New Zealand	-1.88	0.37	0.53	-0.98
Ireland	0.20	-1.01	-0.70	-1.51
South Korea	0.93	-1.43	-1.07	-1.56
Japan	0.55	-1.95	-1.31	-2.71
United Kingdom	-1.94	-0.68	-0.31	-2.92
United States	-2.57	-1.15	-0.17	-3.89

Worthy to mention here again, the overall index is to add the three z-scores together. Regarding higher adolescent birth rates, it is usually regarded as having a negative correlation with gender equality. Meanwhile, the share of seats in parliament and labor force participation rates are normally viewed as positive correlations with gender equality. According to the above index, the top three countries with the highest gender equality scores are the Netherlands, Iceland, and Sweden. However, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, although highly developed in the economy, are all demonstrated as the top three countries with respect to the worst level of gender inequality.

### 3 Research Database

The data employed in this study, encompassing adolescent birth rates, the share of parliamentary seats, and labor force participation rates, was sourced from the OECD database. Access to this database necessitated official registration. Given that the data originates from an authoritative source, it is presumed to adhere rigorously to ethical standards. Initially, I utilized the keywords “gender equality” and “OECD countries” to locate the pertinent datasets, which were subsequently downloaded individually. Following the download process, the datasets were meticulously cleaned and stored on my laptop for further analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, this study employed standard instruments such as Microsoft Excel and SPSS to calculate and interpret the z-scores of the data.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 The Netherlands

To analyze in-depth, the Netherlands, with an overall index of 4.29, ranks first in gender equality. In the Netherlands, only 6.2 adolescent females aged 15 to 19 give birth among 1,000 females, women take 37.8% of seats in its parliament, and 79.9% of females join in the labor market. Meanwhile, it was demonstrated in the study that there was moderate to high gender equity in the Netherlands because females proactively participated in the part-time labor market and maintained comparatively higher fertility (Mills et al., 2008) [15]. Previous research also investigated disparities in gender inequality across different educational levels in the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States. It found that the gender wage gap is most pronounced among highly educated individuals in the Netherlands, due to men receiving higher returns on their education compared to women (Evertsson et al., 2009) [16]. Van Mol (2021) started to interpret gender equality from the aspect of female and male students obtaining education at overseas nations [17]. More importantly, to empower female rights in society, the Netherlands has also proactively fostered many dialogues with other OECD countries to seek some effective lessons and successful experiences. The government continuously seeks to work jointly with multiple international organizations to address the gender equality issue and protect women's rights. As the data indicated, the Netherlands government has apparently adopted gender diplomacy to campaign for better female right of reproductive and combat violence against women and girls. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has prioritized four themes in its efforts to combat gender inequality: empowering women to take on leadership roles and participate in political and other decision-making processes; empowering women's economic status; protecting women and girls from domestic violence; and highlighting women's importance in dealing with conflicts. Besides, the Netherlands also set up substantial gender initiatives to gain funds to promote and boost equal rights between women and men. Associated with the policy framework of the Strengthening Civil Society, the SDG 5 Fund, with a total of €500 million over the period 2021-2025, which initially planned to be distributed into the 4 instruments of Power of Women (PoW), Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Partnership Fund (SRHR), Leading from the South (LFS) to improve the national level of gender equality to a new standard [18]. Benefiting from the government's support in funding and policy, the Netherlands has strategically sped up its progress in advocating gender equality to provide a relatively friendly living environment for female groups to achieve their well-being.

### 4.2 Iceland

To interpret the findings, Iceland successfully ranks second in gender equality among OECD countries with a score of 2.63. This success was largely attributed to the contribution of Iceland's government, because it has made substantial efforts to offer many employment opportunities for females, granted many benefits for women to

pursue leadership positions from a political scope, and proactively guided them to participate in the decision-making process to voice for themselves. In the last half of the 20th century, efforts to promote gender equality primarily concentrated on improving the status of women in the workplace, in politics, and education; at home, however, women bore the primary burden of childrearing. Although mothers could assign to the father a portion of their paid leave entitlements, this rarely occurred (Eydal and Gíslason, 2008) [19]. Additionally, a new parental leave law was unanimously approved by the Icelandic parliament in May 2020 [20]. The law has made significant adjustments to parents' circumstances. Eighty percent of their salary is awarded to each parent for a non-transferable leave of absence, which can last three months. Accordingly, the law has enacted that females and males shall take the same responsibility at home and taking care of children. The three months of paid parental leave also provide more time for the female to recover from their health status of childbirth and relieve the economic burden of backing to the workplace. It is a big stride for the whole society to recognize the crucial value that females should keep healthy during the process of reproduction. Fathers in Iceland were granted the longest quota rights to paid parental leave (Moss, 2015) [21]. Looking back to Iceland's history, the country didn't offer sufficient support to reconcile the gender differences in family responsibilities. Till 1981, Iceland started to enact its first laws, to ensure all people have the right to enjoy three months of paid parental leave (Duvander & Lammi-Taskula 2011) [22]. Thanks to the government's support, Iceland later promulgated many legislations on promoting gender equality and one of the most well-known ones is the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, No. 150/2020 (Gender Equality Act) [23]. More notable legislation has been followed with the Act on Gender Autonomy, No. 80/2019, and the Act on Equal Treatment on the Labour Market, No. 86/2018. These Acts and legislations have contributed to the increase of female economic pay in the labor market, the security of female influence in political participation, and the evacuation of female abuse or harassment in society.

Aside from that, Sweden ranks third in gender equality, with an overall index of 2.41. Historically, the Swedish feminist gender equality policy has purported ideals that support the eradication of gender discrimination in all aspects of societal life including democratic, legal, and economic equality (Linda Lane & Birgitta Jordanson, 2020) [24]. Especially in 1995, Sweden joined as a member of the European Union (EU), which later was proven to be the best opportunity to address the issues of gender equality and empower female's role in economic development. From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, people's understanding of gender inequality in Sweden was primarily on the unequal sharing of housework without payment. And then people's focus gradually turned to the labor market. However, the mainstream of this mindset gradually changed to different arenas from the policy domain to political and economic reform. Supported by welfare state arrangements identified by Esping-Anderson (1990) as embedded in social democratic regimes, Sweden followed up with other Nordic countries' pace, aims to succeed in providing men and women equal access to health, sickness and unemployment insurance, parental leave and access to affordable child and elderly care (Arnalds et al., 2022)[25]. The supports, especially encouraging women's participation in the labor market were to achieve

gender equality through employment and economic independence for both sexes. Moreover, the Swedish government has utilized taxation reform to distribute a relatively higher proportion of tax income to maintain the welfare of the female group and prioritize a healthy living environment for them [26]. All these policies and reactions have contributed to the high level of gender equality and more stimulus for economic development.

### 4.3 The United States of America

During the research, it was surprising to observe the United States of America (with a score of -2.92), one of the most developed countries in this world, now ranks as the one with the worst gender equality among the OECD countries. Dissimilar to those Nordic countries, the gender situation in the United States is more complicated than in other OECD countries because it is much more involved with ethnic and racial discrimination. England et al. (2020) noticed that there had existed a trend of slowdown and stall on others that suggested further progress required substantial institutional and cultural change [27]. At the same time, Goss (2020) disclosed in the book *The Paradox of Gender Equality: How American Women's Groups Gained and Lost Their Public Voice* that women's history was structured by overcoming obstacles and refuting presumptions such as the insightful idea that suffrage would not have a significant impact on women's political participation, even as women's organizations flourished in the decades immediately following the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment [28]. Aside from that, men's involvement in household and caregiving duties, government-funded child care, and company adoption of policies that lessen gender discrimination and assist both sexes in juggling work and family obligations are a few examples of how these increases should be implemented. However, it is observed that although the government of the United States has formulated a series of policies to combat gender discrimination, there still exists a lot of hindrance in the way of achieving a high quality of gender equality among the whole society. What is worth mentioning here is that gender bias has been embedded into the evolution and development of the United States since its establishment. On July 4, 1776, the Continental Congress signed the Declaration of Independence, which clarified all men's equal rights. But it was interpreted as that all "men" are equal, instead of men and women being equal. In 1868, the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, promulgated 92 years after the founding of the United States, stipulating that "equal protection of the laws shall be afforded to all persons," the word "person" was used for the first time to include both men and women. Although this eliminated discrimination against women in form, but only from literal terms. In 1870, Congress enacted the 15th Amendment, which enabled black people to vote. Despite the passage of the 15th Amendment, which asserts that "No slave shall be denied or deprived on account of race or color," women remained excluded from the electorate. Before the ratification of the 15th Amendment, women's rights activists endeavored to include the term "gender" between "color" and "former slave," but their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. The absence of governmental protection in legal matters has made it exceedingly difficult for women in American society to achieve parity with men in terms of income, polit-

ical representation, and social status. Consequently, indicators of gender equality have remained relatively low, underscoring the persistent disparities between men and women.

## 5 Discussion

The findings of this research underscore the effectiveness of utilizing z-scores derived from three key indices to generate a comprehensive overview of gender equality standards in OECD countries. Our project specifically investigates the assessment of gender equality levels through these z-scores, which correlate with three critical indicators. Analysis of these indicators reveals that the Netherlands, Iceland, and Sweden consistently rank among the top three countries regarding gender equality within the OECD. By examining the social policies implemented in these nations, particularly those addressing birth rates, female participation in parliaments, and female welfare—our project, the study has identified several micro-methods and strategic frameworks that could be adopted by other OECD countries to enhance gender equality and mitigate biases against women.

Nevertheless, the scope for further research remains substantial. Additional factors, such as the education levels of women, warrant detailed examination to gain a more nuanced understanding of gender equality standards. This expanded research agenda is critical for developing a holistic approach to promoting gender equality across diverse socioeconomic contexts within the OECD countries. Future studies that have continued exploration of these potential factors can contribute to more effective policy-making, the overarching goal of achieving gender equality and diminishing the deficiency effects while minimizing the gender gap.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author acknowledged that there was no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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