

Leading the Future: How Girls' Schools Can Respond to the OECD's Gender Equality Findings

Key insights from recent research:

- **Gender gaps remain substantial** across education, employment, leadership, health, and political participation, despite decades of progress — with two areas identified as particularly urgent: the digital and green transitions.
- **The digital gap is widening:** fewer than 1% of 15-year-old girls aspire to ICT careers versus 8% of boys, and women's share of ICT specialist roles has grown by just one percentage point in a decade.
- **The green transition is creating new jobs that women are not accessing equally,** with women significantly under-represented in engineering, energy, climate science, and environmental technology.

In September 2025, the OECD published its *Gender Equality in a Changing World* report, a comprehensive assessment of gender equality across EU and OECD countries. The report examines how women, men, girls and boys are faring across seven policy areas: education and skills, paid and unpaid work, leadership and representation, health, gender-based violence, the green transition, and the digital transformation.

The report's central finding is unambiguous: despite significant progress over recent decades, sizeable gender gaps persist across economic, social, and political life. Despite girls outperforming boys in educational attainment, they continue to face barriers to full equality. They have lower confidence in Math and Science, stereotyping in subject areas, and poor mental health outcomes. They also remain under-represented in leadership, face a persistent gender pay gap, and carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care.

Two areas, however, are identified as particularly urgent given the pace of change and carry direct implications for girls' schools: the digital transition is accelerating faster than gender-equality efforts, and the green transition is creating new labour-market opportunities that women are not yet accessing equally. This briefing focuses on what those two priorities mean in practice for girls' school leaders.

The Digital Gender Gap

Women remain significantly under-represented in digital careers, and the gap is not closing fast enough. Across OECD countries, the proportion of men working as ICT specialists is three to eight times higher than the proportion of women, and over the past decade the overall share of women in ICT specialist jobs has increased by only one percentage point. The problem begins well before the workplace: by the age of 15, fewer than 1% of girls across the OECD aspire to become ICT professionals, compared to almost 8% of boys. This is not a gap that will close on its own. Women are still under-

represented in AI research and development and are increasingly targets of gendered mis- and disinformation campaigns, the risks of which can be magnified by generative AI tools.

For girls' schools, the implications are clear: digital and AI skills are now foundational for all careers, not only STEM. Yet girls' confidence in digital subjects often lags behind their actual performance, making early exposure and sustained identity-building essential if girls are to see themselves as the digital leaders and innovators the economy needs.

The Green Transition Gender Gap

The green economy is expanding rapidly, but women are not entering it equally. Women remain significantly under-represented in engineering, energy, climate science, and environmental technology — the sectors at the heart of the transition. As with the digital gap, the problem is rooted in early education: girls are not seeing themselves as future climate scientists, engineers, or environmental leaders. Girls' schools are well placed to change that — by embedding climate literacy and environmental science across the curriculum, developing green STEM pathways, and ensuring girls have early access to the role models and industry connections that make these careers feel attainable.

Girls' schools can — and should — be at the forefront of this. They are uniquely positioned to respond, offering environments that build confidence, dismantle stereotypes, and provide early access to digital and green learning pathways. By embedding core digital skills and climate literacy across the curriculum, widening access to role models and industry partnerships, and ensuring every girl has the tools and opportunities to participate fully, girls' schools can shape the next generation of digital innovators and climate leaders.

References

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/gender-equality-in-a-changing-world_e808086f-en.html

This briefing has been prepared by ICGS experts, drawing on sector knowledge and international research, with the support of AI tools. All interpretation, judgement, and recommendations reflect the professional expertise of the ICGS team and are intended to support girls' school leaders in their strategic thinking. They should be considered in the context of each school's circumstances and are not a substitute for local decision-making.