



Chief Executive Women

Women leaders enabling women leaders

Media Release

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Australia's gender balance progressing slowly

According to the OECD's latest report, [The Pursuit of Gender Equality](#), gender balance at the top of listed companies across the OECD remains a distant goal.

The report names Australia as a mid-range performer across most gender equality outcomes, despite women making up 58.7% of all graduates from undergraduate degree programs (which is slightly above OECD average), and notes that Australian women are "much less likely to study (and later work in) the lucrative science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields".

"The OECD report puts Australia's gender equality performance in corporate leadership in step with OECD averages and notes our slightly better than average progress towards gender-balanced boardrooms and in the rise of female CEOs," says Kathryn Fagg, CEW President.

"The data presented in the comprehensive OECD report highlights the real opportunities for growing Australia's GDP through increasing female workforce participation and for enhancing the performance of companies through increasing the diversity of their senior leadership.

"It also reinforces the lack of structural and institutional backing for women throughout their careers as a serious obstacle to their reaching senior positions in the private or public sector," says Kathryn Fagg.

Women in leadership in corporate Australia

The OECD report found that, in the period 2013–2016, Australia was among six countries, including Belgium, France, Italy, Poland and Sweden, making the greatest progress towards gender balanced boardrooms.

In 2016 women sat on 20% of board seats OECD wide, slightly up from 16.8% in 2013.

Australia's most recent [board gender diversity data](#) released in September by the AICD puts women on 25.4% of ASX200 board seats.

However, the OECD notes that, while quotas and soft targets have boosted the number of women on boards in many countries, the gains at the Board level have not been reflected below board level.

According to the OECD's Gender Equality Questionnaire, in 2016, on average 4.8% of CEOs across the OECD were women, double the 2.4% in 2013.

Australia is one of four countries, including Hungary, Ireland and Luxemburg, to experience an increase in the percentage of female CEOs over that period.

In August 2017 Chief Executive Women's [Senior Executive Census](#) examined the composition of ASX200 Executive Leadership teams. We noted that:

- 5% of ASX 200 CEOs are women
- Men hold 79% of roles in the ASX200 Executive Leadership teams
- 41 companies in the ASX200 have no women in their Executive Leadership team
- 126 companies in the ASX200 have no women in line roles in their Executive Leadership team

“It is worthwhile noting the emphasis given in the OECD report to the importance of role models. CEW recognises that to increase the number of women in senior leadership positions requires both female role models in such roles and male leader role models who are seen to drive change within their organisations – such role modelling from both genders enables the breakdown of gender stereotypes and cultural norms that continue to hinder women’s progress to the top.

“Every company has its own rewards and risks in striving for gender balance, and progressive companies recognise that leadership is key. In the corporate setting, our research and experience confirm that the Chairman, Board, CEO and leadership team must all be committed to having gender diversity as a key priority, otherwise it is unlikely that progress will be made or benefits realised,” said Kathryn Fagg.

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About Chief Executive Women (www.cew.org.au)

Chief Executive Women is the pre-eminent organisation representing more than 430 of Australia’s most senior women from the corporate, public, academic and not-for-profit sectors. Its mission is “women leaders enabling women leaders”. Through advocacy, targeted programs and scholarships, CEW works to remove the barriers to women’s progression and ensure equal opportunity for prosperity. CEW offers innovative and substantive programs aimed at enabling women’s participation and future leadership.

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