

# Preface

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People and their talents are two of the core drivers of sustainable, long-term economic growth. If half of these talents are underdeveloped or underutilized, the economy will never grow as it could. Multiple studies have shown that healthy and educated women are more likely to have healthier and more educated children, creating a positive, virtuous cycle for the broader population. Research also shows the benefits of gender equality in politics: when women are more involved in decision-making, they make different decisions—not necessarily better or worse—but decisions that reflect the needs of more members of society.

Some of the most compelling findings regarding the benefits of gender equality are emerging from companies. For example, companies that include more women at the top levels of leadership tend to outperform those that don't. With a growing female talent pool coming out of schools and universities, and with more consumer power in the hands of women, companies who fail to recruit and retain women—and ensure they have a pathway to leadership positions—undermine their long-term competitiveness. And for those that do, the benefits of diversity are evident.

But these benefits go beyond the economic case. There is another simple and powerful reason why more women should be empowered: fairness. Women represent one half of the global population—they deserve equal access to health, education, influence, earning power and political representation. Their views and values are critical for ensuring a more prosperous and inclusive common future. Humanity's collective progress depends on it.

Through the *Global Gender Gap Report*, the World Economic Forum quantifies the magnitude of gender-based disparities and tracks their progress over time. While no single measure can capture the complete situation, the Global Gender Gap Index presented in this *Report* seeks to measure one important aspect of gender equality: the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics. The *Report* thus identifies those countries that are role models in equitably allocating their resources between women and men, regardless of the overall level of those resources. To complement this, the Country Profiles contain a comprehensive set of supporting information that provides the broader context on laws, social norms and policies within a country. This year's *Report* also provides unique new insights on the pace of change, and where change is coming from, based on almost a decade of data.

We created the *Global Gender Gap Report* in 2006 to provide a public, globally relevant tool that delivers

information on how countries are faring on gender equality. Since then, this *Report*, and the other initiatives of the Gender Parity Programme, have generated significant impact. The Global Gender Parity Group, a multi-stakeholder community of business leaders, has helped build momentum for gender equality as a business imperative, both at and beyond the World Economic Forum. Our online repository of information on company best practices to close economic gender gaps serves as a gateway for those seeking to implement such practices in their own companies. Our collaborations with public and private sector leaders in Japan, Korea, Mexico and Turkey to close economic gender gaps are amongst the models that other countries are seeking to adopt in order to address gender equality. The platform we provide for dialogue has helped bring together stakeholders on issues as diverse as girls' education, the science and technology gender gap and women's entrepreneurship. Finally, this *Report* has been widely used by numerous businesses, governments, universities, NGOs, media organizations, and individuals as a vital tool for their own work.

We would like to express our appreciation to Yasmina Bekhouche, Senior Project Manager, Gender Parity Programme, and Saadia Zahidi, Head, Gender Parity Programme for their leadership and contributions to this *Report*. We would also like to thank Jessica Camus, Pearl Samandari Massoudi and Paulina Padilla Ugarte for their support of this project at the World Economic Forum. We are thankful for the ongoing support of Ricardo Hausmann, Director, Center for International Development, Harvard University, and Laura D. Tyson, S.K. and Angela Chan Professor of Global Management, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley. Finally, we welcome the indefatigable support of the Partners of the Gender Parity Programme and their commitment to closing gender gaps.

As this *Report* shows, good progress has been made over the last years on gender equality, and in some cases, in a relatively short time. Yet we are far from achieving equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes. To accelerate the pace of change, we must be consistent in measuring progress, rigorous in identifying solutions and collaborative in our actions. While governments have an important role to play in creating policies that provide women and men with equal access to opportunities, companies must also create workplaces where the best talent can flourish. Civil society, educators and media are also critical in empowering women and engaging men in the process.

It is our hope that this latest edition of the *Report* will serve as a call to action to spur change on an issue that is central to our future. Ultimately, it is through each individual adapting his or her beliefs and actions that change can occur. We call upon every reader of this *Report* to join these efforts.