

# Preface

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People and their talents are among the core drivers of sustainable, long-term economic growth. If half of these talents are underdeveloped or underutilized, growth and sustainability will be compromised. Moreover, there is a compelling and fundamental values case for empowering women: women represent one half of the global population—they deserve equal access to health, education, earning power and political representation.

The current inequalities risk being exacerbated in the future. The Fourth Industrial Revolution will transform the global economy and society in an unprecedented manner. Industries are already undergoing profound shifts in their business models as technology is disrupting current methods of production, consumption and delivery. Labour markets are also rapidly changing in this context. As a result, gender gaps are set to increase in some industries as jobs traditionally held by women become obsolete, while at the same time opportunities are emerging in wholly new domains. We must clearly understand the progress thus far as well as the future outlook to reap the opportunities and mitigate the challenges presented by these trends.

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 Index points to potential role models by revealing those countries that—within their region or income group—are leaders in distributing resources more equitably between women and men, regardless of the overall level of available resources.

The Global Gender Gap Index was developed in 2006, partially to address the need for a consistent and comprehensive measure for gender equality that can track a country's progress over time. In some countries, progress is occurring rapidly regardless of starting point and income level, but in others, change is much slower or negligible. A decade of data has revealed that the Economic Participation and Opportunity gender gap has been closed by 59%, with slow improvements of 3% over the past ten years. In Educational Attainment, the gender gap has decreased compared to 2006 and now stands at 95%. Health and Survival is the subindex that is closest to

parity, at 96%, but the gap has widened slightly compared to 2006. While the most relative improvement over the last decade has been made in Political Empowerment, the gender gap in this area remains the widest, with only 23% being closed.

The magnitude of national gender gaps is the combined result of various socioeconomic, policy and cultural variables. Governments thus have a leading role to play as the closure or continuation of these gaps is intrinsically connected to the framework of national policies in place. The Index does not seek to set priorities for countries but rather to provide a comprehensive set of data and a clear method for tracking gaps on critical indicators so that countries may set priorities within their own economic, political and cultural contexts. In addition, governments must align their efforts with those of business and civil society to foster growth that includes both men and women. The World Economic Forum's Global Challenge on Gender Parity seeks to promote public-private cooperation to close gender gaps, based in part on the analytical tools provided by this *Report* as well as others.

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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.