

## G7 2018: Making Gender Inequality History?

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### Executive Summary

Feminists have long argued that gender relations need to be taken seriously as an integral element of the analysis of every social problem, rather than being ‘added on’. In Charlevoix, gender relations were genuinely at the heart of the G7 summit agenda: Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada emphasized their centrality to all five main summit themes, one of which was fully focused on ‘Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’. This is undeniably welcome, but as this policy brief argues, achieving true equality is about far more than simply providing better market opportunities or closing gender pay gaps. Women’s inequality is only partly about economics; rather, it reflects much deeper and often-hidden structures of power that govern society.

### Gendering the G7 agenda?

On the second day of the G7 summit in Charlevoix, US President Donald Trump caused consternation on the part of feminists—captured brilliantly by IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde’s [look of exasperation](#)—when he sauntered into the women’s empowerment breakfast discussion late. Yet for feminists, such disregard for gender issues by powerful men is nothing new. They are used to being ignored, ridiculed, and, even when taken seriously, the subject of a ‘[just add women and stir](#)’ approach rather than one that recognizes (often highly unequal) gender relations as fundamentally constitutive of social structures, and therefore permeating every conceivable social and political problem.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada evidently understands this. He has—albeit [not without criticism](#)—

burnished his feminist credentials since acceding to office, and for the first time in living memory, he placed questions of gender at the centre of what was a [highly ambitious](#) G7 summit agenda in 2018. The goal of ‘Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’ was one of the five key themes, and, as Trudeau noted before the summit, achieving this was crucial for making serious progress on [the other four themes](#), particularly around growth and jobs. However, is this even possible, and what was actually achieved by the G7 in Charlevoix? This brief argues that, despite the welcome fact that gender inequality is being taken more seriously than in the past, it is still stymied by an unwillingness to address the deeper structural forces that reproduce it.

### **Gender Inequality is not only Financial**

Globally, women are to be found in the lowest-paid work. They earn 23% percent less than men. Approximately 75% percent of women in developing

regions are in the informal economy, in precarious and insecure jobs that render their escape from poverty impossible. Women also do twice as much (and sometimes much more) unpaid care work than men, such as childcare and housework. As a result, they work longer days than men when paid and unpaid labour are both counted. It is therefore undeniable that we need to address the pronounced gendered inequality that typifies the contemporary world and to empower women.

But, if we deconstruct those gender inequalities a little, what are the mechanisms by which they are reproduced? Women are particularly vulnerable to economic deprivation which exacerbates inequality. These phenomena are due to structural (social, cultural and institutional) discrimination and constraints that fall upon women and impair their ability to profit from economic development. For example, they face discrimination based on socially constructed gender stereotypes and gender roles. Feminised qualities tend to be

devalued, limiting women's capability and thus explaining the difficulty they encounter in accessing leadership or high-skilled positions. As a result, women are not paid the same as men in equal positions. This also explains the occupational segregation on the labour market and the fact that women are to be found in lower-paid jobs. Furthermore, women's wider – and fundamentally necessary – contribution to maintaining society is devalued. Because they are responsible for reproducing the human species and consequently for reproducing the labour force, any economic growth is completely dependent upon women's reproductive work. If we add-on the domestic and care services they frequently provide at great cost – but which is never remunerated or even considered in conventional models of growth-inducing economic activity – their contribution is far from fully appreciated.

In fact, this aspect of women's life is normalised, not considered to be 'productive work' and the result is that

they are both unpaid and faced with a double cost: i.e. either losing the opportunity to earn money or having to work another job beyond their reproductive activity to do so. The social reproduction role put upon women thus constitutes an extra burden as the responsibilities are not equally shared and do not allow women to find a work-life balance that considerably limits their economic independence. This explains, for example, why women encounter difficulty entering the labour market, maintaining their position within it, or why they often have to take part-time jobs. This in turn explains the persistent gender pay gap and the fact that women face higher chances of poverty and inequalities.

These systemic constraints are based on pervasive social norms stemming from the way [masculinities and femininities are constructed](#). Those socially constructed gender roles do not stop at borders and are being widely reproduced by the global political economy. In that sense, the global leaders of the advanced

economies have a significant role to play in addressing these unequal gender relations, unlocking the potential of women and girls and withdrawing the barriers to their full labour participation.

### **The Gender Agenda in the G7**

In general terms, [the G7/8 has gradually sought, over the years, to include women's issues and a feminist perspective in its agenda](#) to the point where women's empowerment is now prioritized. Indeed, during last year's G7 summit in Taormina, Leaders aimed to reduce inequalities and build the foundations for a sustainable economic environment, and women's empowerment featured among [the target areas](#). Despite the terrorist attacks and the main focus on foreign policy during the summit, the [Leaders' Communiqué](#) addressed the theme of gender equality briefly in a (rather short) paragraph. The global leaders reaffirmed their commitment to gender equality and acknowledged the need to increase women's involvement in the economy as it is 'fundamental for the fulfillment of human rights'.

They also agreed on an ambitious [Roadmap for a Gender-Responsive Economic Environment](#) that approached women's economic empowerment more comprehensively than ever before, and constitutes a positive step towards greater gender inclusivity.

The Roadmap covers a wide range of issues such as: the representation of women in all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; work-life balance; equal pay policies; and investment in social structures to support households. The leaders also pledged to 'value unpaid care and domestic work and its estimated contribution to the economy' and 'combat precarious employment'. While these commitments are credible, substantial measures need to be implemented in order to ensure women's empowerment. However, no tangible measures or policies are mentioned, and the Roadmap represents mostly 'recommendations', 'suggestions' and 'considerations', rather than assertive decisions. Moreover, many of the commitments

remain contingent on the actions and compliance of the private sector.

The leaders further admitted that what had been done in the past was not enough and that the G7 ought to do more. Other policy analysts shared this [opinion](#) and further expressed the belief that the G7 commitments to gender equality were [inconsistent](#) and lacked [substance](#). Finally, the 2017 Taormina Summit did not address the deeper social strictures that hinder women's economic development mentioned above. However, overall the 2017 G7 laid the foundations for a better discussion around gender equality and women's empowerment, and paved the way towards more action.

### **The 2018 Charlevoix Summit**

The Canadian G7 presidency has seen the Trudeau government pushing 'advancing gender equality' as the top priority. For the very first time, it also planned to include analyses of gender equality throughout all the themes discussed during the summit. The Charlevoix G7 also created a Gender

Equality Advisory Council to ensure the integration of gender equality and this represents a significant step forward.

This was successful to a degree as gender equality is addressed throughout [the final communiqué](#) and the different themes discussed. Indeed, as part of the theme 'Investing in Growth that Works for Everyone' the leaders endorsed the [Charlevoix Commitment on Equality and Economic Growth](#), thus broadening their approach to social and economic progress, by, for example, acknowledging that the GDP measure does not capture the realities and dimensions of male and female well-being. They also committed to further support gender equality in labour market opportunities and in the distribution of unpaid care work, with measures such as paid maternity leave and parental leave. Although the same criticism made earlier applies here, as no tangible reforms or policies are mentioned, it is clear that some of our political leaders are now taking gender issues far more seriously.

Moreover, the communiqué does not mention that fathers will be encouraged to take parental leave in order to foster an equal sharing of care responsibilities.

The G7 countries have reiterated their engagement in favour of education by endorsing the [Charlevoix Declaration on Quality Education for Girls, Adolescent Girls and Women in Developing Countries](#) and allocating [new funding](#) to help girls in conflict and crisis situations to receive a ‘safe and quality’ education. The declaration also mentioned that leaders will prepare women for the jobs of the future, ‘encourage increased access to quality post-secondary education’ and ‘will seek to increase opportunities for women beyond lower-skilled jobs, including in high-growth, higher-wage sectors’ and in STEM occupations. But here again no practical measures have been announced to ensure that the commitments will be implemented. Despite the fact that this summit constitutes a success in terms of gender mainstreaming, most of the commitments made, and discussed in

this policy brief, do not tackle the root causes of gender inequality described above and will not, unfortunately, ‘make gender inequality history’.

[Canada’s Presidency of the G7](#) [certainly exemplified](#) the willingness to challenge and undermine the persisting and pervasive ‘power dynamics of gender’, to empower women by taking down ‘systemic barriers’, ‘gender ideologies, social norms and stereotypes’. However, there is no indication of measures tackling those in a truly substantive sense. The fact that no mention is made of encouraging fathers to take parental leave confirms this. Yet, violence against women, the gender pay gap and glass ceiling in employment, the unequal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities, and more generally gender inequalities of all kinds of power are all linked to enduring [gender relations between women](#) and men and culturally entrenched [gender roles](#). Rethinking the way we educate boys, who also suffer from the constraining structure



of social norms, and girls would be a good place to start.

Overall, Canada's leadership of the G7 has allowed for successful progress in terms of gender mainstreaming, which constitutes a considerable move towards gender equality. But more concrete measures will be necessary to ensure the implementation of the

ambitious commitments. Finally, the G7 will have to try and address the unequal power dynamics of gender relations to make 'gender inequality history' in the long run.

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