

# The Male Disadvantage in Educational Achievement and Attainment

OECD Forum, 20–21 May 2019, Paris

# National Commission on Gender Equality in Education



Report submitted in February 2019. An English translation of the report is forthcoming:  
<https://nettsteder.regjeringen.no/stoltenbergutvalget/>

# Commission Mandate

All pupils have equal right to quality learning in school

## **EVIDENCE**

Building evidence on causes of the gender gap in education

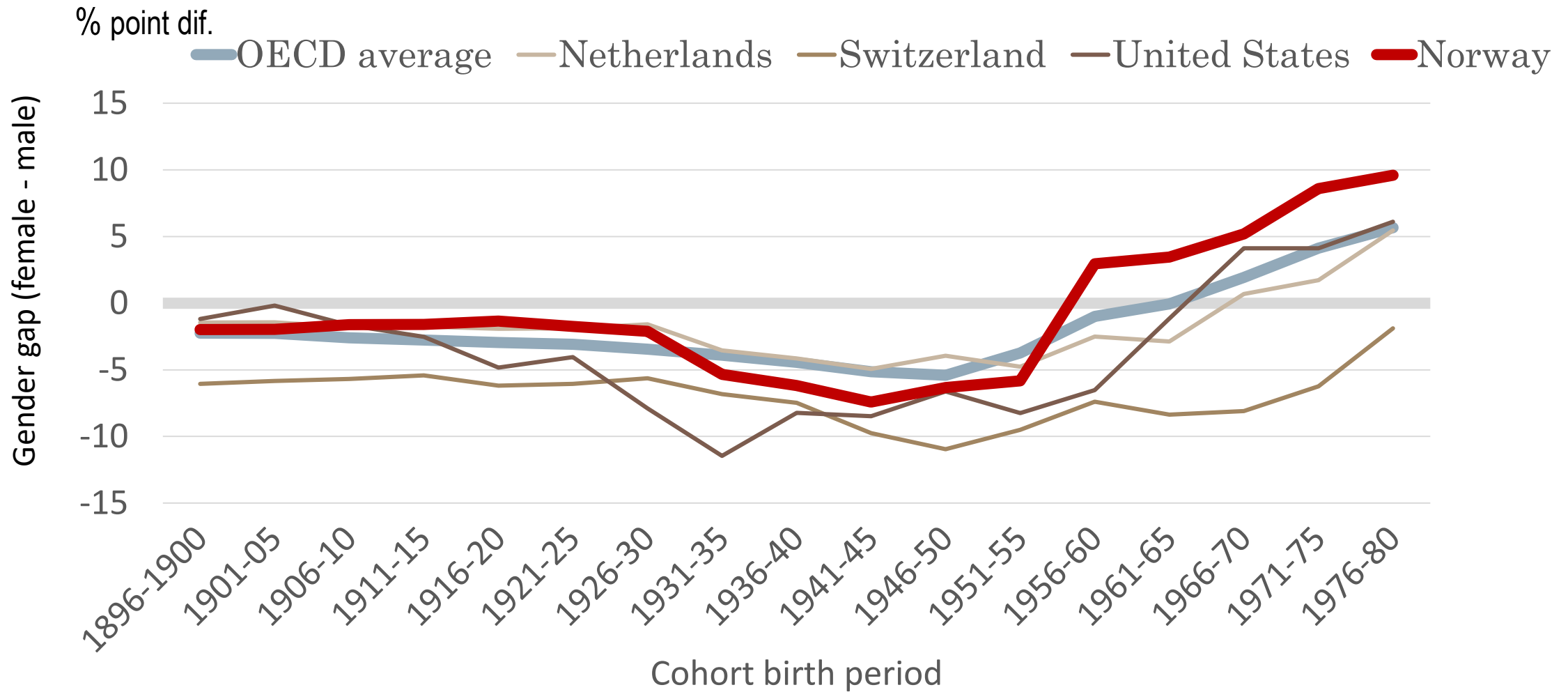
## **POLICY and interventions**

Offer local and national authorities knowledge to inform their choices of efficient policies and interventions to prevent unfavourable gender gaps in educational achievement



Gender gaps in the  
education system and lifecycle outcomes

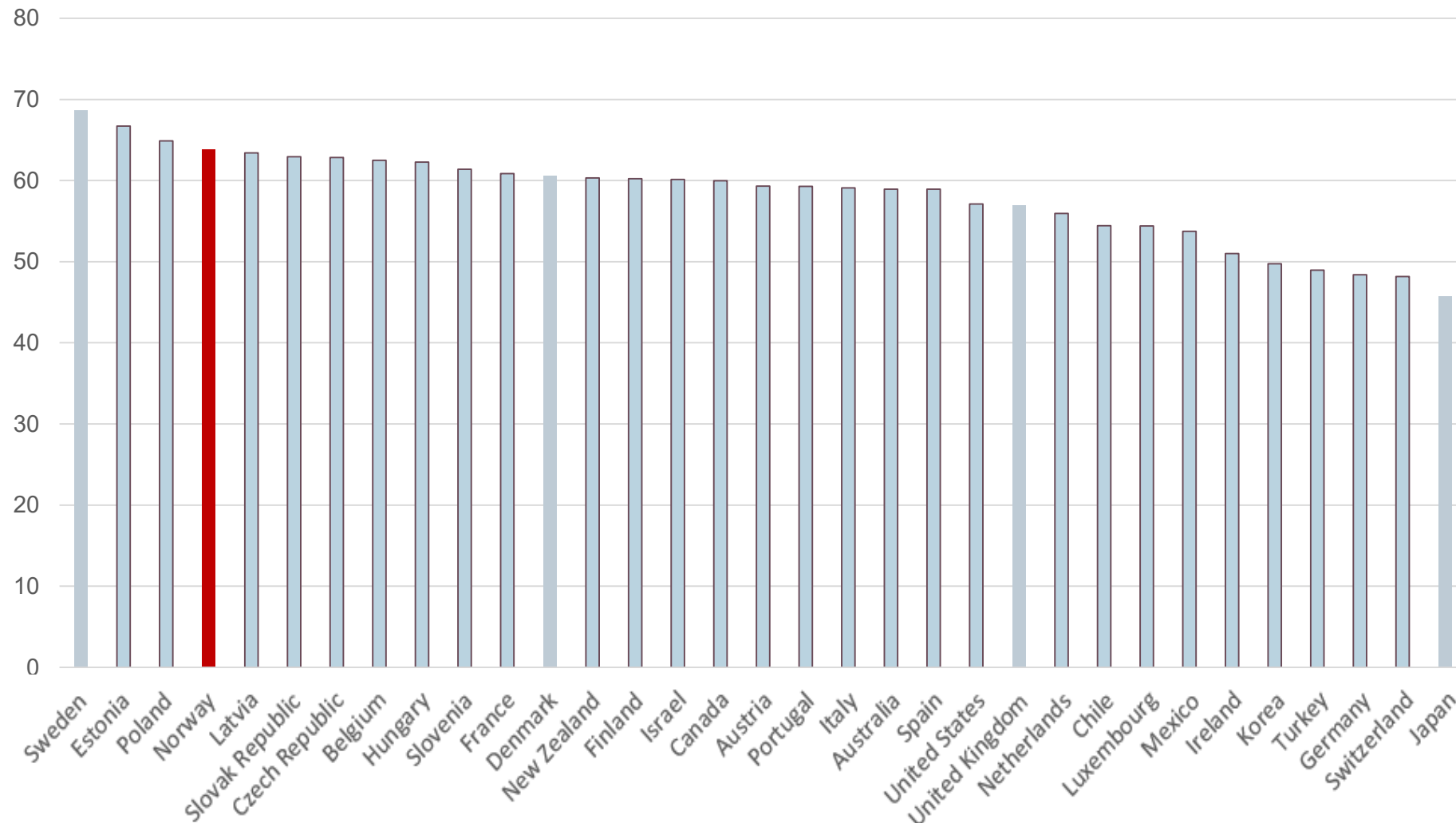
# Long term trends in the gender gap in tertiary attainment



Source: Barro and Lee, 2013. OECD report Figure 2.1.

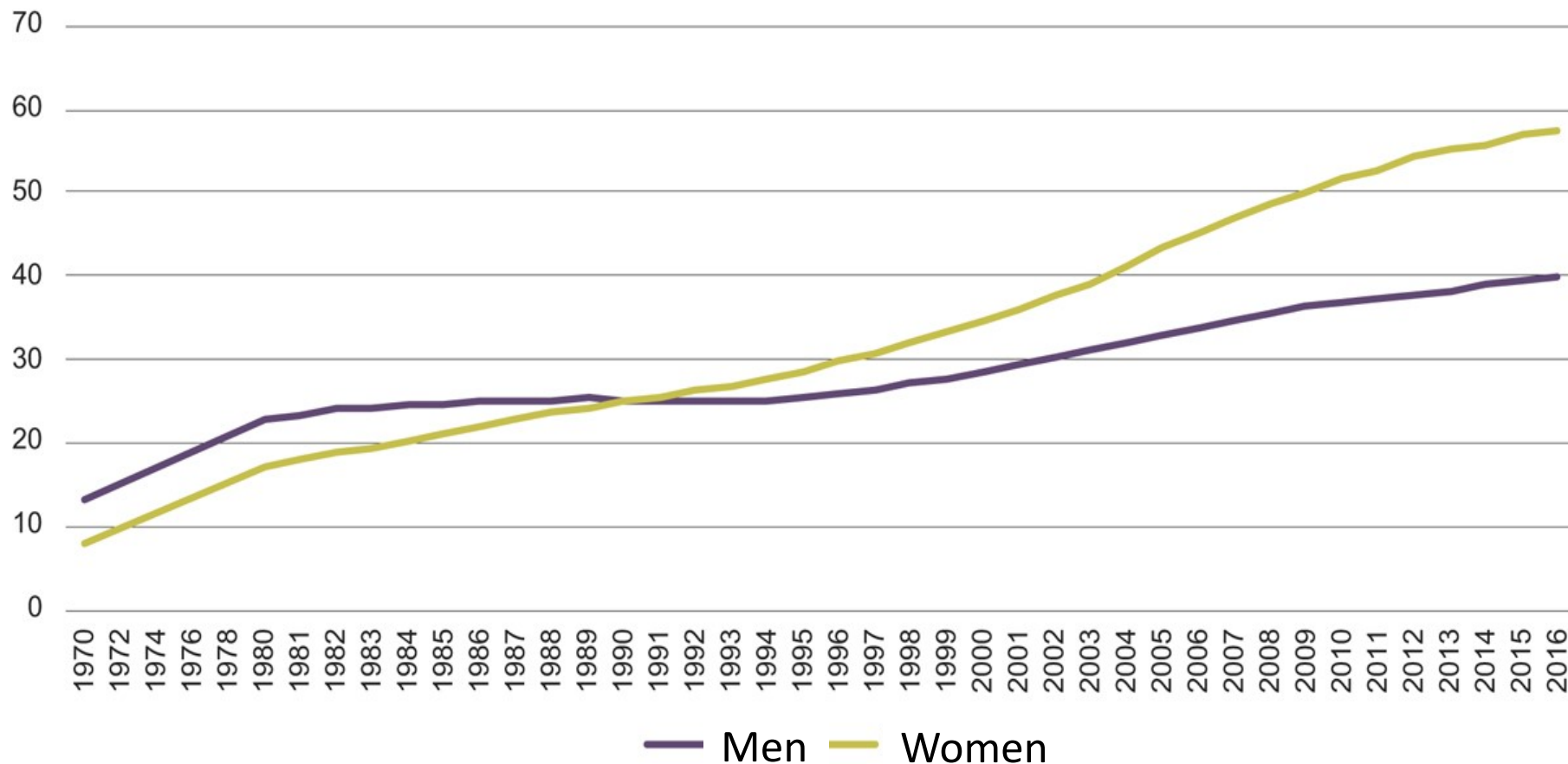
# The gender gap in high income/emerging countries

Percentage of women among recently graduated bachelor students, 2015

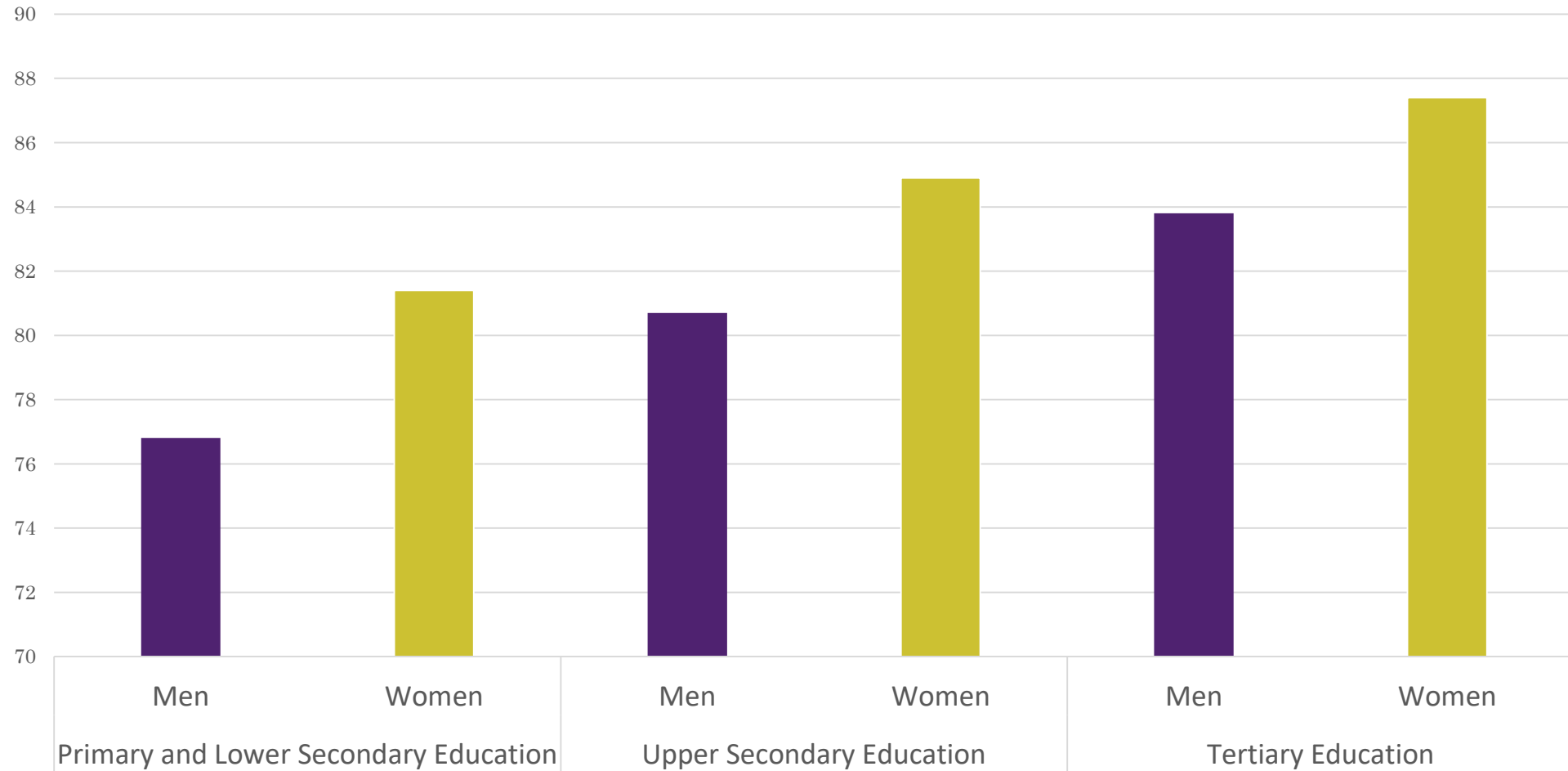


Source: OECD Education Database, 2018

# Proportion of women and men in Norway with higher education. Age 30-39. 1970-2016



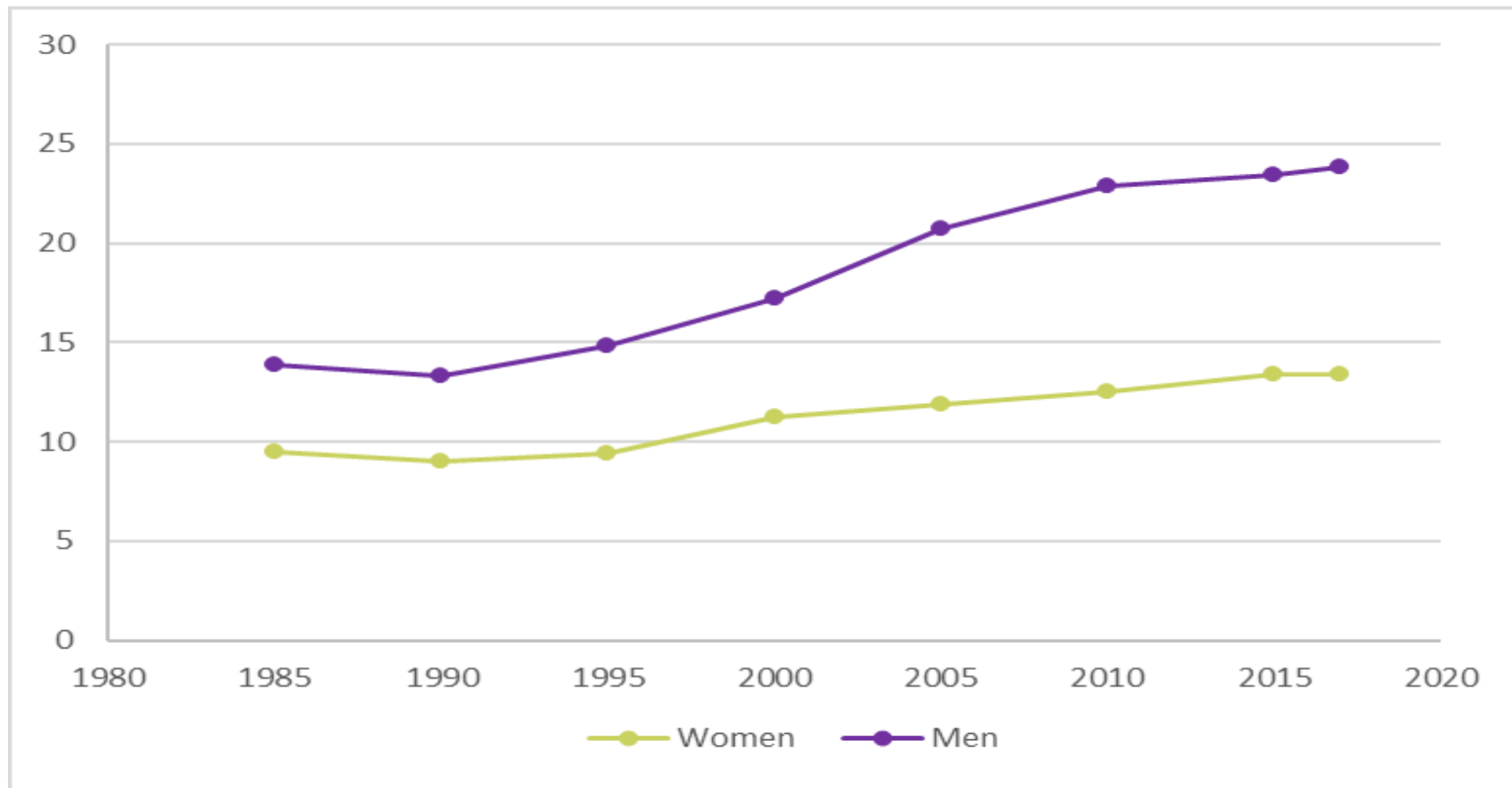
# Life expectancy at different levels of educational attainment at age 30, by gender, 2009-2015, in Norway



Source: Norwegian Institute of Public Health (2016)

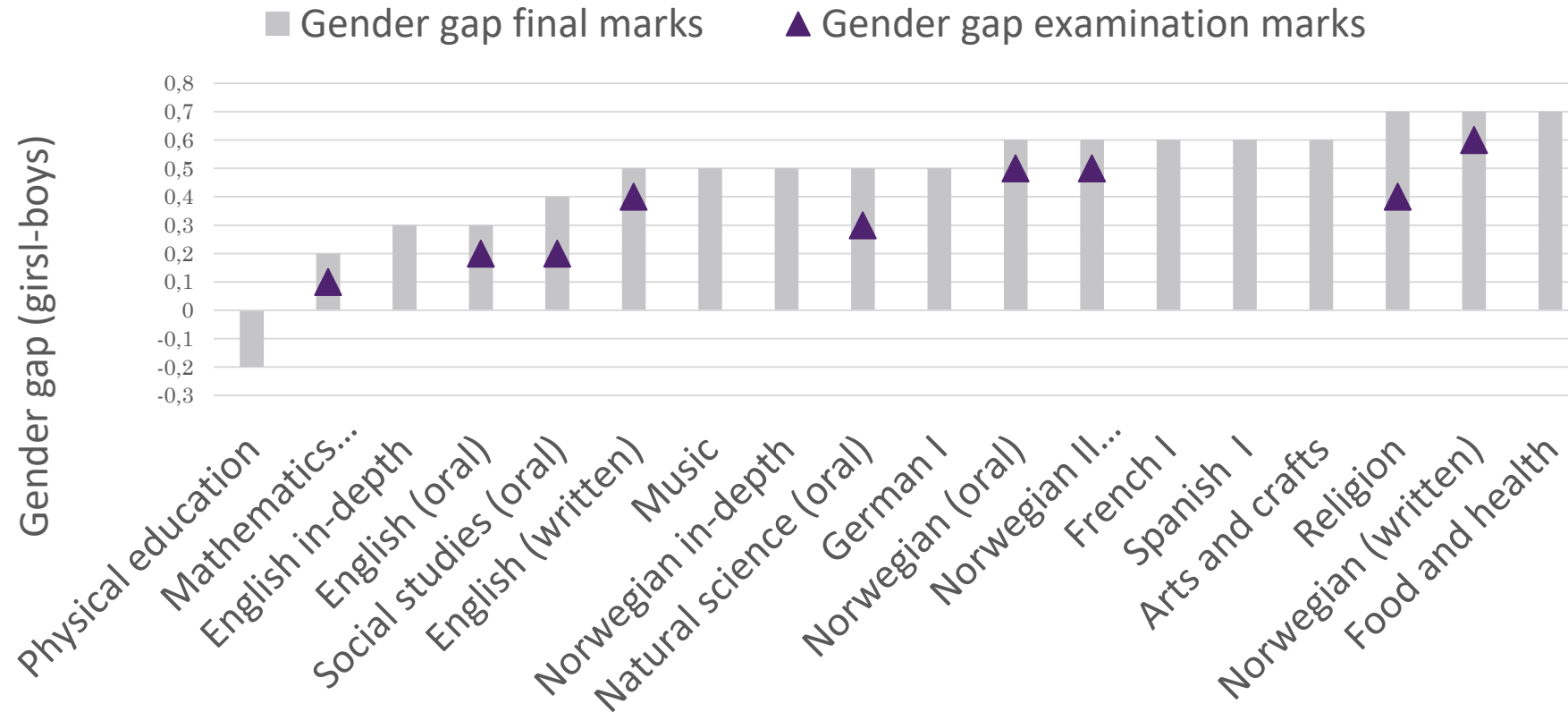


# Proportion of men and women without children at age 45 in Norway



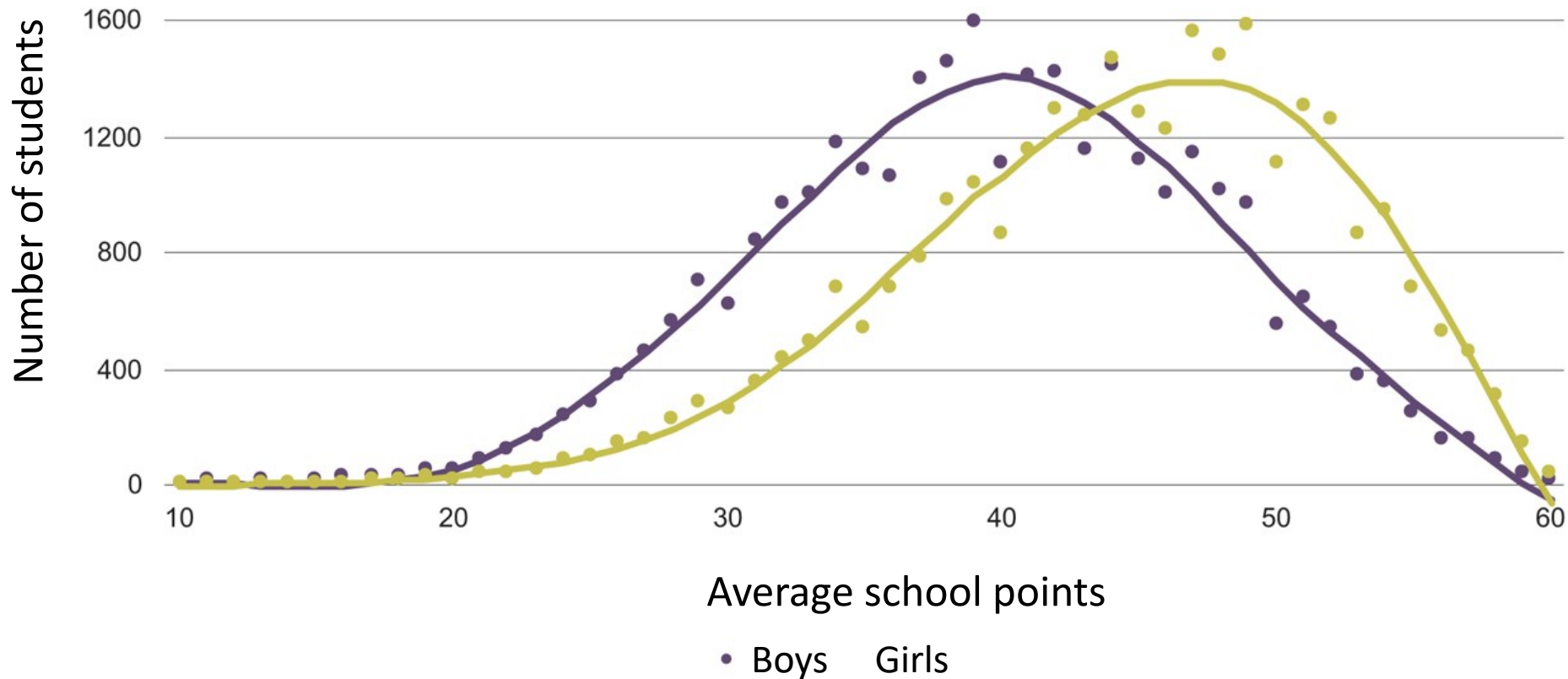
Source: Statistics Norway 2018

# Girls do better in all subjects in school except physical education in Norway



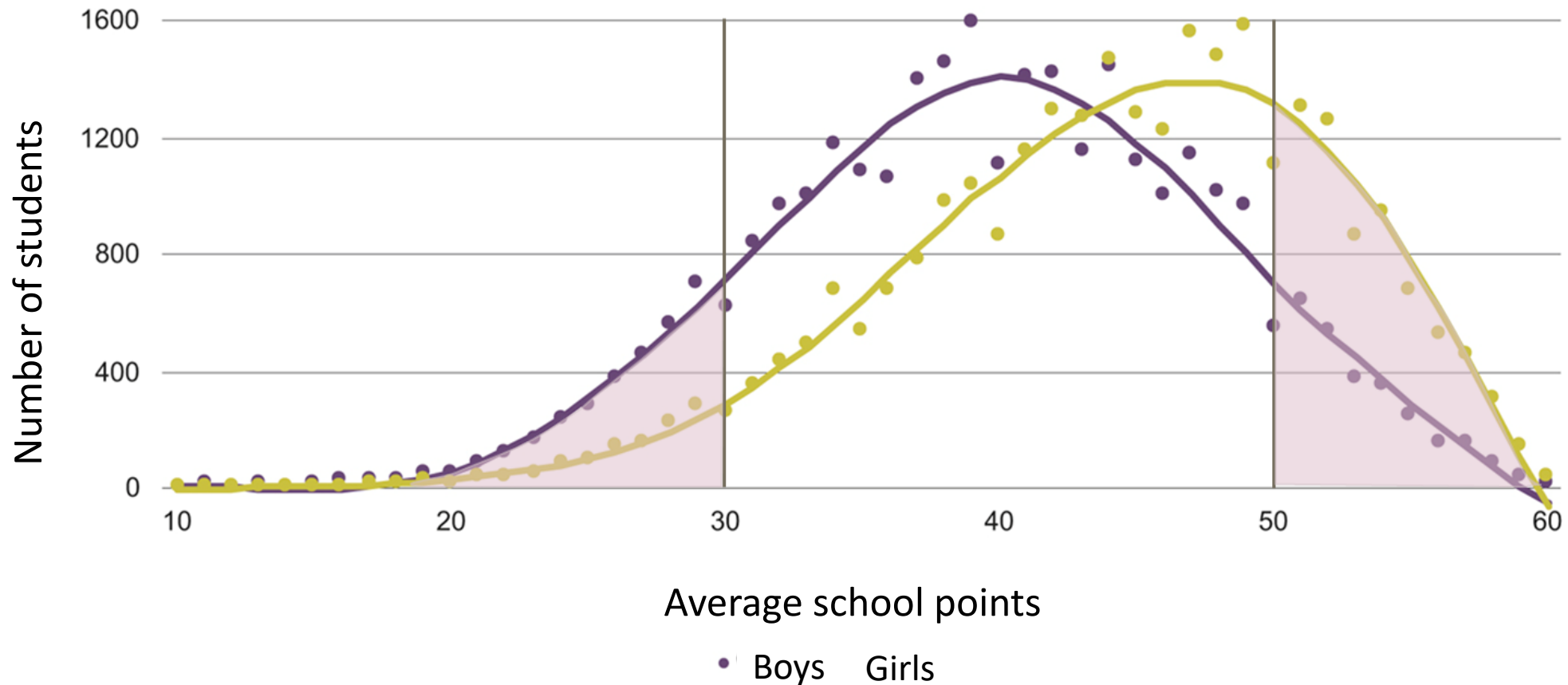
Gender gaps in final marks and examination marks in 10th grade (examination form in parentheses), 2017. Source: Statistics Norway, StatBank

# In Norway, girls do better than boys across the whole GPA distribution



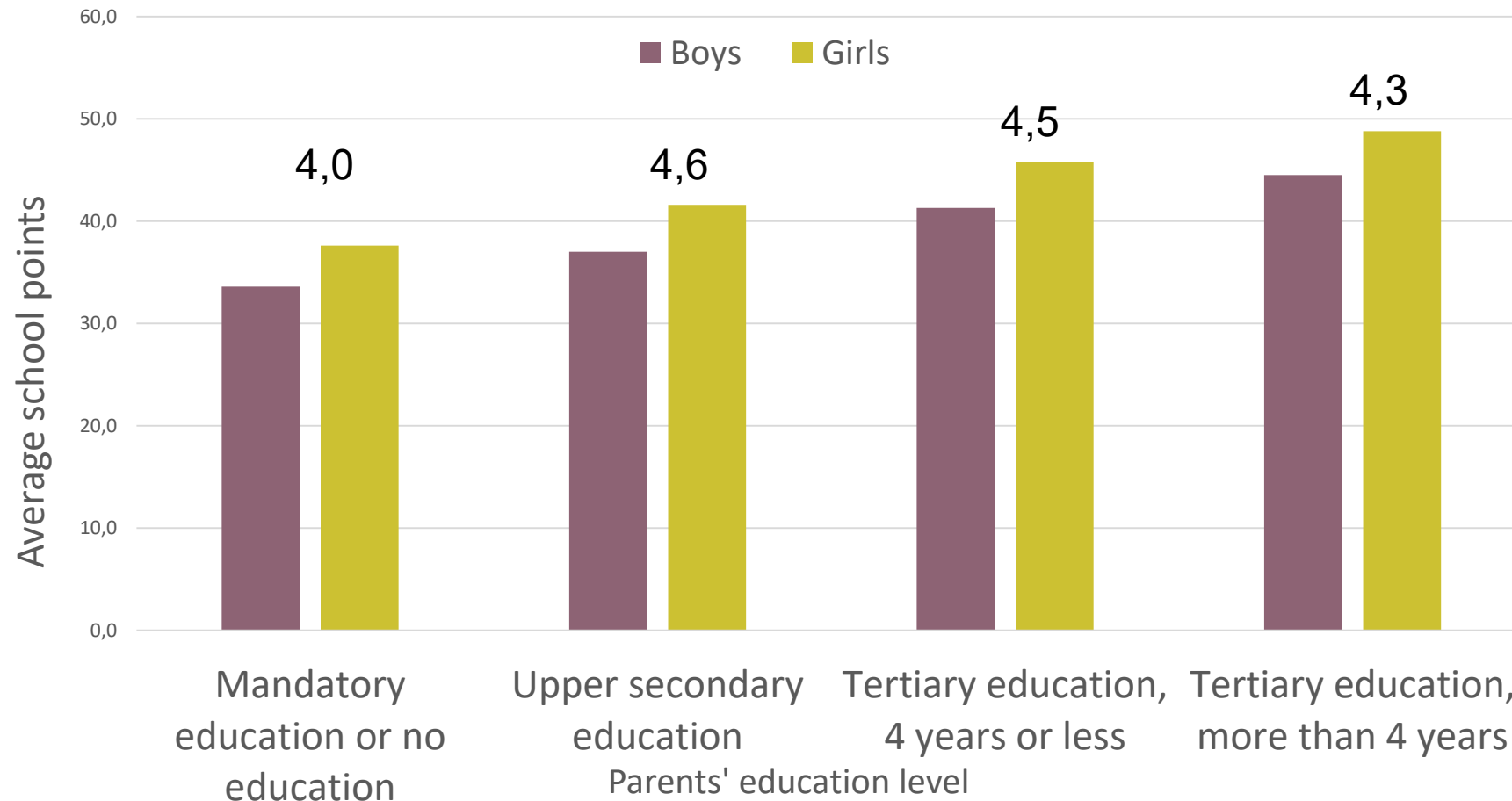
GPA distribution in 10th grade (lower secondary education) by gender, 2018. Source: Requested from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018

# The gender gap is easiest to spot in the upper and lower parts of the GPA distribution

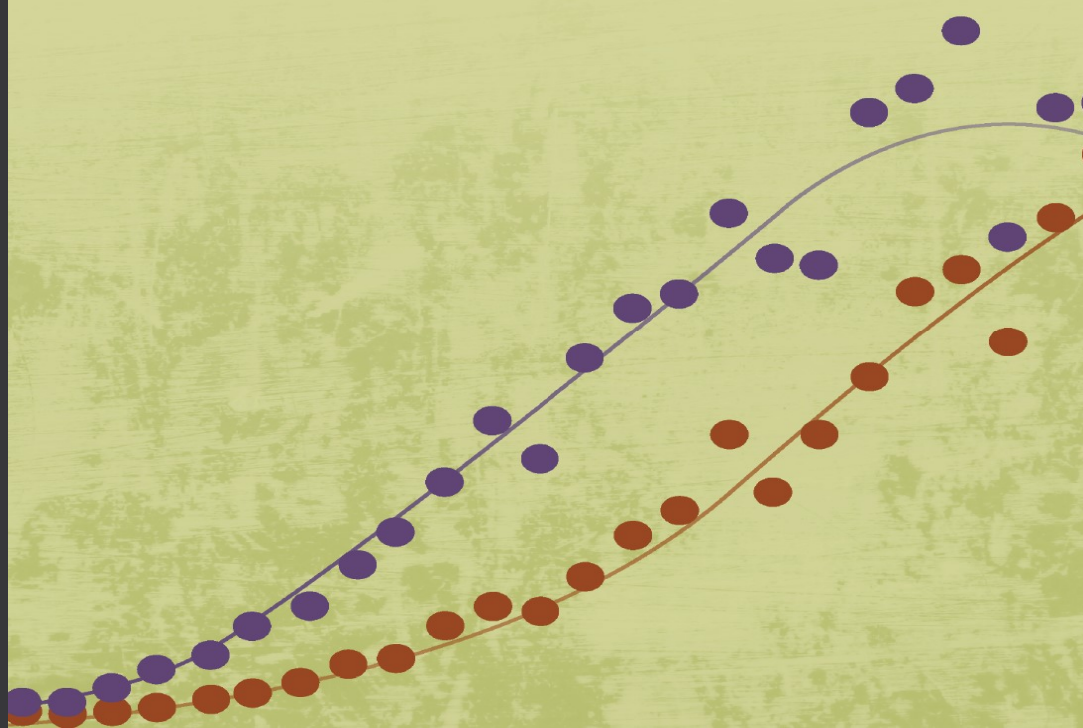


GPA distribution in 10th grade (lower secondary education) by gender, 2018. Source: Requested from the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2018

# In Norway, the gender gap in GPA score persists across parents' educational levels



GPA score by gender and parents' education level, 2018. Source: Statistics Norway, StatBank



Causal factors contributing to the gender gap in education

## Not one, but two questions:

1. Why do we see a reversal of the gender gap in educational attainment in favour of women since the 1970s?
2. Why is there a gender gap in educational achievement in disfavour of boys, dating back as long as we have data?

# 1) Why gender gap in educational attainment

## PERHAPS:

- Equal opportunities
- Career expectations
- Local labour market
- Economic returns to education
- Signaling value of higher education

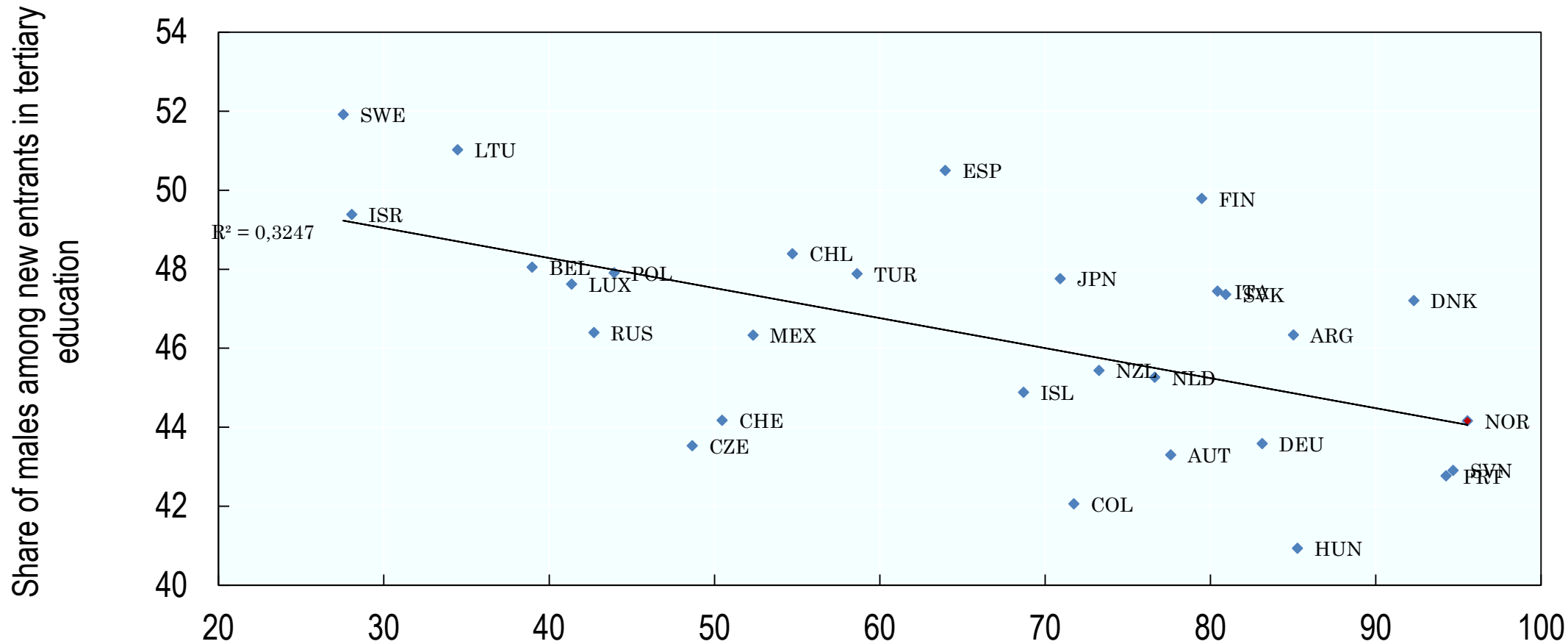


## 2) Why gender gap in educational achievement

### Teacher-pupil-interaction

- Teacher gender – NO
- Teacher evaluated tests – PERHAPS, but only explains a small fraction of the gender gap

# Male share of new entrants in tertiary education is lower in countries where teacher assessments are more common



Sources: Borgonovi (2018)

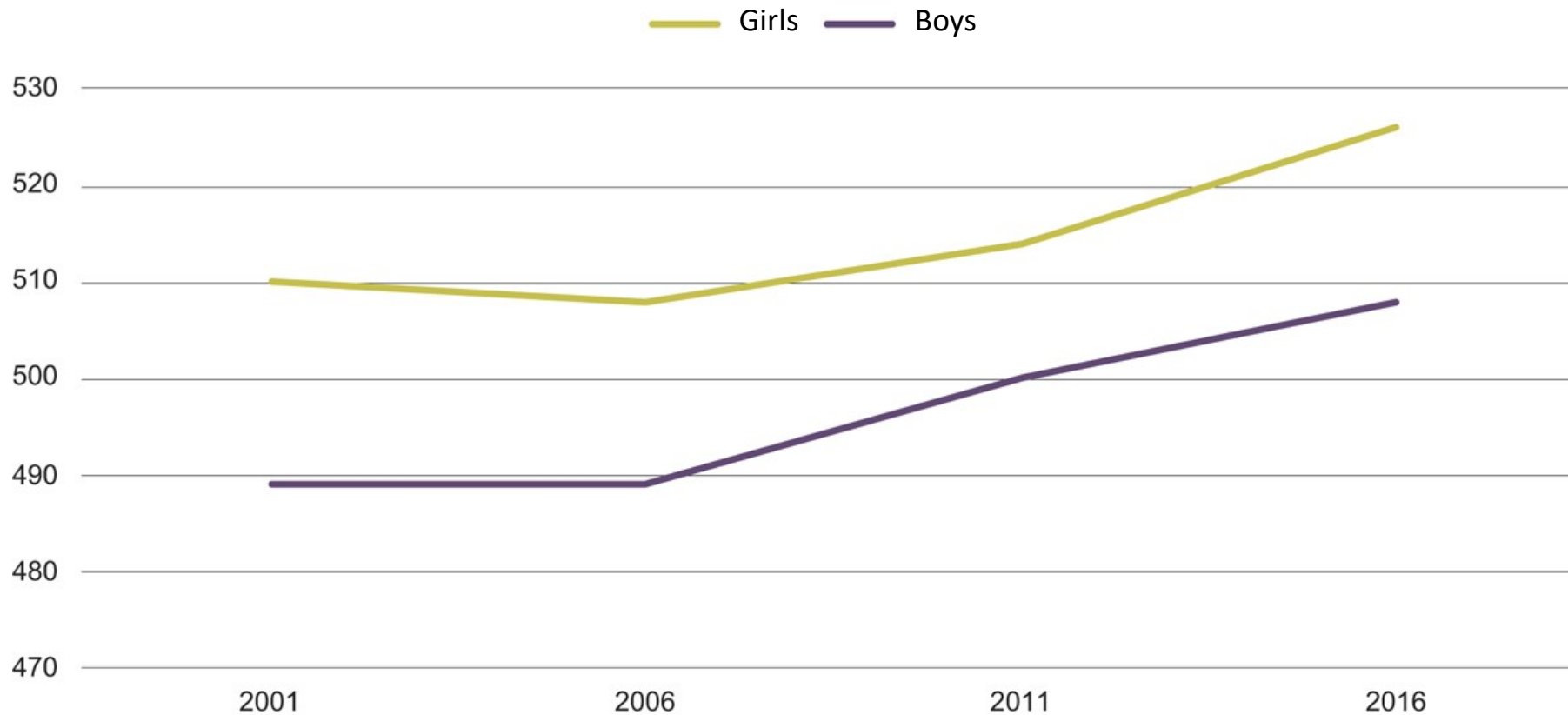
## 2) Why gender gap in educational achievement, cont.

### Gender differences in development

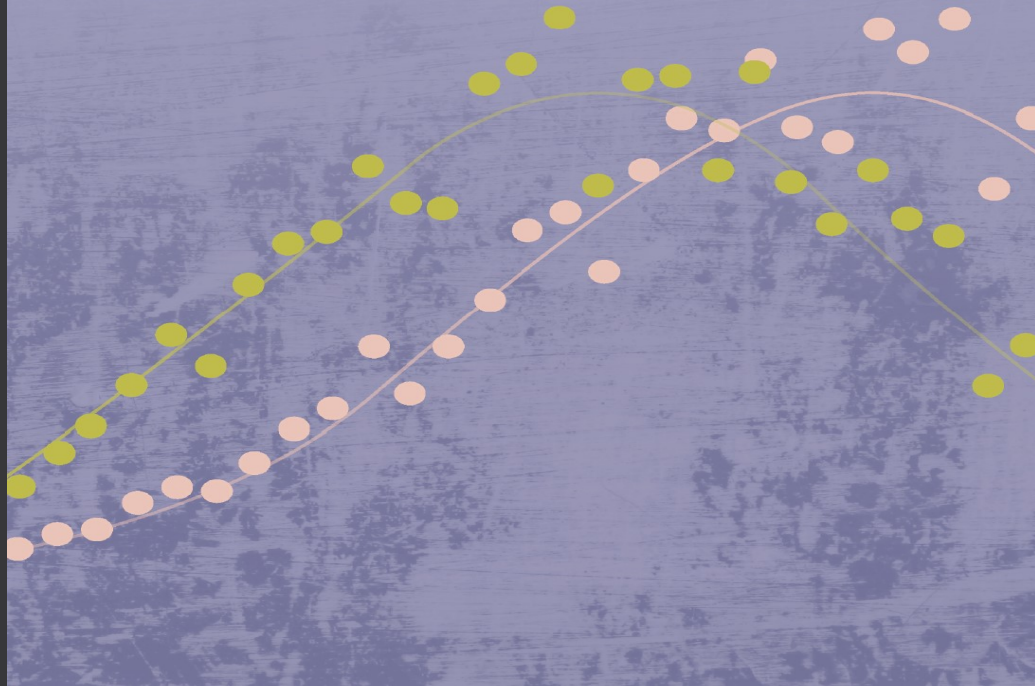
- Self-regulation and social skills
- Cognitive development in puberty
- Cognitive profile and language development



# Reading skills of boys and girls improve – gender gap persists



Reading skills in 4th grade by gender, PIRLS.  
*Source: Borgonovi (2018)*



Recommendations by the Commission

# Guiding principles

The policy measures shall

- Improve boys' performance, not impair girls' performance
- Help reducing the socio-economic gap in performance
- Target both boys and girls, men and women
- Contribute to an inclusive learning environment
- Be evidence-based

# Four main areas of education policy

- 1) Early intervention and adapted education  
e.g. flexible school starting age
- 2) Content and structure in primary and lower secondary education  
e.g. different weighting of final and examination marks
- 3) Transitions in the educational pathway  
e.g. the right to apprenticeships for pupils in TVET programs
- 4) Evidence system for kindergarten, primary and secondary education  
e.g. develop a national course database for education



# Conclusions

- The gender gap is a social grand challenge requiring policies and interventions
- The evidence is too weak to conclude on the causes of the gender gap
- There are almost no country examples of policies and interventions that are efficient to prevent or mitigate the gender gap - this calls for cooperation between countries
- Achieving gender equality in education for both genders *is possible*

Thank you