2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index:

OPPORTUNITY WITHOUT POWER IS NOT ENOUGH



EQUAL MEASURES 2030

About Equal Measures

Equal Measures helps gender equality movements turn evidence into influence. We build the evidence architecture that movements need to strengthen accountability, shift power and shape the decisions, institutions and systems that affect women, girls and gender-diverse people. By combining trusted gender data, advocacy tools, learning opportunities and global networks, we help advocates bring evidence to the moments that matter most. With a goal of reaching 100,000 Factivists by 2030, we are helping build a future where evidence-powered movements can drive lasting change.

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FIVE LESSONS FROM A CHANGING GENDER EQUALITY LANDSCAPE

The 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index finds that global gender equality has continued to improve, but progress remains too slow, uneven and increasingly fragile. While many countries are advancing, warning signs of stagnation, backlash and declining trust in institutions suggest that progress cannot be taken for granted.

Gender Equality Has Advanced, But No Country Has Finished the Journey

69.0

Global Index score in 2025

^ 2.3 points since 2020
Still only a 'fair' score

0

Countries that have achieved gender equality

Highest score: Norway 93.3

Progress ...and Its Limits

57%

of women and girls live in countries that made progress

but only 5% live in countries with a 'very good' score

1.6B

Women and girls live in countries that 'stagnated' or 'declined'

around one-third of all countries

Largest decline:
United States
v 6.06 points

Who Is Advancing, and Who Is Falling Behind

Nearly 4 in 5

lower-income countries are making progress

36 of 46 low- and lower-middle-income countries improved between 2020 and 2025

Almost 2/3

of countries that declined were high-income

11 high-income countries out of 17 declining countries between 2020 and 2025

1 PROGRESS CONTINUES, BUT IT IS TOO SLOW AND INCREASINGLY FRAGILE

Global scores improved, but no country has achieved gender equality and one-third of countries 'stagnated' or 'declined'. Progress is continuing, but at a pace that falls far short of what's needed and is becoming increasingly vulnerable to reversal.

2 THE GEOGRAPHY OF GENDER EQUALITY IS BEING REDRAWN

While many of the fastest gains are occurring in Latin America & the Caribbean, Asia & the Pacific, the Middle East & North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, some of the clearest signs of backsliding are emerging in high-income countries, which make up two-thirds of declining countries, despite recording some of the world's highest overall scores. Similarly, while Europe & North America remains the highest-scoring region overall, it recorded the slowest progress and some of the sharpest setbacks. This suggests that progress on gender equality cannot be assumed, even in countries long regarded as leaders.

3 PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE WITH POLITICAL WILL AND CONCRETE ACTION

Many countries have made substantial gains in expanding a range of opportunities including within health and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), education, digital inclusion and economic opportunity. Improvements in maternal health, girls' education, internet access and legal protections on a range of issues (including abortion laws, parenting and care laws, and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Rights) show that policy choices and investment matter.

4 OPPORTUNITY WITHOUT POWER IS NOT ENOUGH

The strongest warning signs in the Index are not so much related to access and opportunities but to women's influence, representation, ability to shape decisions, and basic political rights and freedoms. Across many countries, gains in opportunity are not being matched by gains in power. Without stronger institutions, rights and representation, the progress that we do see in the Index may not endure.

5 THE CENTRAL LESSON OF THE 2026 EQUAL MEASURES GENDER EQUALITY INDEX IS THAT OPPORTUNITY WITHOUT POWER IS NOT ENOUGH:

Across much of the world, women and girls are gaining greater access to education, healthcare, technology and economic opportunities. Yet progress is proving far more fragile where it depends on voice, representation, civic freedoms, access to justice and trust in public institutions.

The result is a widening gap between advances in women's opportunities and advances in women's power.

Closing that gap may be one of the defining gender equality challenges of the coming decade. **Without stronger institutions, rights, representation and the freedom for women, girls and gender-diverse people to organise, participate and hold leaders to account, today's gains risk becoming tomorrow's reversals.**

PROGRESS IN AN AGE OF DISRUPTION

The story of gender equality in 2026 is defined by a growing contradiction. Around the world, the Index shows that women and girls are gaining access to education, healthcare, technology and economic opportunities. In many countries, legal frameworks are being reformed to protect and promote the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people. Yet many of the rights, freedoms and institutions that make those gains meaningful and durable are under pressure. Progress continues, but the foundations needed to protect and sustain it are increasingly fragile.

Between 2020 and 2025, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted healthcare, education, employment, and public services. Armed conflicts intensified, climate-related crises threatened lives and livelihoods, and rising costs strained households and public institutions. These shocks intersected with existing inequalities in income, safety, access to services and political power, shaping the choices and opportunities available to women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Gender equality also became an increasingly visible site of political contestation. Anti-gender movements and political actors used debates about women's and LGBTQIA+ rights, reproduction and "traditional family values" within wider struggles over national identity, democracy and social change. In a range of countries, rights once assumed to be secure became contested, while restrictions on civic freedoms and public dissent placed additional pressure on those seeking to challenge discrimination and hold institutions accountable.

Yet the period was not defined by backlash alone. Many countries saw improvements linked to service and infrastructure improvements (including improvements in access to family planning, girls' education, digital banking, and internet access) and many countries did reform discriminatory laws and enshrine protections (including liberalising abortion laws, strengthening care and family leave laws, and strengthening rights to protect people no matter their sexual orientation and gender identity). From our experience partnering with feminist movements around the globe, we know they continued ***to successfully organise, challenge regressive laws and demand accountability***. Women, girls and gender-diverse people were not simply experiencing these changes. They worked to shape them, defend established rights and extend equality where progress remained limited. The tension between progress in some places and on some issues, with rollbacks and warning signs in others, was a feature of the 2026 Index.

This tension matters because access and power are not the same. A woman may have access to healthcare but lack an effective way to challenge discrimination within the health system. A girl may enter school but still face early marriage or barriers to completing her education. Women may gain access to the internet and financial services without gaining equal control over income, assets or economic decisions.





MEASURING WHAT MATTERS: HOW THE INDEX TRACKS GENDER EQUALITY

The **2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index** tracks progress on gender equality across **130 countries**, representing approximately **90 per cent of the world's women and girls**. Drawing on **27 indicators** across **five dimensions** of women's lives, it provides a picture of where progress is occurring, where it is stalling, and where it is being reversed. Unlike many global measures that focus on a single issue or outcome, the Index brings together evidence across health, safety, economic opportunity, leadership, rights and the broader conditions that enable gender equality.

The Index was designed to answer a simple question: **Are women and girls gaining not only opportunities, but also the rights, power, representation and enabling conditions needed to live equal lives?**

This focus reflects a central finding of the 2026 Index. While many countries are making progress in areas such as education, health, digital access and economic opportunity, progress is often weaker in areas related to voice, representation, civic freedoms and access to justice. Measuring both opportunities and power helps reveal whether gains are likely to be sustained over time.

One of the distinctive features of the Index is the range of evidence it combines. The Index includes measures of **outcomes** (such as *maternal mortality* and *girls' expected years of schooling*), **laws and policies** (such as *abortion laws* and *parenting and care protections*), **women's perceptions and experiences** (including *equal access to public services and women feeling safe at night*), and **institutional conditions** (such as *government social spending*, *risk of debt crisis* and *gender data systems*). This approach provides a more complete picture of gender equality than any single type of measure can offer.

The 2026 Index also reflects the priorities of gender equality advocates. In 2025, Equal Measures surveyed 422 advocates worldwide. When asked about the top gender equality priorities in their contexts, respondents most frequently identified violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic empowerment, leadership and political participation, and rights and justice. These priorities informed the redesign of the Index and align closely with its five dimensions: **Health & SRHR; Safety & Security; Economic Opportunity & Power; Civic Space & Leadership; and the Enabling Environment for Gender Equality.**



Country scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger performance on gender equality. The Index is built from 27 indicators, which are grouped into five thematic dimensions (see *Annex 1*). Each dimension contains five or six related indicators. To enable comparison across different types of measures, indicator results are converted to a common 0–100 scale using established gender equality targets. A score of 100 indicates that a country has met the target for a given indicator. For example, the target for girls' expected years of schooling is at least 17 years. A country where girls can expect to complete 17 years of schooling would therefore receive a score of 100 on that indicator. The standardised indicator scores are then aggregated using the arithmetic mean to produce a score for each dimension, and the five dimension scores are aggregated based on a geomatric mean to calculate a country's overall Index score. The Index also tracks change over time by comparing country performance in 2020 and 2025, allowing readers to assess not only a country's current level of gender equality but also whether progress is advancing, stalling or reversing.

Like any global index, the Equal Measures Gender Equality Index has limitations. First, it is constrained by the availability of globally comparable data. To be included in the Index, a data source must cover at least 130 countries, use a consistent methodology across countries, and provide data for both reference years included in the Index (2020 and 2025). Despite recent progress, significant gaps in global gender data remain. According to UN Women's ***Gender Snapshot 2026***, less than 60 per cent (56.6 per cent) of the data needed to monitor SDG 5, the Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality, is currently available globally, although this represents a substantial improvement from 19.3 per cent in 2019.

The Index also cannot explain every factor driving changes in gender equality, nor is it intended to do so. Instead, it provides a high-level overview of a globally comparable set of issues, enabling countries to be benchmarked against one another and held accountable for progress. It can help identify where progress is occurring, where gaps remain, and where renewed attention is needed.

THE INDEX WAS DESIGNED TO ANSWER A SIMPLE QUESTION: ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS GAINING NOT ONLY OPPORTUNITIES, BUT ALSO THE RIGHTS, POWER, REPRESENTATION AND ENABLING CONDITIONS NEEDED TO LIVE EQUAL LIVES?

By bringing together diverse sources of evidence, the Index supports advocates, policymakers, researchers and decision makers working to advance gender equality. However, it is most powerful when used alongside locally relevant evidence, including both quantitative and qualitative data, that can help explain country-specific contexts and trends. The Index is also most effective when placed in the hands of movements, advocates and gender equality champions who can use it to inform policy, strengthen accountability and drive change.

Examples of how advocates have used previous editions of the Index to advance gender equality can be found in our ***Impact Stories***.

A full methodology paper, including indicator definitions, data sources, scoring methods and technical notes, is available in our ***Index data hub***.

Figure 1.

How to read the Gender Equality Index scores

SCORE LEVEL

The level of a country's Index score is based on a scale of 0 to 100 points, where 0 is the lowest score and 100 is the highest. A score of 100 would indicate a country has met the gender equality target for that issue. The scores are then grouped into an ordinal scale with five categories, from 'very good' to 'very poor'. For example, a country receiving a score of 72 for Dimension 3 on Women's Economic Empowerment would be considered 'fair' in terms of its performance on gender equality on this dimension.

VERY GOOD	≥ 85
GOOD	75–84.9
FAIR	65–74.9
POOR	55–64.9
VERY POOR	<55

PACE OF CHANGE

FAST PROGRESS: Score increased by ≥ 5 or more points between 2020 and 2025

SOME PROGRESS: Score increased by ≥ 1 to <5 points between 2020 and 2025

NO PROGRESS: Score stayed the 'same' (margin between ≥-1 and ≤1 over 5 years)

DECLINE: Score declined by ≤1 point or more over 5 years

The pace of change in a country's score between 2020 and 2025 is represented by an ordinal scale with four categories, from 'fast progress' to 'decline'. For example, a country that raised its score from 62 in 2020 to 68 in 2025 would be considered to have made 'fast progress'.

'Fast progress' should be seen as fast relative to other countries over the specific period, and not relative to the pace of change needed to reach the targets. While all measures of change must be contextualised, countries that start from a lower score level have potential for greater rates of change.



Figure 2.

2026 Gender Equality Index scores, trends and rankings by country

RANK	COUNTRY	2020 SCORE	2025 SCORE	PROGRESS
1	Norway	91.9	93.3	▲
2	Denmark	90.9	92.3	▲
3	Sweden	92.5	91.4	▼
4	Switzerland	91.0	91.1	■
5	Germany	89.3	90.2	■
6	Luxembourg	87.3	89.4	▲
7	Austria	89.3	89.3	■
8	Finland	91.4	89.0	▼
9	Spain	88.9	88.9	■
10	Iceland	88.6	88.8	■
11	Slovenia	86.3	88.7	▲
12	Canada	88.8	87.6	▼
13	Australia	84.2	87.1	▲
14	Belgium	86.5	87.0	■
15	Netherlands	90.7	86.5	▼
16	Lithuania	83.7	86.4	▲
17	Ireland	85.0	86.2	▲
18	France	89.1	85.7	▼
19	Czechia	86.0	85.2	■
20	Estonia	83.3	84.8	▲
21	United Kingdom	83.9	84.8	■
22	New Zealand	86.3	84.4	▼
23	Singapore	82.0	84.1	▲
24	Portugal	84.5	83.8	■
25	Republic of Korea	79.8	82.8	▲
26	Latvia	79.4	82.7	▲
27	Italy	84.4	82.7	▼
28	Poland	77.2	81.9	▲
29	Costa Rica	75.0	81.9	⏫
30	Japan	78.9	81.6	▲
31	Uruguay	81.3	81.6	■
32	Chile	75.0	81.3	⏫
33	Cyprus	77.8	80.8	▲
34	Slovakia	79.9	80.8	■
35	Croatia	79.3	80.4	▲
36	Moldova	72.6	78.9	⏫
37	Israel	80.8	78.3	▼
38	United States	83.7	77.7	▼
39	Malta	77.3	77.1	■
40	Romania	75.0	75.8	■
41	Bulgaria	75.9	75.7	■
42	Albania	70.3	75.6	⏫
43	Armenia	66.9	75.6	⏫
44	Serbia	75.6	75.2	■
45	Kazakhstan	69.0	74.9	⏫
46	Argentina	71.4	74.8	▲
47	Greece	73.9	74.5	■
48	Brazil	68.6	73.9	⏫
49	Georgia	74.3	73.7	■
50	Mexico	65	73.7	⏫
51	South Africa	75.5	73.6	▼
52	Montenegro	69	73.5	▲
53	Colombia	69.4	73.0	▲
54	Hungary	78.2	72.9	▼
55	Bosnia and Herzegovina	68.5	72.8	▲
56	Mongolia	65.7	72.5	⏫
57	Malaysia	66.2	72.0	⏫
58	Viet Nam	64.4	71.2	⏫
59	Mauritius	72.8	71.2	▼
60	Thailand	64.9	71.1	⏫
61	Panama	66.7	70.8	▲
62	China	70.9	70.1	■
63	Namibia	62.6	69.9	⏫
64	Philippines	66.8	69.8	▲
65	Ukraine	67.2	69.4	▲
66	Kyrgyzstan	63.1	69.4	⏫
67	Peru	67.7	69.3	▲
68	Bolivia	64.7	69.1	▲
69	Ecuador	63.7	68.6	▲
70	Uzbekistan	64.7	68.5	▲
71	North Macedonia	70.2	67.8	▼
72	Turkey	64.0	67.6	▲
73	Algeria	63.7	67.2	▲
74	Russia	69.2	66.1	▼
75	Jordan	63.4	65.7	▲
76	Dominican Republic	61.1	65.7	▲
77	Kuwait	58.6	65.2	⏫
78	Paraguay	66.0	65.1	■
79	India	59.6	64.5	▲
80	Bahrain	61.2	64.2	▲
81	Saudi Arabia	57.3	64.0	⏫
82	Azerbaijan	57.9	63.8	⏫
83	Jamaica	62.1	63.6	▲
84	Morocco	59.2	63.2	▲
85	El Salvador	59.5	63.2	▲
86	Guatemala	59.5	62.9	▲
87	Botswana	60.7	62.8	▲
88	Tunisia	62.8	62.6	■
89	Nepal	57.2	62.5	⏫
90	Ghana	60.0	61.3	▲
91	Indonesia	61.6	61.1	■
92	Lesotho	56.7	60.2	▲
93	Senegal	55.9	58.8	▲
94	Honduras	51.2	58.6	⏫
95	Tajikistan	54.0	58.4	▲
96	Kenya	56.9	57.9	▲
97	Sri Lanka	54.9	57.9	▲
98	Benin	53.3	56.7	▲
99	Venezuela	53.2	56.5	▲
100	Uganda	50.3	56.3	⏫
101	Cameroon	51.1	56.2	⏫
102	Cambodia	52.6	56.2	▲
103	Egypt	50.0	56.1	⏫
104	Burkina Faso	54.2	56.0	▲
105	Nicaragua	57.5	55.9	▼
106	Mozambique	53.4	55.9	▲
107	Gabon	47.9	55.1	⏫
108	Eswatini	56.9	55.0	▼
109	Zimbabwe	52.3	54.0	▲
110	Zambia	50.9	53.2	▲
111	Côte d'Ivoire	49.3	53.1	▲
112	Ethiopia	50.3	53.1	▲
113	Liberia	46.7	52.7	⏫
114	Tanzania	54.5	52.5	▼
115	Gambia	50.1	52.2	▲
116	Lebanon	51.3	52.0	■
117	Lao PDR	51.0	51.9	■
118	Bangladesh	50.2	51.7	▲
119	Togo	50.7	51.5	■
120	Malawi	50.1	50.9	■
121	Sierra Leone	42.1	49.4	⏫
122	Mali	46.6	48.3	▲
123	Niger	45.1	47.8	▲
124	Guinea	45.9	47.2	▲
125	Madagascar	46.4	47.1	■
126	Mauritania	43.4	45.8	▲
127	Chad	37.8	45.3	⏫
128	Nigeria	45.0	45.1	■
129	Pakistan	41.1	43.4	▲
130	Congo	40.6	43.1	▲

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

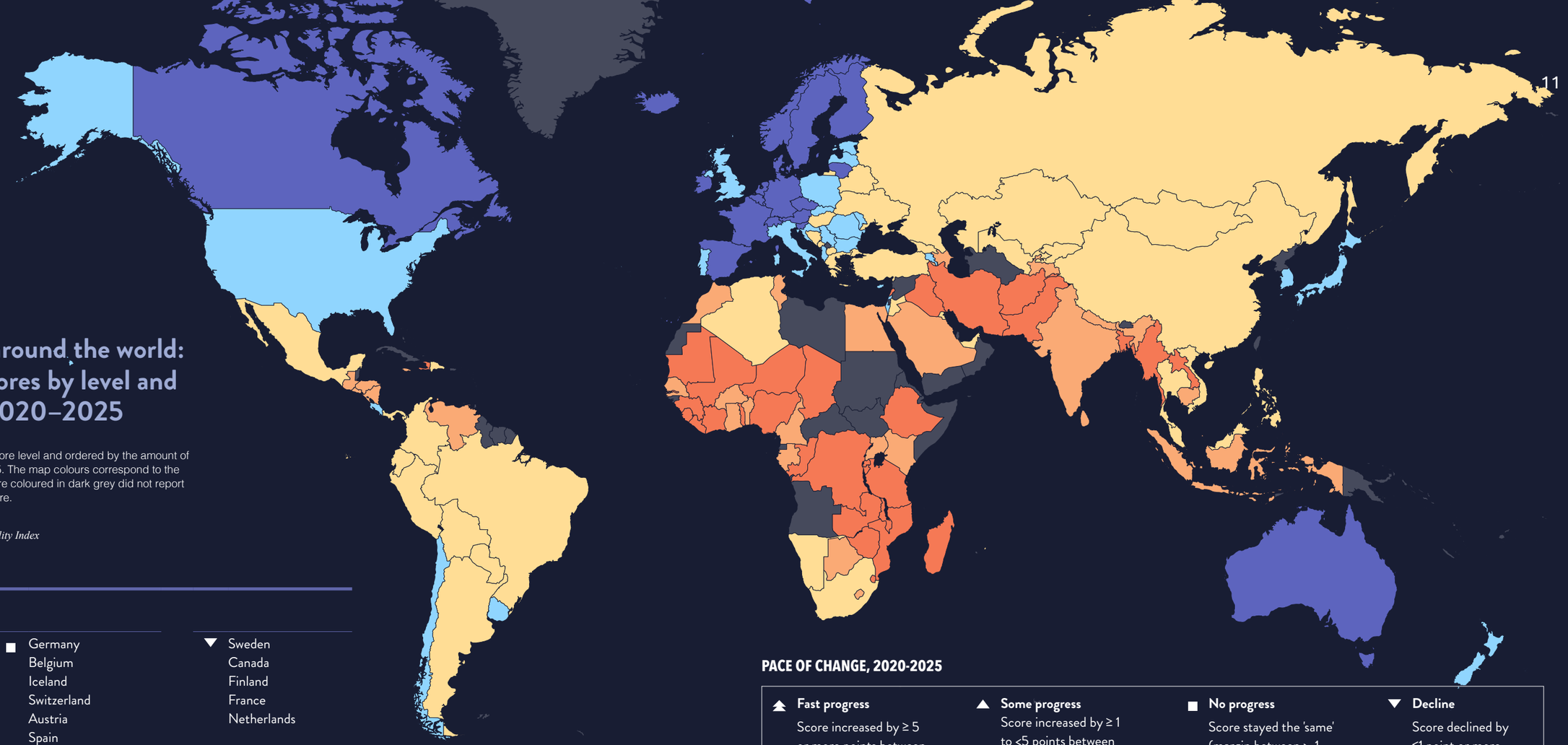
Note: Countries are ranked by their unrounded 2025 scores. Scores in the table may appear identical when rounded to one decimal place

Figure 3.

Gender equality around the world: Country Index scores by level and pace of change, 2020–2025

Note: Countries are grouped by their score level and ordered by the amount of progress made between 2020 and 2025. The map colours correspond to the score level. In the map, countries that are coloured in dark grey did not report sufficient data to calculate an Index score.

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index



VERY GOOD (85-100 POINTS)

▲	■	▼
Australia	Germany	Sweden
Lithuania	Belgium	Canada
Slovenia	Iceland	Finland
Luxembourg	Switzerland	France
Norway	Austria	Netherlands
Denmark	Spain	
Ireland	Czechia	

19 COUNTRIES

GOOD (75-85 POINTS)

▲	▲	■	▼
Armenia	Poland	Slovakia	Italy
Costa Rica	Latvia	United Kingdom	New Zealand
Chile	Cyprus	Romania	Israel
Moldova	Republic of Korea	Uruguay	United States of America
Albania	Japan	Bulgaria	
	Singapore	Malta	
	Estonia	Serbia	
	Croatia	Portugal	

25 COUNTRIES

FAIR (65-75 POINTS)

▲	▲	■	▼
Mexico	Ecuador	Greece	North Macedonia
Namibia	Dominican Republic	Georgia	Mauritius
Mongolia	Montenegro	China	South Africa
Viet Nam	Bolivia	Paraguay	Russia
Kuwait	Bosnia and Herzegovina		Hungary
Kyrgyzstan	Panama		
Thailand	Uzbekistan		
Kazakhstan	Turkey		
Malaysia	Colombia		
Brazil	Algeria		
	Argentina		
	Philippines		
	Jordan		
	Ukraine		
	Peru		

34 COUNTRIES

PACE OF CHANGE, 2020-2025

▲ Fast progress
Score increased by ≥ 5 or more points between 2020 and 2025

26 COUNTRIES

▲ Some progress
Score increased by ≥ 1 to <5 points between 2020 and 2025

60 COUNTRIES

■ No progress
Score stayed the 'same' (margin between >-1 and <1 over 5 years)

27 COUNTRIES

▼ Decline
Score declined by ≤1 point or more over 5 years

17 COUNTRIES

POOR (55-65 POINTS)

▲	▲	■	▼
Honduras	India	Tunisia	Nicaragua
Gabon	Tajikistan	Indonesia	
Saudi Arabia	Morocco		
Egypt	El Salvador		
Uganda	Cambodia		
Azerbaijan	Lesotho		
Nepal	Benin		
Cameroon	Guatemala		
	Venezuela		
	Bahrain		
	Sri Lanka		
	Senegal		
	Mozambique		
	Botswana		
	Burkina Faso		
	Jamaica		
	Ghana		
	Kenya		

29 COUNTRIES

VERY POOR (<55 POINTS)

▲	■	▲	▼
Chad	Lao PDR	Côte d'Ivoire	Eswatini
Sierra Leone	Malawi	Ethiopia	Tanzania
Liberia	Togo	Niger	
	Lebanon	Congo	
	Madagascar	Mauritania	
	Nigeria	Pakistan	
		Zambia	
		Gambia	
		Zimbabwe	
		Mali	
		Bangladesh	
		Guinea	

23 COUNTRIES

NEW LEADERS ARE EMERGING, BUT PROGRESS REMAINS UNEVEN

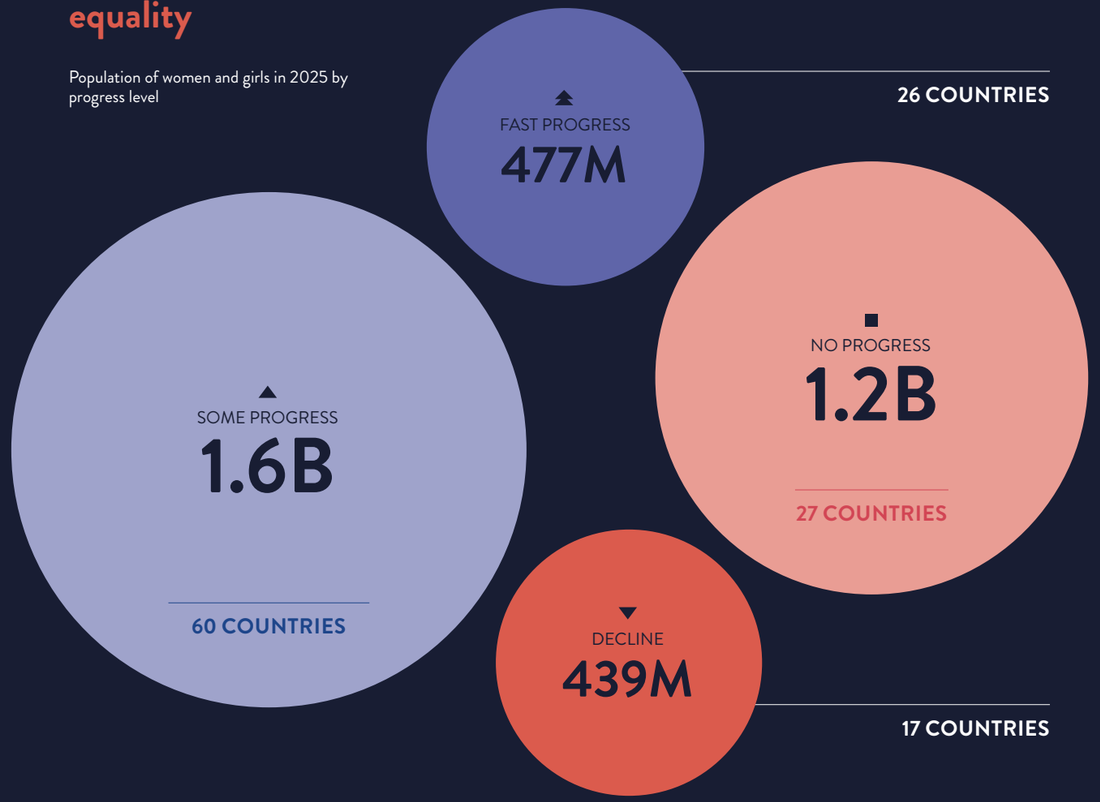
The Index shows that gender equality is moving in the right direction in many parts of the world, but progress remains too slow and unevenly distributed. Between 2020 and 2025, the average Index score across the 130 countries covered by the Index rose from 66.7 to 69.0 out of 100.

This means that, on average, countries are getting closer to gender equality but are still far from achieving it. Two-thirds of countries improved during the five-year period, with 27 countries making ‘fast progress’ and another 59 making ‘some progress’. Yet 1.6 billion women and girls live in countries where gender equality 'stagnated' or 'declined'. This underscores how stagnation and decline in several populous countries (including China, Indonesia, Nigeria, Russia and the United States) can shape the experience of a large share of the world's women and girls.

Figure 4.

1.6 billion women and girls live in countries 'stagnating' or 'backsliding' on gender equality

Population of women and girls in 2025 by progress level



Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index and United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects 2024. Reference year 2025; accessed on September 2026

Figure 5.

Two-thirds of countries made progress between 2020 and 2025

	VERY GOOD 19	GOOD 25	FAIR 34	POOR 29	VERY POOR 23	COUNTRIES
▲ FAST PROGRESS		Armenia Costa Rica Chile Moldova Albania 5	Mexico Namibia Mongolia Viet Nam Kuwait Kyrgyzstan Thailand Kazakhstan Malaysia Brazil 10	Honduras Gabon Saudi Arabia Egypt Uganda Azerbaijan Nepal Cameroon 8	Chad Sierra Leone Liberia 3	26
▲ SOME PROGRESS	Australia Lithuania Slovenia Luxembourg Norway Denmark Ireland 7	Poland Latvia Cyprus Republic of Korea Japan Singapore Estonia Croatia 8	Ecuador Dominican Republic Montenegro Bolivia Bosnia and Herzegovina Panama Uzbekistan Turkey Colombia Algeria Argentina Philippines Jordan Ukraine Peru 15	India Tajikistan Morocco El Salvador Cambodia Lesotho Benin Guatemala Venezuela Bahrain Sri Lanka Senegal Mozambique Botswana Burkina Faso Jamaica Ghana Kenya 18	Côte d’Ivoire Ethiopia Niger Congo Mauritania Pakistan Zambia Gambia Zimbabwe Mali Bangladesh Guinea 12	60
■ NO PROGRESS	Germany Belgium Iceland Switzerland Austria Spain Czechia 7	Slovakia United Kingdom Romania Uruguay Bulgaria Malta Serbia Portugal 8	Greece Georgia China Paraguay 4	Tunisia Indonesia 2	Lao PDR Malawi Togo Lebanon Madagascar Nigeria 6	27
▼ DECLINE	Sweden Canada Finland France Netherlands 5	Italy New Zealand Israel United States of America 4	North Macedonia Mauritius South Africa Russia Hungary 5	Nicaragua 1	Eswatini Tanzania 2	17

Note: 130 countries with comparable data

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

One of the most important findings of the Index is that progress is becoming more geographically diverse. While Europe & North America contain many of the highest-scoring countries, the most rapid progress since 2020 has come from other regions. Latin America & the Caribbean recorded the largest regional improvement between 2020 and 2025 (+3.7 points), followed by Asia & the Pacific (+3.4 points), the Middle East & North Africa (+3.1 points), and Sub-Saharan Africa (+2.5 points). Europe & North America was the only region to 'stagnate' (+0.8 points).

Sub-Saharan Africa remains the lowest-scoring region overall, but it continued to make progress in a majority of its countries, with one-fifth making ‘fast progress’. This aligns with the reality that many lower-income countries are still building and expanding systems that support gender equality, including education, healthcare, legal protections, digital access, and social protection. As a result, countries starting from lower levels of gender equality do have greater scope for rapid progress.

Still, the countries making the fastest progress come from very different regions and circumstances. Armenia and Mexico recorded the largest gains, followed by Chad, Honduras, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Gabon, Costa Rica, Mongolia, and Viet Nam. These countries vary widely in income levels, geography and starting levels of gender equality, illustrating that progress is possible across diverse political, economic, and social contexts. Chad, for example, remains among the lowest-ranked countries overall, but ranks third globally for improvement since 2020, illustrating both how far it still has to go and how rapidly progress is possible.

WHILE JUST 5 PER CENT OF WOMEN COVERED BY THE INDEX LIVE IN COUNTRIES CURRENTLY RATED 'VERY GOOD' FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 57 PER CENT LIVE IN COUNTRIES THAT IMPROVED BETWEEN 2020 AND 2025.

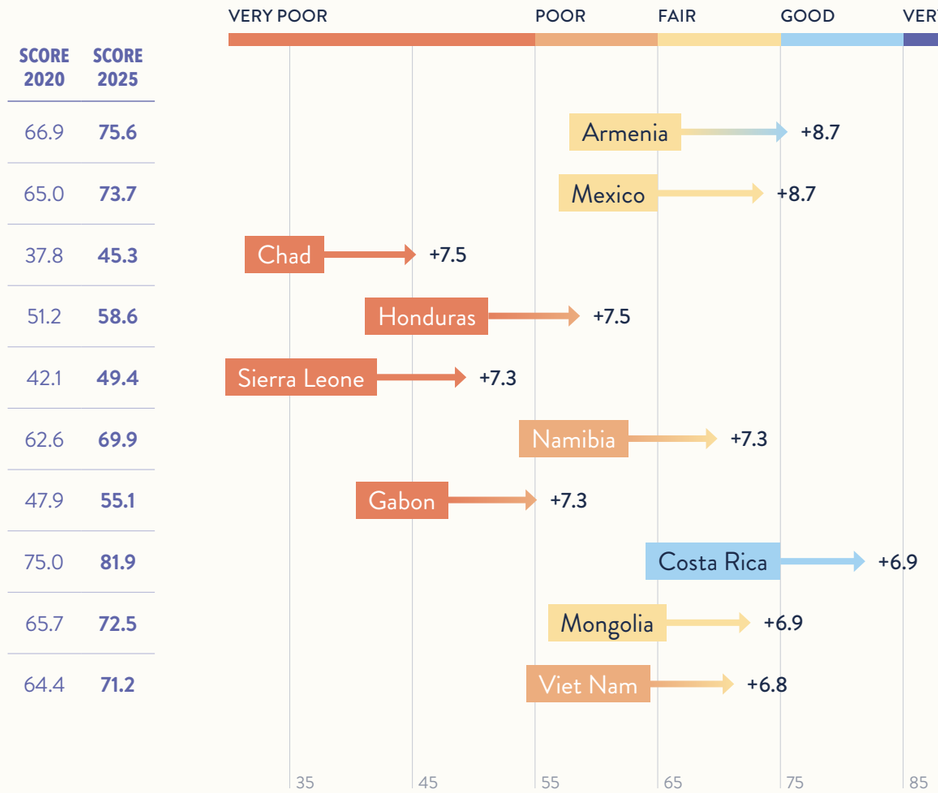
Looking just at country rankings, however, tells only part of the story. The Index also shows that progress is reaching a large share of the world's women. While just 5 per cent of women covered by the Index live in countries currently rated 'very good' for gender equality, 57 per cent live in countries that improved between 2020 and 2025. This is because there are a number of populous countries among the list of improving countries: very large countries, including Bangladesh, Brazil, India, and Pakistan all made progress on gender equality between 2020 and 2025.

The trajectories of very large and populous countries will change the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls for the better, or for the worse.

Figure 6.

10 Countries that made the fastest progress between 2020 and 2025

Change in Index score points



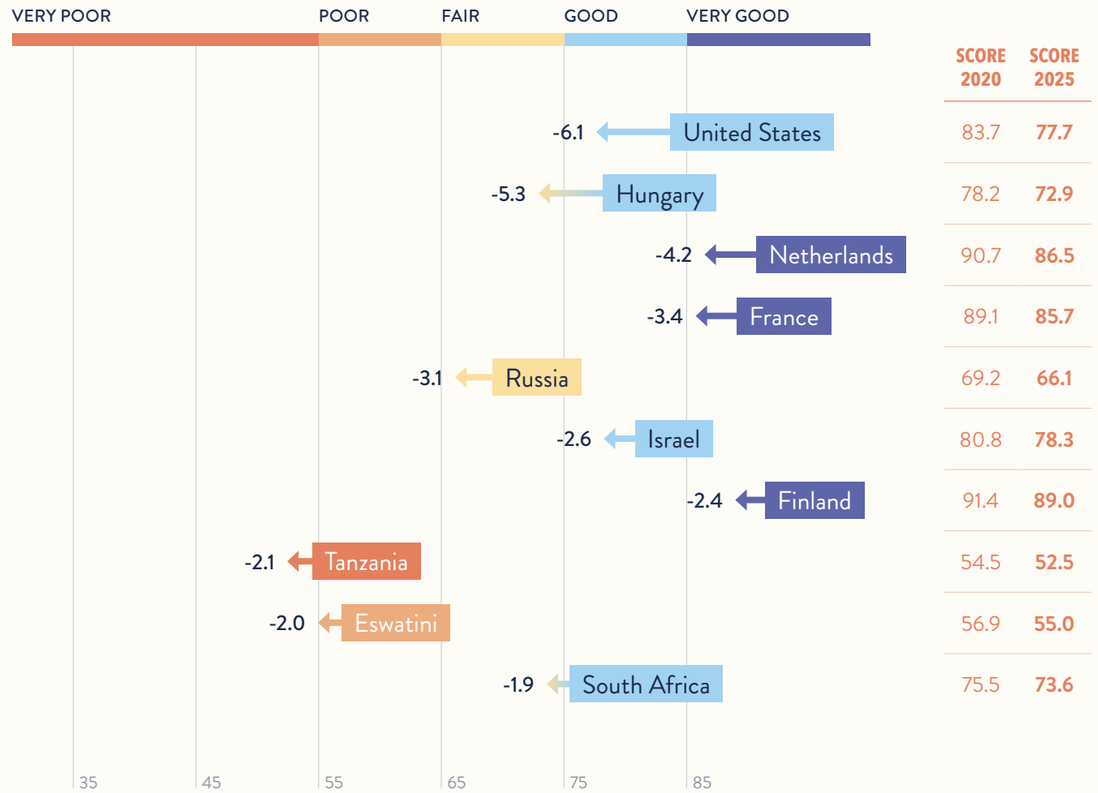
Note: Scores may not sum due to rounding.

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

Figure 7.

10 Countries that declined most between 2020 and 2025

Change in Index score points



Note: Scores may not sum due to rounding.

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

While it should be celebrated that the majority of lower-income countries are making progress — **nearly 80 per cent of low- and lower- middle income countries made either 'some' or 'fast' progress** — this story of improvement should not obscure the scale of the challenges that remain. **For example, 23 countries in the Index receive a 'very poor' score, meaning they are, on average, only about halfway to achieving gender equality.** 19 of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Change is happening in many of these countries: 15 of them improved between 2020 and 2025. Sustained support for locally-led gender equality movements and reforms will help continue this progress and tackle the fundamental barriers to gender equality.

In many of these countries, gender inequality is compounded by extreme poverty, debt distress, conflict, limited educational opportunities, and weak legal protections. For millions of women, girls and gender-diverse people, these realities continue to constrain rights, opportunities and life outcomes every day (see *Box 1*).

Box 1

GENDER INEQUALITY IN CONTEXT: THE CHALLENGES FACING THE LOWEST-SCORING COUNTRIES

Countries with 'very poor' Index scores face a convergence of economic, social and political challenges that create significant barriers to gender equality.



Girls' education cut short

Girls in countries with 'very poor' scores complete, on average, fewer than 10 years of education, and in some countries as few as 6 years, far below the Index target of at least 17 years.

When girls leave school early, they are more likely to experience child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and economic exclusion, while losing opportunities to build the skills, income and agency needed to shape their own futures.



Extreme poverty

The average per-capita income in countries with 'very poor' Index scores is just US$1,777 per year. By comparison, countries with 'good' or 'very good' gender equality scores have an average per-capita income of US$51,049, almost thirty times higher.



Debt distress

All but five countries with a 'very poor' score are experiencing a public and/or private debt crisis. Four of the remaining countries are still considered at risk of debt distress. Only Eswatini (the highest scorer in the group) is not at risk.

Debt crises constrain governments' ability to invest in the services and systems that underpin gender equality, including education, healthcare, social protection and measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.



High adolescent fertility

Adolescent birth rates are dramatically higher in countries with 'very poor' scores. On average, there are 94 births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19, equivalent to roughly one in ten girls giving birth during adolescence.

In countries with 'good' or 'very good' scores, the equivalent rate is approximately one in 125 girls.



Violent conflict

Eight of the twenty-three countries with 'very poor' scores are among the countries experiencing the ***highest levels of violent conflict globally***.

Conflict increases exposure to violence, displacement and insecurity, while disrupting education, healthcare, livelihoods and the institutions needed to protect rights and advance gender equality.



Limited rights and protections for LGBTQIA+ people

Homosexuality is criminalised in 19 of the 23 countries, including 6 countries where same-sex relations may be punished by life imprisonment.

Even where homosexuality is legal, legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity are largely absent, leaving LGBTQIA+ people with limited protection under the law.

NO COUNTRY CAN TAKE PROGRESS FOR GRANTED

While many countries continued to make progress on gender equality between 2020 and 2025, the Index also identified an important countertrend: stagnation and decline. In several countries long regarded as gender equality leaders, progress stalled or reversed, highlighting that gender equality gains cannot be taken for granted.



Europe & North America remains the highest-scoring region globally, but it recorded 'no progress', stagnating between 2020 and 2025. Some slowing of progress is unsurprising in countries that already score highly. As countries approach the Index targets, further gains become harder to achieve. Stagnation alone is therefore not necessarily cause for concern in high-scoring countries and regions.

ACROSS ALL REGIONS, HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES ACCOUNT FOR NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF DECLINING COUNTRIES DESPITE REPRESENTING JUST OVER ONE-THIRD OF COUNTRIES IN THE INDEX.

However, the Index also identifies a different, more concerning trend: many countries are not simply slowing down, but moving backwards. Europe & North America has the highest proportion of declining countries in any region: 23 per cent of countries in Europe & North America declined on gender equality between 2020 and 2025, a much higher percentage than the next region with the most declining countries (Sub-Saharan Africa with 12 per cent of countries declining).

The pattern extends beyond Europe & North America. Across all regions, high-income countries account for nearly two-thirds of declining countries despite representing just over one-third of countries in the Index. 11 high-income countries declined between 2020 and 2025: Canada, Finland, France, Hungary, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, and the United States of America.

The declines were not evenly distributed across dimensions. Among high-income countries that 'declined', the most consistent area of setbacks was Civic Space & Leadership (Dimension 4). 10 of the 11 declining high-income countries recorded deterioration in this dimension, with Hungary (-22.6 points), the Netherlands (-14.8 points), Russia (-11.7 points) and the United States (-10.9 points) recording the biggest drops. Within the Civic Space & Leadership Dimension, the biggest drops on average were seen in ***women in climate decision-making*** and ***women ministers***, suggesting that women's voice, representation and influence in decision-making may be more vulnerable to reversal than gains in areas such as health or education.

Together, these findings challenge the assumption that gender equality progresses in a single direction. While many countries continue to advance, the Index shows that gains can be fragile, particularly in areas linked to rights, representation and civic space. Progress requires not only accelerating change where gaps remain, but also protecting hard-won gains from erosion.



Box 2



THE UNITED STATES: THE WORLD'S CLEAREST WARNING THAT GENDER EQUALITY GAINS CAN BE LOST

No country illustrates the fragility of gender equality progress more clearly than the United States. Between 2020 and 2025, it recorded the largest overall decline of any country in the Index, losing more than six points and falling fifteen places in the rankings. The decline was not confined to a single issue. The U.S. recorded setbacks across multiple dimensions, most notably Health & SRHR, Civic Space & Leadership, and the Enabling Environment for Gender Equality.

The sharpest deterioration occurred in Health & SRHR, where the U.S. score fell by 11.8 points following changes to abortion laws after the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. The United States was the only country in the Index to backslide on ***abortion laws*** between 2020 and 2025. At a time when many countries have expanded protections for sexual and reproductive health and rights, this stands out as a rare and significant reversal.

But the decline extended beyond reproductive rights. The United States also recorded substantial setbacks in Civic Space & Leadership, including declines in ***women's representation in ministerial positions***, ***women's in climate decision-making***, and ***women's freedom of expression***. Warning signs also emerged in the enabling conditions that support gender equality, including declining ***satisfaction with healthcare availability***, ***access to public services***, and an increasing ***risk of debt crisis***.

The U.S. experience demonstrates that progress on gender equality cannot be assumed to be permanent, even in wealthy democracies with long histories of advancing women's rights. Rights can be rolled back, representation can fall, and institutions can weaken. The United States serves as the clearest warning in the Index that gender equality gains require continual protection, investment and political commitment.

The results also challenge the assumption that gender equality naturally follows economic prosperity. Ranked 38th globally, the United States has a similar Index score to countries such as Moldova and Armenia, despite generating approximately 10 times more income per person.

PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE WITH POLITICAL WILL AND CONCRETE ACTION

Between 2020 and 2025, the Index recorded improvements in conditions that shape women's and girls' health, education, and economic opportunities. The global indicator score for ***women's internet use*** increased by 10.04 points, ***maternal mortality*** by 3.84 points, and ***child, early and forced marriage*** by 1.54 points. 72 countries saw 'fast progress' on ***women's internet use***, 76 countries made at least 'some progress' on ***maternal mortality***, and 58 did so on ***child, early and forced marriage***.

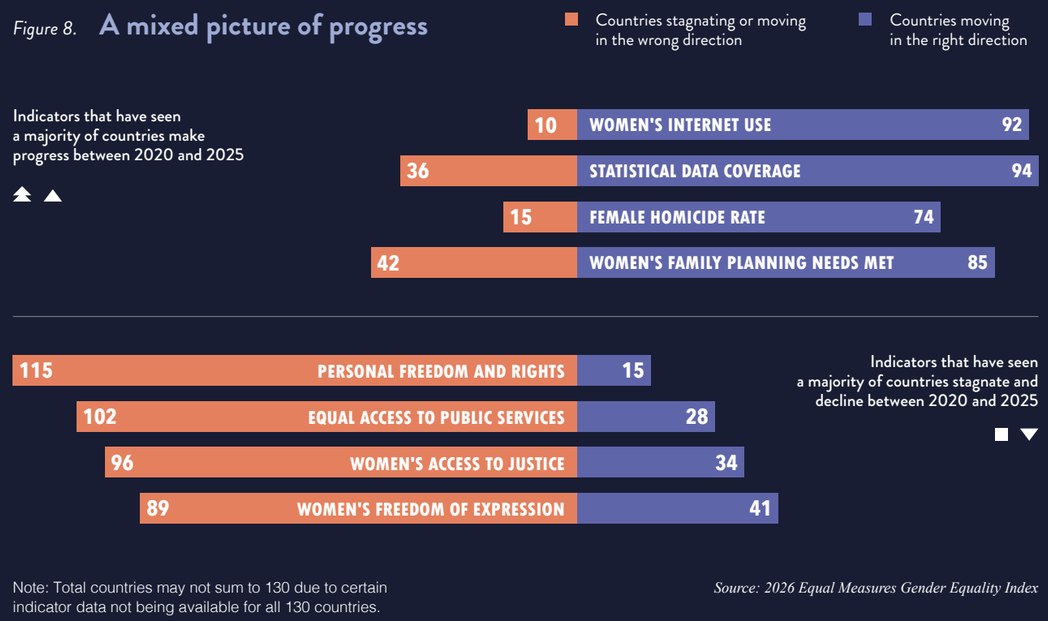
Core issues such as ***maternal mortality***, ***child, early and forced marriage***, and ***women in vulnerable work*** all have 'very good' scores globally. Around the world, no country declined on ***women's family planning needs***, ***parenting and care laws***, and ***Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity rights*** and only one — Uzbekistan — went in the wrong direction on ***adolescent birth rates***.

Abortion laws have also stood solidly. Only one country in the Index restricted abortion rights in recent years — the United States — while nine improved their laws including Mexico, Thailand, Argentina, Colombia, Benin, Republic of Korea, Mauritania, Malta, and Finland, and these rights are fully secured and liberalised in 62 countries.

The target for ***parenting and care laws*** has been achieved in 59 countries, in 56 countries for ***risk of debt crisis***, in 36 countries for ***women in climate decision-making***, and in 29 countries for ***girls' expected years of schooling*** (including lower-ranking countries such as Georgia, Argentina and Kuwait).

Progress across these indicators matters because it concerns the systems and services that support women's and girls' rights: access to healthcare and education, protection around parenting and care, and participation in an increasingly digital world.

Figure 8. **A mixed picture of progress**



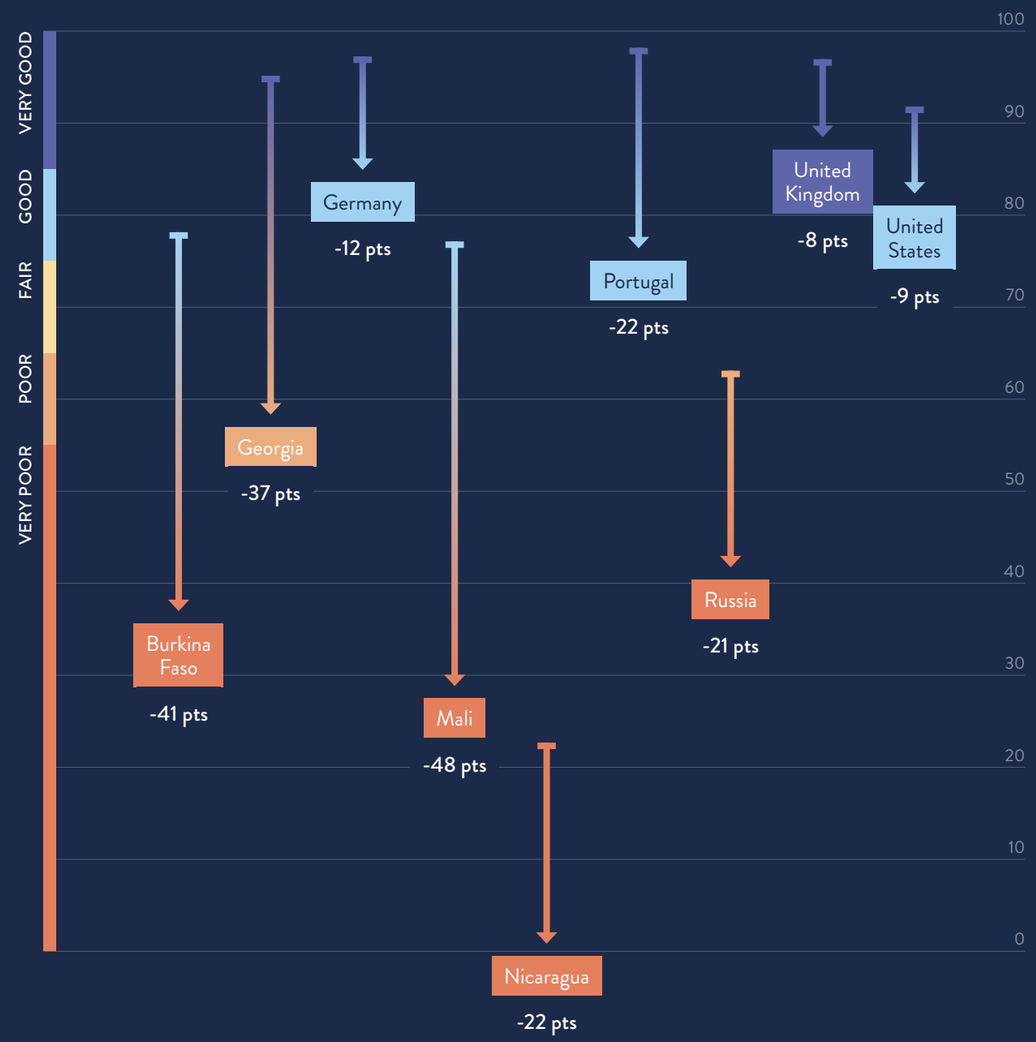
Note: Total countries may not sum to 130 due to certain indicator data not being available for all 130 countries.

Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

THE GREATEST THREATS ARE TO RIGHTS, VOICE AND POWER.

Figure 9.

Two-fifths of countries backslid on women's freedom of expression



Source: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index

While the Index shows that some aspects of women's lives are improving in some countries, it also points to a clear and growing area of concern: The dimensions most closely tied to women's voice, influence, rights and participation in public life are falling behind. ***Women's access to justice*** declined by 2.12 points globally, while ***women's freedom of expression*** fell by 2.03 points, the two largest global setbacks across the Index, and the only two indicators where any gains made around the world could not overcome the backsliding seen in other countries.

More than a quarter of countries backslid on both indicators, including countries with long-standing democratic traditions and strong institutional histories. These setbacks extend beyond countries facing conflict or institutional fragility. Australia, Austria, the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom were among those that declined on both indicators. The pattern aligns with trends identified beyond the Index. ***V-Dem's 2026 Democracy Report*** describes a global "Great Reversal" in democratic performance and identifies freedom of expression as the "most hard-hit" aspect of democracy.

These declines matter because they affect more than individual rights or access to services. Access to justice and freedom of expression shape whether women can seek legal protection, participate in public debate, influence political decisions, challenge discrimination and hold institutions accountable. When these rights weaken, women may have fewer effective routes to challenge discrimination, seek protection or influence the institutions that shape their lives. The result is not simply less voice, but weaker protection for gains made elsewhere. Political representation presents a related concern. ***Women in parliament*** and ***women ministers*** remain among the Index's lowest-scoring indicators.

Women in climate decision-making and ***women ministers*** appeared among the top drivers of decline in eight of the ten largest-declining countries. Meaning that backsliding is occurring not only in women's ability to speak and seek justice, but also in their presence within formal decision-making.

WHEN THESE RIGHTS WEAKEN, WOMEN MAY HAVE FEWER EFFECTIVE ROUTES TO CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATION, SEEK PROTECTION OR INFLUENCE THE INSTITUTIONS THAT SHAPE THEIR LIVES.

The Index also reveals declining confidence in the institutions and services that shape women's daily lives. Findings from multiple Gallup World Poll perception indicators used throughout the Index point to growing concern among women about the systems and services that shape their daily lives. In many countries, women reported worsening perceptions of healthcare, safety, transport, access to justice and other public services. These trends are visible not only in lower-scoring contexts, but also in wealthy countries that have historically been seen as gender-equality leaders.

Taken together, these findings reveal the central tension in the Index. Women and girls may gain access to services, education, technology and economic opportunities while remaining underrepresented in the institutions that govern those opportunities. Sustaining progress therefore requires more than expanding access. It requires protecting civic freedoms, ensuring effective access to justice and increasing women's power to shape public decisions.

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS ACROSS FIVE DIMENSIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY

DIMENSION 1: HEALTH AND SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS (SRHR)

Women's health and SRHR are central to their physical, psychological, and emotional development and to ensuring their bodily autonomy. This dimension examines ***maternal mortality, adolescent fertility, family planning, abortion laws, women's satisfaction with healthcare availability,*** and ***women's satisfaction with water quality***. Together, these indicators reflect both women's health outcomes and the services, rights, and legal protections that underpin them.

Health and SRHR recorded modest global progress between 2020 and 2025, with the global score rising from 70.3 to 72.1: 24 countries made 'fast progress' and 52 made 'some progress', while 21 'stagnated' and 33 'declined'. Beneath this mixed headline are both important achievements and worrying warning signs.

Maternal mortality was among the five fastest-improving indicators in the Index, improving by 3.84 points globally, with 35 countries making 'fast progress'. This continues a longer-term story of investment in maternal healthcare and demonstrates that preventable deaths can be reduced when health systems, services and political commitment align. Yet ***maternal mortality*** remains unacceptably high in some countries, showing how unevenly these gains are distributed.

Women's satisfaction with healthcare availability declined in 57 countries — the second highest out of all indicators. This included France, Finland, Hungary, Israel, the Netherlands, and the United States (all countries which have also experienced setbacks in their overall Index scores). Several factors explain these trends spanning from persistent barriers in women's access to services, healthcare spending, shortage of medical supplies, gaps in healthcare

THE BROADER POLITICAL CONTEXT ALSO HIGHLIGHTS HOW VULNERABLE GAINS IN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS CAN BE.



outcomes between men and women, the unequal distribution of care work, and services that fail to meet the needs of women and girls facing intersectional inequalities.

Abortion laws reveal increasingly divergent trajectories. Almost half of the countries in the Index had the full extent of abortion rights in 2025, and nine strengthened their laws between 2020 and 2025. As a result, the global average improved modestly from 63.4 to 65.3. Yet progress remains uneven. Many countries recorded no change, while millions of women and girls continue to live under restrictive laws. The broader political context also highlights how vulnerable gains in sexual and reproductive health and rights can be.

Well-resourced and increasingly coordinated anti-rights movements are challenging access to safe and legal abortion, comprehensive sexuality education and other sexual and reproductive health services. Initiatives such as the Geneva Consensus Declaration illustrate the growing international coordination of these anti-rights efforts, with 47 signatory countries, most of which rank in the lower half of the Index.

These findings reinforce a central lesson from the Index: rising scores alone do not guarantee lasting progress. Where rights and services have advanced, they still require sustained legal protection, financing and political commitment. Equally, countries with strong existing protections cannot assume those gains will endure without continued vigilance.

DIMENSION 2: SAFETY AND SECURITY

Women's safety and security depend not only on protection from violence, but also on access to justice, freedom from harmful practices, safety in public spaces, and resilience to conflict and climate-related threats. ‘Gender-based violence’ was the most commonly cited priority gender equality issue in our 2025 Advocates Survey, yet significant global data gaps remain. The Index therefore uses the strongest available comparable measures to track progress and setbacks across a wider range of safety and security challenges.

Safety and Security saw less progress than any other dimension in the Index. Its global score increased by just 1.4 points between 2020 and 2025, reaching 69.9 ('fair') in 2025. It recorded the fewest countries making 'fast progress' (18), while most countries either 'stagnated' (32) or 'backslid' (34), highlighting how difficult it has been to translate commitments on safety, justice and protection into meaningful gains.



The sharpest warning came from ***women’s access to justice***, which recorded the largest global decline of any indicator in the Index, falling in 55 countries. Because this indicator reflects whether women can access justice on equal, secure and effective terms, its decline points to weakening confidence in, or performance of, one of the key institutions through which women can enforce rights and seek protection.

SAFETY AND SECURITY SAW LESS PROGRESS THAN ANY OTHER DIMENSION IN THE INDEX.

These findings stand in contrast to reductions in ***female homicide rates***, for which scores increased by 6.6 points globally over five years. However, homicide captures only one dimension of violence. High levels of under-reporting, impunity and limited data on other forms of violence mean that these gains do not fully reflect women's lived experiences of safety and security.

Women’s own perceptions also reveal how far there is to go. Globally, only 59 per cent of ***women said that they felt safe walking alone at night in their neighbourhood***, giving the indicator a ‘poor’ score. In 40 countries, fewer than half of women reported feeling safe. These perceptions matter because fear can restrict women’s mobility, access to work and education, and participation in public life even where violence is not formally recorded.

Climate vulnerability had the lowest average score in the dimension (57.5 points) and remains one of the weakest-performing indicators in the entire Index. No country achieved a 'good' or 'very good' rating and even the highest-scoring country attained only a 'fair' score. More than four-fifths of countries (113) 'stagnated' between 2020 and 2025. This indicator captures structural exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, which are difficult to transform over a five-year period despite being an increasingly important safety and security issue for women, girls and gender-diverse people. Climate shocks and environmental stress can deepen existing inequalities, increasing risks such as displacement, loss of livelihoods, food and water insecurity, disruption to health and education services, and gender-based violence, particularly for women and girls already facing social, political and economic disadvantages.

The findings suggest that improving safety and security for women, girls and gender-diverse people will depend on strengthening the institutions, justice systems and resilience mechanisms that allow them to live, move and participate in society without fear.

DIMENSION 3: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND POWER



The Economic Opportunity and Power dimension examines the extent to which women and girls can develop skills, access financial and digital resources, obtain legal protections during periods of parenting and care, and participate in economic life without being concentrated in highly vulnerable forms of work. Together, the five indicators capture important foundations for women's economic independence, although they cannot measure every aspect of economic power, such as earnings, asset ownership, unpaid care or control over economic decisions. 'Economic empowerment' was the third most frequently cited gender equality priority in our 2025 Advocates Survey, after 'gender-based violence' and 'sexual and reproductive health and rights'.

Economic Opportunity and Power was both the strongest-performing and fastest-improving dimension in the Index, rising from 75.5 to 78.8 between 2020 and 2025. But, despite being the strongest-performing dimension, large inequalities remain. In 2025, high-income countries outperformed low-income countries by 37.4 points on average, highlighting the substantial distance many countries still need to travel to ensure women can fully participate in economic life.

Digital access was the strongest driver of progress. ***Women's internet use*** recorded by far the largest improvement across the dimension, increasing by 10 points globally. Among the 102 countries with comparable data, 72 recorded 'fast progress' and another 20 recorded 'some progress'. ***Women's financial inclusion*** also improved globally, with more women holding accounts at financial institutions or mobile-money providers, although country trajectories diverged: 45 countries made 'fast progress', while 40 declined. These trends reflect a period of rapid growth in ***smartphone ownership, internet connectivity, and digital financial services***, particularly across lower-income countries.

HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES CONTINUE TO OUTPERFORM LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES BY 37.4 POINTS ON AVERAGE, HIGHLIGHTING THE SUBSTANTIAL DISTANCE MANY COUNTRIES STILL NEED TO TRAVEL TO ENSURE WOMEN CAN FULLY PARTICIPATE IN ECONOMIC LIFE.

Parenting and care laws improved by 3.7 points globally. Progress was concentrated in a relatively small number of reforming countries, while most countries recorded no change. However, this apparent stagnation should be interpreted cautiously. 51 countries had already achieved the Index target by 2020, leaving little or no scope for further improvement within the Index framework. For these countries, unchanged scores reflect the maintenance of strong legal protections rather than policy inaction. At the same time, persistent gaps elsewhere show that many women still lack adequate legal protections during pregnancy, parenthood and periods of care.

Girls' expected years of schooling remains one of the strongest-performing indicators in the Index. 90 countries received a 'good' or 'very good' score, and 29 countries met or exceeded the Index target of at least 17 years of schooling for girls. However, progress remains highly uneven. The lowest scores are concentrated primarily in low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. In countries such as Chad, Mali, Niger, Pakistan, and Sierra Leone, girls can still only expect under eight years of education on average. While several middle- and higher-income countries continued to make gains between 2020 and 2025, large education deficits in a small number of countries persist and continue to constrain opportunities for millions of girls.

In many ways, Economic Opportunity and Power presents the most encouraging picture of any dimension in the Index. Many countries are making substantial gains in digital access, financial inclusion and some key legal protections, creating new opportunities for women to access information, services and economic resources. Yet the findings also highlight the distinction between access and power. Expanding internet connectivity or financial account ownership can often be achieved relatively quickly through technological innovation and market expansion. By contrast, changes that strengthen women's economic security and influence, including care systems, labour protections and broader economic rights, typically require deeper institutional reform. Sustaining progress will depend not only on expanding access, but on ensuring that women can translate new opportunities into lasting economic independence and decision-making power.

DIMENSION 4: CIVIC SPACE AND LEADERSHIP

Civic Space and Leadership sit at the heart of women's power, voice and agency. While many measures of gender equality focus on outcomes such as health, education, safety or economic participation, this dimension focuses on whether women can participate in public life, influence decisions, exercise their rights, and shape the institutions that govern their societies. It examines whether women hold leadership positions, can express their views freely and have their rights protected.

For gender equality advocates, these issues are fundamental. Progress on health, education and economic opportunity can improve women's lives, but sustaining and extending those gains often depends on women's ability to organise, advocate, participate politically and hold institutions accountable.

Of all five dimensions in the Index, Civic Space and Leadership performs the worst. With a global score of just 60.5, it is the only dimension firmly in the 'poor' category. The indicators in this dimension appear repeatedly among the top 10 most declining countries across the Index.

There was some progress in formal representation, but it came from a low base. ***Women in parliament*** moved from a 'very poor' global score in 2020 to a 'poor' score in 2025. Representation in ***ministerial positions*** and ***climate decision-making*** also improved overall, but ***women ministers*** remained one of the lowest-scoring indicators in the entire Index, showing how far most countries remain from equal political power.

Even more concerning is ***women's freedom of expression,*** which emerged as one of the fastest-declining indicators in the entire Index, second only to ***women's access to justice***. Two-fifths of countries recorded backsliding between 2020 and 2025 on ***women's freedom of expression***. These declines were not confined to countries facing conflict or democratic crisis. Several countries long regarded as leaders on gender equality, including Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, all experienced significant deterioration in this indicator.

PROGRESS ON HEALTH, EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY CAN IMPROVE WOMEN'S LIVES, BUT SUSTAINING AND EXTENDING THOSE GAINS OFTEN DEPENDS ON WOMEN'S ABILITY TO ORGANISE, ADVOCATE, PARTICIPATE POLITICALLY AND HOLD INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE

This demonstrates that pressures on civic space are not confined to fragile states or authoritarian contexts; they also affect countries traditionally seen as leaders on gender equality. While these countries started with 'very good' scores and therefore cannot be compared to countries with low scores that are actively restricting speech, political participation or personal autonomy, the scale of the deterioration compared to previous years should be cause for concern.

The findings on ***personal freedom and rights*** point in a similar direction. While seven countries achieved the target for this indicator in 2025, just over one-third of countries still scored 50 or below, meaning they remain less than halfway to meeting

the conditions the indicator captures. More troubling still, 115 countries 'stagnated' or 'declined' between 2020 and 2025. Some of the steepest falls occurred in Nicaragua and Russia, where ***Freedom House recorded tighter restrictions on dissent and critical speech***.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity rights remained another of the Index's lowest-scoring indicators. The picture is again mixed rather than uniformly regressive. While 36 countries strengthened rights through reforms including decriminalisation, relationship recognition or stronger protection from discrimination, homosexuality was further criminalised in ***Afghanistan***, ***Burkina Faso***, ***Mali***, ***Niger*** and ***Uganda*** after 2020, bringing the global total to 63 countries. These developments demonstrate that legal progress is possible, but also that LGBTQIA+ rights remain highly contested and unequally protected.



This dimension tells us whether women can shape progress, not simply benefit from it. When women and other vulnerable groups cannot speak freely, organise, obtain equal rights or participate in decisions, societies lose both their leadership and the priorities and perspectives they bring. Progress in women's lives will remain incomplete and vulnerable unless it is matched by progress in women's power, representation, and freedom to influence the future.

DIMENSION 5: THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS REQUIRE NOT ONLY RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT ALSO ACCOUNTABILITY, PARTICIPATION AND RIGHTS. WITHOUT THESE, STRONGER INSTITUTIONS DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATE INTO BETTER OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN.

The Enabling Environment for Gender Equality refers to the institutions, resources, services and systems that make progress possible and sustainable. While many issues that affect the enabling environment for gender equality lack globally comparable data, the Index captures key dimensions including public infrastructure and services, government investment, financing for development, debt vulnerability, and the openness of government data systems. Together, these indicators give an indication whether countries are creating the conditions needed to advance and sustain gender equality.

The 2025 Gender Equality Advocates Survey reflected the importance of these foundations, where advocates identified social protection, gender data and accountability, and financing for gender equality as key priorities.

The central finding of this dimension is that in a number of ways the enabling environment for gender equality is improving but it is from a low base.

In 2025, Dimension 5 was the Index's second-lowest scoring dimension. However, it was also among the fastest-improving dimensions between 2020 and 2025, increasing by 2.9 points. Only Economic Opportunity and Power improved more rapidly. This suggests countries are making progress in strengthening some of the systems that support gender equality, even though enabling conditions remain weaker than outcomes in areas such as health, safety, and economic opportunity.

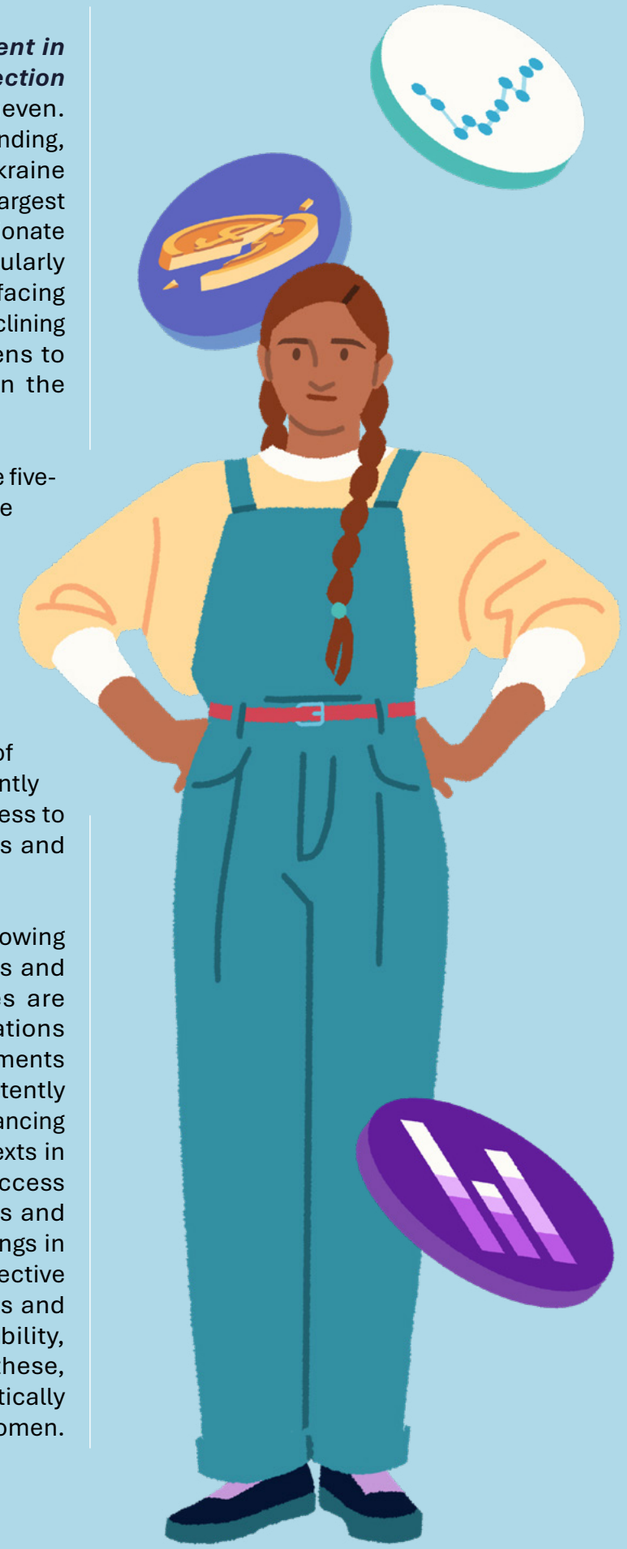
Substantial gains in the ***openness and availability of government data*** drove much of this improvement, with progress occurring across many countries. ***Women's satisfaction with public transport*** also improved, although gains varied considerably between countries.

Other indicators present a more mixed picture. Some countries strengthened their fiscal position and reduced their ***risk of debt crisis***, while others experienced notable deterioration. Bangladesh, Guinea, Nigeria, and Paraguay recorded sharp increases in debt vulnerability, raising concerns about future capacity to finance public services and equality-related investments.

Progress in ***government investment in health, education and social protection*** was limited globally and highly uneven. While some countries increased spending, others sharply reversed course. Ukraine and Brazil experienced some of the largest declines. Given women's disproportionate reliance on public services, particularly women living in poverty and those facing multiple forms of marginalisation, declining investment in these areas threatens to undermine progress elsewhere in the Index.

The weakest area of progress over the five-year period is whether countries are ensuring ***equal access to public services*** regardless of gender. This indicator showed virtually no improvement between 2020 and 2025; 67 countries 'stagnated' and 35 'declined'. This suggests that gains in data systems, infrastructure and aspects of fiscal management are not consistently translating into more equitable access to essential services for women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Overall, Dimension 5 highlights a growing gap between institutional progress and lived experience. While countries are strengthening some of the foundations for gender equality, these improvements are not yet being translated consistently into equal access to services and financing remains constrained in many contexts in ways that fundamentally restrict access and opportunities for women, girls and gender-diverse people. As the findings in Dimension 4 also demonstrate, effective systems require not only resources and infrastructure, but also accountability, participation and rights. Without these, stronger institutions do not automatically translate into better outcomes for women.



Index Dimensions, Indicators, Targets, and Data Sources

CODE	OFFICIAL NAME	SHORT REFERENCE NAME	TARGET*	SOURCE
DIMENSION 1 – Health and SRHR				
1.1	Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	Maternal Mortality	0	WHO
1.2	Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15–19 years)	Adolescent Birth Rate	0	UN Population Division/ DESA via World Bank
1.3	Demand for family planning satisfied with modern methods (percentage of women aged 15–49 years; women married or in a union)	Women's Family Planning Needs Met	100	UN Population Division/ DESA
1.4	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) who indicate they are satisfied with the availability of quality healthcare in the city or area where they live	Women's Satisfaction with Healthcare Availability	100	Gallup World Poll
1.5	Extent to which there are legal grounds for abortion	Abortion Laws	Best score = 100	Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR) World Abortion Laws Map
1.6	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) who say they are satisfied with the quality of water in the city or area where they live	Women's Satisfaction with Water Quality	100	Gallup World Poll
DIMENSION 2 – Safety and Security				
2.1	Proportion of young women (age 15–19 years) who have been married	Child, Early and Forced Marriage	0	OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database
2.2	Female victims of intentional homicide (per 100,000 female population)	Female Homicide Rate	0	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
2.3	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) who say they feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	Women Feeling Safe at Night	100	Gallup World Poll
2.4	Extent to which women enjoy equal, secure, and effective access to justice	Women's Access to Justice	Best Score = 4	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)
2.5	Climate vulnerability (measures a country's exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity across six key life-supporting sectors: food, water, health, ecosystem services, human habitat, and infrastructure)	Climate Vulnerability	Best Score = 0	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative Index (ND-GAIN)
DIMENSION 3 – Economic Opportunity and Power				
3.1	Expected years of schooling for girls at school entry age	Girls' Expected Years of Schooling	17 years or more = 100	UNDP (based on UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS))
3.2	The proportion of employed women who are "contributing family workers" (a particularly vulnerable category of work)	Women in Vulnerable Work	0	International Labour Organization / World Bank (ILO/WB)
3.3	Extent to which the country has laws mandating women's parenthood and care equality	Parenting and Care Laws	Best score = 100	World Bank - Women, Business and the Law (WB - WBL)
3.4	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) with an account at a financial institution or mobile-money-service provider	Women's Financial Inclusion	100	United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)
3.5	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) who used the internet (from any location)	Women's Internet Use	100	International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
DIMENSION 4 – Civic Space and Leadership				
4.1	The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	Women in Parliament	Parity = 45%–55%	Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) via UNSD
4.2	Proportion of women in ministerial or equivalent positions (including deputy prime ministers) in the government.	Women Ministers	Parity = 45%–55%	Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) via World Bank
4.3	Proportion of women party delegates for official COP Climate meetings	Women in Climate Decision-Making	Parity = 45%–55%	Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)/ Gender Climate Tracker
4.4	Extent to which women are able to openly discuss political issues in private homes and in public spaces?	Women's Freedom of Expression	Best Score = 4	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)
4.5	Level of personal autonomy, individual rights and freedom from discrimination (Country Assessment based on four areas: Freedom of Movement, Property Rights and Business, Personal Social Freedoms, and Equality of Opportunity)	Personal Freedom and Rights	Best Score = 16	Freedom House
4.6	Extent to which laws criminalise, protect or recognise sexual orientation, gender identification, and same-sex relationships	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Rights	Best Score = 1	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA World)
DIMENSION 5 – The Enabling Environment for Gender Equality				
5.1	Proportion of women (age 15+ years) who say they are satisfied with the public transportation systems in the city or area where they live	Women's Satisfaction with Public Transport	100	Gallup World Poll
5.2	National statistics coverage and disaggregation (across 22 topics split across social, economic/ financial, and environmental statistics)	Statistical Data Coverage	Best score = 100	Open Data Watch / Open Data Inventory (ODW / ODIN)
5.3	Country's vulnerability to a public and/or private debt crisis	Risk of Debt Crisis	100 = lowest debt vulnerability	Debt Justice UK
5.4	Proportion of government spending on education, health and social protection	Government Social Spending	60% or more = 100	Oxfam & DFI Commitment to Reducing Inequality (CRI) Index
5.5	Extent to which access to public services are distributed equally by gender	Equal Access to Public Services	Best Score = 4	Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

** Target set based on original data; Indicator then scored 0-100 based on distance from this Target*

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EQUAL MEASURES 2030

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