United States Records Largest Decline in Gender Equality of 130 Countries, New Global Index Finds

Released in the wake of the United States midterm elections, the Index reveals setbacks in reproductive rights, women's political representation, and healthcare satisfaction.

WASHINGTON, DC / NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 10, 2026 — The United States (U.S.) recorded the largest decline in gender equality of any country measured in a new global Index, falling 15 places in the global rankings between 2020 and 2025. Released one week after the U.S. midterm elections, the findings raise questions about the state of women's rights and representation in a country long regarded as a global leader in gender equality.

The **2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index** tracks gender equality across 130 countries, covering 3.7 billion women and girls — 90% of the world's female population. It measures progress across 27 indicators, including health, safety, economic opportunity, political participation, and women's rights.

The U.S. was the only country to backslide on the Index's abortion laws indicator and saw declines across several other measures of women's power and wellbeing, including women in senior roles in government, representation in climate decision-making, and satisfaction with the availability of healthcare. The country also remains an outlier on key policies that support gender equality. For example, the U.S. is the only Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country that does not guarantee any national paid maternity leave.

"The United States is a powerful reminder that progress on gender equality can never be taken for granted," said **Alison Holder, Executive Director of Equal Measures**. "When a country that has long regarded itself as a global leader on equality records the largest decline in our Index, it sends a clear warning: women's rights can be rolled back, representation can erode, and hard-won gains can be lost. The question is not whether progress is possible, but whether countries are willing to protect it."

One of the world's richest countries ranks 38th

The U.S. is one of the world's wealthiest countries, yet it ranks just 38th on the 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index. Countries such as Moldova and Armenia achieve similar gender equality outcomes while generating roughly one-tenth of the income per person.

The Index also highlights a second challenge for the U.S.: not only does it rank lower than might be expected given its wealth, it is also moving in the wrong direction. While Europe &

North America remains the highest-scoring region overall, several traditionally high-performing countries recorded declines between 2020 and 2025, including the Netherlands, France, Finland, Canada, and Sweden, in addition to the U.S.

By contrast, nearly two-thirds of countries improved their scores during the same five-year period. Armenia was the fastest-improving country in the Index (+8.70 points), while Mexico recorded the second-largest improvement (+8.65 points). The U.S., meanwhile, experienced the largest decline of any country measured, losing 6.06 points.

This trend is reflected across income groups. On average, low-income countries improved their gender equality scores almost four times faster than high-income countries between 2020 and 2025, demonstrating that progress depends not only on economic resources, but also on policy choices and political commitment.

Women's rights and freedoms are under pressure worldwide

The U.S. findings are part of a wider pattern of setbacks in women's rights and political voice. While global gender equality continues to improve overall, **approximately 1.6 billion women and girls live in countries where gender equality has stalled or gone backwards**. No country has achieved gender equality.

Indicators on women's access to justice and women's freedom of expression showed the largest global declines among the 27 indicators captured by the Index. More than a quarter of countries moved backwards on both measures, with setbacks recorded in democracies including Australia, Austria, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.

"The lesson from this Index is clear: gender equality does not advance on autopilot," said **Holder**. "Countries move forward when rights are protected, women have a voice in decision-making, and governments invest in equality. When those commitments weaken, progress can quickly unravel."

A global warning — and an opportunity to act

The Index is being released ahead of the Copenhagen Summit for Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights on November 16, where advocates and policymakers will discuss how to accelerate progress worldwide.

The U.S.'s decline, alongside wider global pressures on women's rights and democratic participation, illustrates a central finding of the Index: progress on gender equality is neither automatic nor irreversible. Countries that continue to advance are making deliberate choices to protect rights, expand representation, and invest in women's wellbeing. Those that do not risk losing ground.

Read the full Index: 2026 Equal Measures Gender Equality Index: Opportunity Without Power is Not Enough

About Equal Measures 2030: 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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