Findings from the 2024 SDG Gender Index

A gender equal future in crisis?

EQUAL MEASURES 2030

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A message from the Steering Group

WITH FEWER THAN SIX YEARS REMAINING until the 2030 Agenda deadline, gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise. The 2024 SDG Gender Index by Equal Measures 2030 delivers a sobering yet crucial message: no country is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. This revelation is not just a statistic but a call to action, a rallying cry for global solidarity and cooperative effort.

As members of the Steering Group of the Equal Measures 2030 coalition, we have witnessed firsthand the power of collaboration and the profound impact of diverse voices united in purpose. Our members are brought together by a shared mission to ensure data and evidence drive advocacy and action on gender equality. In these times of interconnected crises, the importance of coalitions like ours cannot be overstated. Through our collective actions, we can dismantle the systemic barriers that hinder progress. Each coalition member brings a unique perspective and expertise, enriching our shared mission and amplifying our collective voice.

As you delve into the findings of the 2024 SDG Gender Index, we urge you to consider the broader implications of this work. Let it inspire you to take action, to join forces with others, and to champion the cause of gender equality in every sphere of life. Together, we can create a world where every individual, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive by 2030 and beyond.

IN SOLIDARITY,
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A girl born today will have to wait until her 97th birthday – beyond her expected lifespan – to see gender equality achieved globally.

Not one country is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.

Nearly 40% of countries have stagnated – or even declined – between 2019 and 2022.

74% of the SDG targets won't be achieved without gender equality.

2024 SDG Gender Index: Key findings

If current trends continue, global gender equality won't be achieved until the 22nd century.

As dismal as this scenario is, **even that trajectory may be optimistic** given the intersecting crises that are set to dominate the final six years of the 2030 Agenda.

Between 2019 and 2022 **nearly 40 per cent of countries** – home to over 1 billion women and girls in 2022 – stagnated or even declined on gender equality.

A 'declining' Index score is a cause for grave concern. Backsliding means that **negative change has taken place** across a number of the 56 issues in the Index.

If this trend towards backsliding and stagnating gathers pace, our forecasts reveal that **global gender inequality could be worse in 2030 than when the SDGs were agreed back in 2015.**

This shocking possibility is a threat to the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda: after all, nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of the SDG targets are considered to be **directly or significantly reliant on gender equality.**

A future of inter-connected crises

Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) coalition members and gender champions see **several interconnected crises linked to resources, democracy, and safety and security** that are already having a negative impact on gender equality.

The resource crunch

Simultaneously insufficient and unsustainable international financing flows alongside domestic austerity measures are making it less likely that public funds will be invested in ways that protect and advance gender equality.

Governments' debt burden (Ind. 17.2) worsened more than any of the other 55 indicators in the Index, affecting services and protection for women and girls.

Women's views on food costs (Ind. 2.4) and comfort with their household income (Ind. 1.4) significantly deteriorated between 2019 and 2022, with declining scores in 63 per cent of countries for both indicators.

The democracy crunch

Gender equality is closely linked with democracy. But the foundations of democracies around the world are at risk because of rising economic inequality, societal and political polarisation, and the closing of civic space.

Income inequality (Ind. 10.1) stagnated or got worse in three quarters of countries between 2019 and 2022.

2024 Index scores reflect societies moving towards political extremes alongside a growing gap between the values held by women and men.

91 countries still had 'poor' and 'very poor' scores in 2022 for personal autonomy, individual rights, and freedom from discrimination (Ind. 10.2).

The safety and security crunch

The concept of 'safety and security' is often seen only through the lens of violent conflict and militarisation, and indeed both are on the rise. For women and girls, these realities hit their bodies, their choices and their personal safety first.

The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries reached 614 million in 2022, 50 per cent higher than the number in 2017.

The United Nations estimates that 80 per cent of the people being displaced by climate change are women and girls.

Only just over half (57 per cent) of women globally said they felt safe walking in their neighbourhood at night (Ind. 16.3).

Advancing gender equality in the face of crises

A blueprint for governments highlighting seven cross-cutting recommendations:

01.

Elevate women's and girls' leadership, power, and voice

The participation of women and girls in public life is not only a core human right but is also essential for countries' social and economic health. Yet gender norms about leadership, as well as poverty, care burdens and violence against female public figures, often exclude women and girls from decision-making spaces.

02.

Reform and apply equality laws and policies

The process of adopting and/or reforming equality laws can engage civil society, government, lawmakers, and the wider public in debate and norm-setting and can create pressure and structures for accountability.

03.

Promote 'data feminism' and close gender-sensitive data gaps

Closing gender-sensitive data gaps is vital to monitor policies and inform the decisions of policymakers. But we must go beyond this to also promote 'data feminism', recognising the power imbalances and colonial legacies baked into statistical systems, practices, and institutions.

04.

Increase resources for and investments in public services and social infrastructure, including care

The social transformation needed for gender equality must be funded, which requires gender-responsive budgets, progressive taxation and strong investment in public services and public (including care) infrastructure.

05.

Recognise and respond to the unique needs and life stage of adolescent girls and young women

The evidence is clear: when girls' rights are realised, societies flourish. Experiences and opportunities in this unique life stage can set the tone for a girl's entire future.

06.

Invest in and create space for feminist organisations and movements

Little progress on women's rights would have been made without collective pressure and advocacy from feminists. They need better resources and safe, secure spaces in which to operate and advocate.

A gender equal future requires collective action and systems-level change, fixing the system and not the women. The Index aims to help illuminate these broader systemic issues, how they fit together, where we are making progress, and where we are not.

07.

Centre gender equality and justice at the heart of international solidarity and cooperation

We need continued collaboration across governments in multi-lateral spaces to protect gender equality commitments against the concerted efforts of anti-rights actors. And we need aid, loans, and grants to be invested in gender equality and the programmes and policies that protect it.

(Un) equal future?

Gender equality in a world of crises

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED PROFOUNDLY since 2015, when 193 countries agreed the ambitious agenda behind the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nine years and a global pandemic later, global solidarity is in crisis, armed conflicts are proliferating, climate breakdown is accelerating, and the majority of the world's people are poorer in real terms. Societies feel more hostile, more inward looking, and less cooperative.

What is the prognosis for gender equality in all this? It's far from the top of the priority list. Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) coalition members and gender champions across the world are finding it harder to elevate gender equality on policymakers' agendas. We're seeing previously accepted language about gender equality stripped from international agreements. We're seeing donors de-prioritising women's rights at the same time as anti-gender financing is rising. And what about gender equality in the poorest countries, where the SDG Gender Index shows action is most needed? Even further down the list, eclipsed by other domestic challenges and a lack of international solidarity.

How shortsighted and reckless. Many of the social and economic crises that have become so severe in recent years have become so precisely because we live in an unequal world. A world that sorts and exploits people and planet based on 'productive' value. A world that treats women and girls[1] like second-class citizens born to serve, care and reproduce. These reflect policy choices, not inevitabilities. **And these choices are currently keeping us in a 'gender inequality trap.'**

When we structure our societies with a view to closing gaps and eliminating barriers for women and girls, we also design societies that are more equal, more sustainable, and more peaceful. When feminist organisations and movements are well resourced and able to mobilise freely, they push for laws, policies and budget decisions that protect vulnerable people as well as our vulnerable planet. More equal societies benefit from the talents and contributions of all people. More equal societies are less likely to face crises and better able to weather crises that do emerge. **This way lies a 'gender equal future.'**

But, as the 2024 SDG Gender Index shows, no country has yet escaped the gender inequality trap: not one country is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030, the year that every country committed to do so. If the current trends continue, global gender equality won't be achieved until the 22nd century.

We know what to do and what is at stake.

What are we waiting for?

A girl born today will have to wait until her 97th birthday – beyond her expected lifespan – to celebrate an equal society.

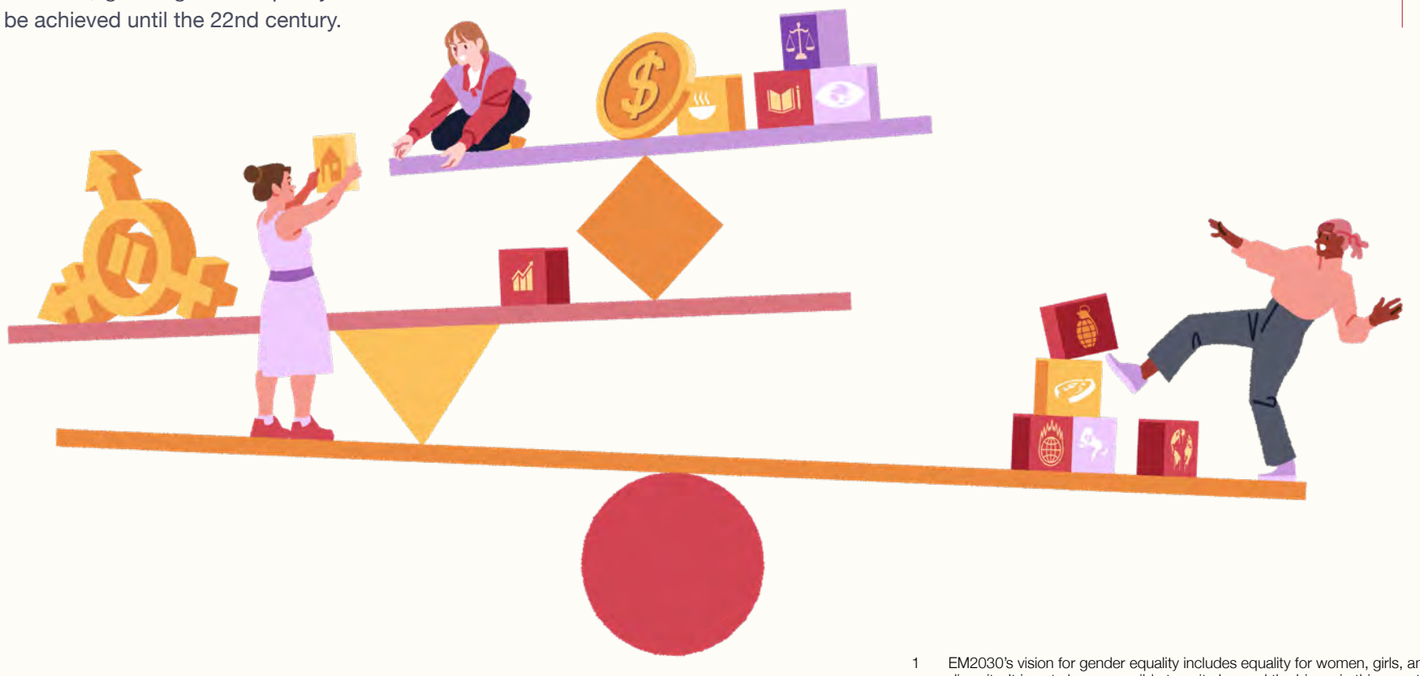
Given the interconnected crises that are set to dominate the final six years of the 2030 Agenda (see *A future of interconnected crises*), even this already-disappointing trend might be optimistic. Nearly 40 per cent of countries – home to over 1 billion women and girls – stagnated or even declined on gender equality between 2019 and 2022. The number of countries seeing a real decline in the situation for women and girls jumped from 10 countries between 2015 and 2019 to 17 countries between 2019 and 2022.

If this backsliding trend continues to gather pace, global gender equality could be worse in 2030 than when the SDGs were agreed in 2015.

This shocking possibility is a threat to the achievement of the entire 2030 Agenda: by our assessment nearly three quarters (74 per cent) of the SDG targets are considered to be directly or significantly reliant on gender equality.

As world leaders prepare for the Summit of the Future, has the warning – that we could end the decade less equal than when the SDGs started – really been heard? Gender gaps should be seen as an 'early warning system' – when inequalities that affect a full 50 per cent of the world's population are ignored, deprioritised, or actively made worse, other crises will be exacerbated and societies will be less resilient.

Gender equality holds the key to a more equal, prosperous, stable, and sustainable future. Our Index highlights the areas where more attention is needed, as well as those where coordinated efforts have led to positive change. Our blueprint outlines seven key recommendations for governments to accelerate progress on gender equality.



Progress towards gender equality is possible – and crucial for our shared future – but is by no means assured.

1 EM2030's vision for gender equality includes equality for women, girls, and gender expansive people in all their diversity. It is not always possible to write beyond the binary in this report due to data gaps and limitations (see *Box 1: Data gaps and the 2024 SDG Gender Index*).

2024 SDG Gender Index: the big picture

The 2024 SDG Gender Index is the flagship research product of EM2030 – the leading global coalition on accountability for gender equality and the SDGs. The Index is the most comprehensive global index available to measure gender equality.

The 2024 Index measures progress on gender equality in 139 countries (covering 96 per cent of the world's women and girls) scoring each country from zero to 100 (100 meaning the target has been reached) on 56 gender equality issues aligned with 14 of the 17 SDGs (see *Annex 1*). The indicators either specifically reference gender equality or relate to issues that have a disproportionate effect on women and girls, such as access to clean water and sanitation or climate change vulnerability.

The 2024 Index tracks data from three reference years – 2015, 2019 and 2022 – allowing for comparison of results before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the first time, these reference years can be used to make predictions on a country-by-country basis. We have also forecast a range of potential scenarios for the world to 2030.

To find out more about the methodology and approach underlying the 2024 SDG Gender Index, see the About the Index page on the EM2030 website and the formal audit of the Index design.

Why does the Index go beyond SDG 5?

SDG 5 – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" – includes issues that are essential for advancing the rights of women and girls, including eliminating GBV and discriminatory laws; ending harmful practices like early/forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); ensuring equal participation; and securing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

But securing a truly gender equal future requires going beyond the issues captured in SDG 5. When communities lack access to public services, water and sanitation, or sources of clean energy for cooking, it is women and girls that bear the burden of these infrastructure gaps. When policies don't consider the specific barriers that girls face (such as time spent collecting water, distance to school, and household and care responsibilities), they miss out on learning. The list goes on.

A gender equal future would be fairer, safer, healthier, more sustainable, and more prosperous for everyone.

A gender equal future requires collective action and systems-level change, fixing the system and not the women. The Index aims to help illuminate these broader systemic issues, how they fit together, where we are making progress, and where we are not.

Box 1.

Data gaps and the 2024 SDG Gender Index

Creating the Index involved seeking the best available data to measure specific gender issues within each SDG. Through this review we confronted significant gender data gaps that highlight the urgent need to invest in more and better gender data, as well as the need to consult feminist organisations and movements as owners, producers, users, and advisers on data to reflect their lived realities.

We know that gender equality advocates and decision-makers lack data and evidence on some of the most important gender equality issues, such as gender-based violence (GBV), sexual and reproductive health and rights, and care burdens. The gaps in globally-comparable data mean that some of these issues are not as well-reflected in the Index as we would like (though we have used the best data available).

Gender advocates and decision-makers also seek data that reveal intersecting disparities within groups of women and girls in all their diversity, for example based on age, income, ethnic or religious identity, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, immigration status, and HIV status, among other factors (see *Leaving no one behind?*).

Available data are still structured around a gender binary framework, which can limit the visibility and understanding of the experiences of gender expansive people. This binary approach excludes trans, non-binary, genderqueer, and other gender-diverse identities, leading to gaps in data that fail to capture the full spectrum of gender diversity. Addressing these limitations requires an intentional shift towards more inclusive data collection practices that recognise and validate all gender identities.

It is essential to continue encouraging the government to recognize and use data from civil society, especially that produced by grassroots women's communities.

– KAPAL Perempuan, Indonesia

We were confronted with several specific data gaps in constructing the 2024 Index: not having new data for basic indicators like the maternal mortality ratio or measures of financial inclusion or labour force data due to COVID-19-related delays in national data collections. Other indicators from the 2022 Index had to be dropped due to increasingly poor data coverage – including those related to women in STEM, gender-specific poverty measures, and girls who were overage in primary education.

This is why one of the key blueprint recommendations is to 'promote data feminism and close gender data gaps' (see *A blueprint for governments*).

With just six years left to 2030, no country has achieved gender equality

THE 2024 SDG GENDER INDEX FINDS THAT, across the 139 countries studied, no country has achieved the promise of gender equality envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.

This is true when we look at the 'average' picture for women and girls within a country, but we also know that the gaps are particularly stark for women and girls who face additional and intersecting discrimination and disadvantage because of their race or ethnicity, wealth or income, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, and many other factors.

The global average score of 66.1/100 in 2022 is 'poor', barely a passing grade (see *Figure 1*). The global average score has improved only slightly since 2015, when it was 63.7/100. Since the SDGs were agreed in 2015, the world has registered only an inconsequential improvement of about one third of one point (out of 100) per year on the Index.

According to the Index, countries with an overall score of 90 or more have a 'very good' score for gender equality, while those scoring less than 60 are considered 'very poor' environments for women and girls (see *Figure 1*).

Figure 1.

SDG Gender Index scoring system

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 points 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 by five categories with labels associated with their score, from 'very good' to 'very poor'. For example, a country receiving a score of 84 for SDG 4 on quality education would be considered 'good' in terms of its performance on gender equality on this goal.

PACE OF CHANGE

- **FAST PROGRESS:** Score increased by more than 0.6 points per year
- **SOME PROGRESS:** Score increased by 0.2 to 0.6 points per year
- **NO PROGRESS:** Score stayed the 'same' (margin between -0.2 and +0.2 points per year)
- **DECLINE:** Score declined by more than -0.2 points per year

The pace of change in a country score since 2019 (or 2015) is represented by four categories, from 'fast progress' to 'decline'. For example, a country that raised its score from 82 in 2019 to 84 in 2022 would be considered to have made 'some progress'.

'Fast progress' should be seen as fast relative to other countries over the specific time period, and not relative to the pace of change needed to reach the SDG 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.

2024 SDG Gender Index scores, trends, and rankings by country

2024 RANK	COUNTRY	2024 SCORE	TRENDS 2015-2019	TRENDS 2019-2022	FORECAST 2022-2030
1	Switzerland	90.1	■	⬆⬆	▲
2	Sweden	89.3	■	■	■
3	Denmark	89.0	▲	■	▲
4	Norway	88.5	■	■	■
5	Finland	87.2	■	▲	■
6	Ireland	86.6	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
7	Netherlands	86.5	■	■	■
8	Luxembourg	86.3	■	▲	■
9	Austria	86.1	▲	■	▲
10	Slovenia	85.3	■	⬆⬆	▲
11	Germany	85.1	■	▲	■
12	Iceland	83.9	■	■	■
13	Singapore	83.3	▲	▲	▲
14	New Zealand	83.0	■	■	■
15	Estonia	82.9	▼	⬆⬆	■
16	Australia	82.6	▼	▲	■
17	Belgium	82.6	▼	⬆⬆	■
18	Canada	82.4	■	■	■
19	Spain	82.3	▲	▲	▲
20	Czechia	81.9	▲	■	■
21	United Kingdom	81.4	■	■	■
22	Latvia	80.8	■	⬆⬆	▲
23	Lithuania	80.5	▼	⬆⬆	■
24	France	80.4	■	■	■
25	Portugal	79.9	▲	▲	▲
26	South Korea	78.9	▲	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
27	Slovakia	78.7	▲	▲	▲
28	Croatia	77.9	■	⬆⬆	■
29	Poland	77.6	▲	▼	▲
30	Israel	77.5	▲	■	▲
31	Italy	77.1	▲	⬆⬆	▲
32	UA Emirates	76.5	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
33	Uruguay	76.4	▲	▲	▲
34	Hungary	76.4	▲	■	■
35	Japan	76.3	■	■	■
36	Malta	76.1	■	■	■
37	Serbia	75.7	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
38	Costa Rica	75.3	▲	▲	▲
39	Cyprus	75.0	▲	▲	▲
40	United States	74.6	▲	▼	■
41	China	74.6	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
42	Chile	74.5	■	⬆⬆	▲
43	Bulgaria	74.0	▼	⬆⬆	■
44	Montenegro	73.6	▲	⬆⬆	▲
45	Moldova	73.2	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
46	Kazakhstan	73.1	▲	▲	▲
47	Romania	72.8	▲	▲	▲
48	Argentina	72.7	▼	⬆⬆	■
49	Greece	72.6	■	▲	■
50	Mauritius	72.5	■	▲	■
51	Armenia	72.1	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
52	Georgia	71.8	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
53	Thailand	71.7	■	⬆⬆	■
54	Kuwait	71.6	▲	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
55	Malaysia	71.4	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
56	Belarus	71.3	■	▼	■
57	Vietnam	71.2	▲	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
58	Albania	71.1	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
59	Uzbekistan	69.9	▲	■	■
60	Bosnia & Herzegovina	69.2	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
61	Mongolia	68.6	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
62	North Macedonia	68.5	▲	▼	■
63	Mexico	68.3	■	⬆⬆	▲
64	Brazil	68.2	▲	⬆⬆	▲
65	Kyrgyzstan	67.9	■	▲	▲
66	Indonesia	67.9	▲	⬆⬆	▲
67	Tajikistan	67.9	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
68	Russia	67.9	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
69	Saudi Arabia	67.6	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
70	Philippines	67.5	■	⬆⬆	▲
71	South Africa	67.5	▼	⬆⬆	■
72	Colombia	67.4	■	▲	▲
73	Paraguay	67.4	▲	▲	▲
74	Dominican Republic	66.6	▲	▲	▲
75	Ukraine	66.5	⬆⬆	▼	▲
76	Peru	66.3	⬆⬆	■	▲
77	Ecuador	66.2	▼	■	▼
78	Turkey	65.9	■	■	■
79	Jamaica	65.6	▲	▲	▲
80	El Salvador	65.1	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
81	Azerbaijan	64.9	⬆⬆	▼	▲
82	Panama	64.4	▲	▼	■
83	Bolivia	64.3	▲	■	▲
84	Morocco	63.2	▲	⬆⬆	▲
85	Tunisia	63.1	■	■	■
86	Nicaragua	62.4	■	■	■
87	Jordan	61.8	▲	▲	▲
88	Algeria	61.6	■	■	■
89	Egypt	61.3	⬆⬆	■	⬆⬆
90	Nepal	61.3	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
91	India	61.2	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
92	Venezuela	60.5	▼	⬆⬆	■
93	Cambodia	60.2	⬆⬆	▲	▲
94	Sri Lanka	60.0	▲	▼	▼
95	Guatemala	59.4	▲	▲	▲
96	Botswana	59.2	▲	■	■
97	Ghana	58.9	⬆⬆	■	⬆⬆
98	Honduras	58.7	⬆⬆	■	▲
99	Eswatini	58.4	⬆⬆	■	▲
100	Namibia	58.0	▲	▲	▲
101	Gabon	57.7	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
102	Iran	57.6	■	▼	■
103	Lao PDR	56.9	⬆⬆	▲	▲
104	Rwanda	56.1	▲	■	▲
105	Bangladesh	55.7	⬆⬆	▲	▲
106	Myanmar	55.3	▲	▼	■
107	Senegal	54.9	▲	▲	▲
108	Iraq	53.7	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
109	Kenya	53.1	▲	▼	■
110	Lesotho	52.6	■	■	■
111	Tanzania	52.5	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
112	Cameroon	52.2	▲	▲	▲
113	Lebanon	51.6	▼	▼	▼
114	Benin	51.1	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
115	Mozambique	50.7	▲	■	▲
116	Côte d'Ivoire	50.7	⬆⬆	▲	▲
117	Zambia	50.5	■	⬆⬆	▲
118	Malawi	50.1	▲	▲	▲
119	Zimbabwe	50.0	■	■	■
120	Mali	50.0	⬆⬆	▲	⬆⬆
121	Uganda	50.0	■	⬆⬆	▲
122	Togo	49.3	▲	⬆⬆	▲
123	Pakistan	48.9	■	■	■
124	Ethiopia	48.4	▲	■	■
125	Guinea	47.9	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
126	Mauritania	47.6	■	▲	■
127	Nigeria	47.4	■	▲	▲
128	Gambia	47.3	▲	▼	■
129	Burkina Faso	46.9	⬆⬆	▼	▲
130	Haiti	46.2	⬆⬆	▼	▲
131	Congo	45.4	▲	⬆⬆	▲
132	Liberia	45.0	▲	▲	▲
133	Madagascar	44.7	▲	▲	▲
134	Burundi	43.0	■	▲	▲
135	DR Congo	42.2	⬆⬆	▼	▲
136	Sierra Leone	42.0	▲	■	■
137	Niger	41.0	▲	■	■
138	Chad	40.1	⬆⬆	⬆⬆	⬆⬆
139	Afghanistan	35.4	■	▼	▼

Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

Switzerland tops the 2024 Index (see *Figure 2*), making it the most gender equal country in the world, and the first year in which a non-Nordic country tops the Index. Switzerland is the only country attaining a 'very good' score, and it also moved 'fast' between 2019 and 2022 by improving on several gender equality issues measured in the Index including increasing women in their climate change (COP) delegation (Ind. 13.1), amending laws on sexual orientation (Ind. 10.5) and family leave (Ind. 8.4), improving infrastructure to support trade and transport (Ind. 11.4), and reducing women's concerns about government corruption (Ind. 17.3).

The top 10 countries in the 2024 Index are:

1. Switzerland
2. Sweden
3. Denmark
4. Norway
5. Finland
6. Ireland
7. Netherlands
8. Luxembourg
9. Austria
10. Slovenia

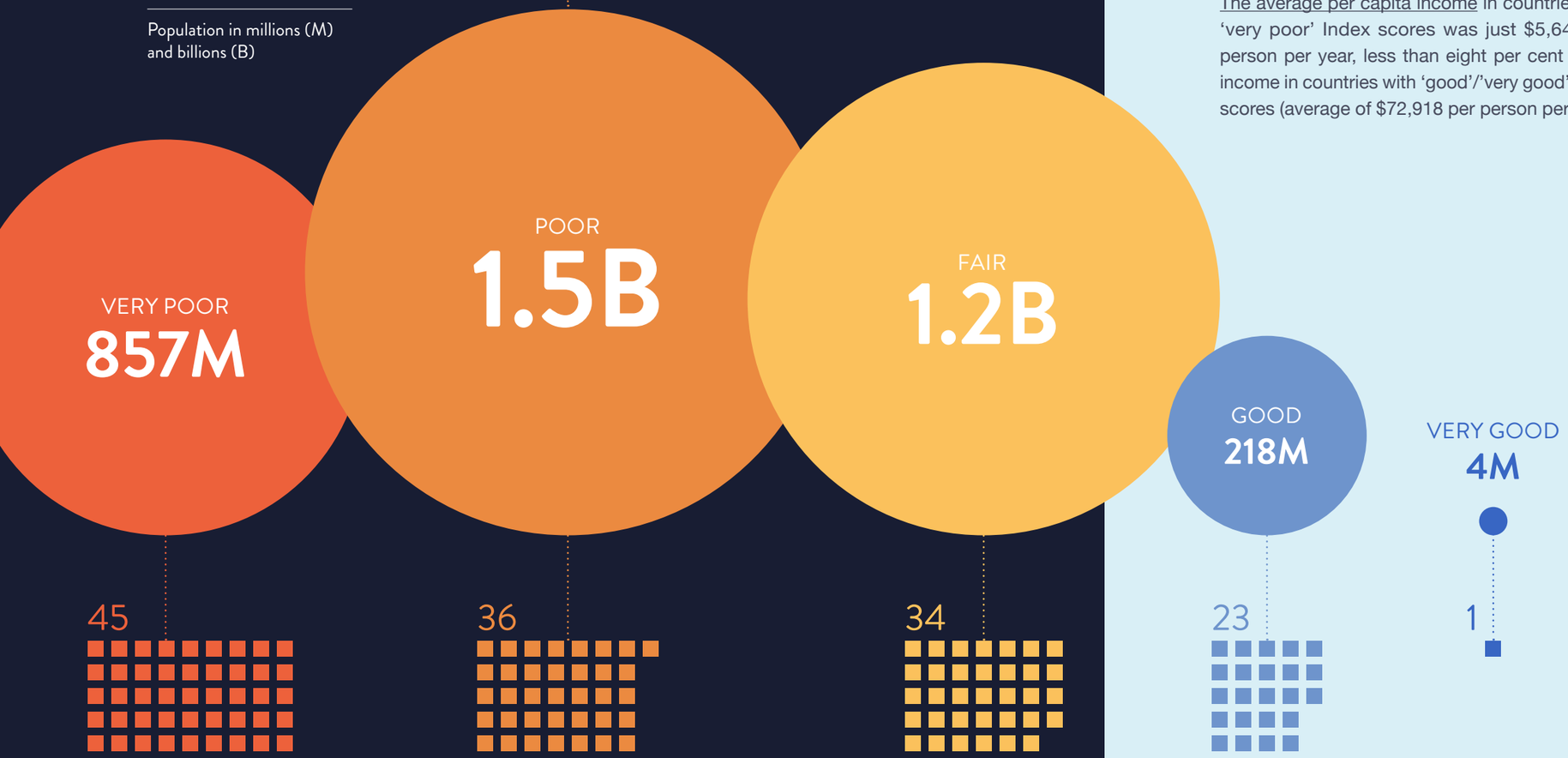
The three lowest-scoring countries in the 2024 Index are:

1. Afghanistan
2. Chad
3. Niger

In total, 19 countries had scores below 50 out of 100, meaning they were less than halfway towards reaching key gender equality targets across the SDGs.

Figure 3.

Population of women and girls by Index score, 2022



Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030 and UNDESA.

What does a 'very poor' gender equality score mean for the lives of women and girls?

2.4B

women and girls lived in countries with **'very poor'** or **'poor'** scores (see *Figure 3* on gender equality in 2022.)

The gender gaps vary widely by context, but there were common themes:

Violent conflict

16 of the 45 countries with 'very poor' Index scores appear on the list of countries experiencing the highest degrees of violent conflict in the world.

Very high levels of absolute poverty

The average per capita income in countries with 'very poor' Index scores was just $5,641 per person per year, less than eight per cent of the income in countries with 'good'/'very good' Index scores (average of $72,918 per person per year).

Education cut short for girls

Secondary education (Ind. 4.4) is out of reach for many girls in countries with 'very poor' Index scores: in these countries an average of 69 per cent of women and girls had no secondary education at all (nearly double the global average).

Poor basic infrastructure and services

On average, less than half of people (46 per cent) in countries with 'very poor' Index scores had access to even basic sanitation services (Ind. 6.2).

High rates of adolescent fertility (including 'forced pregnancies')

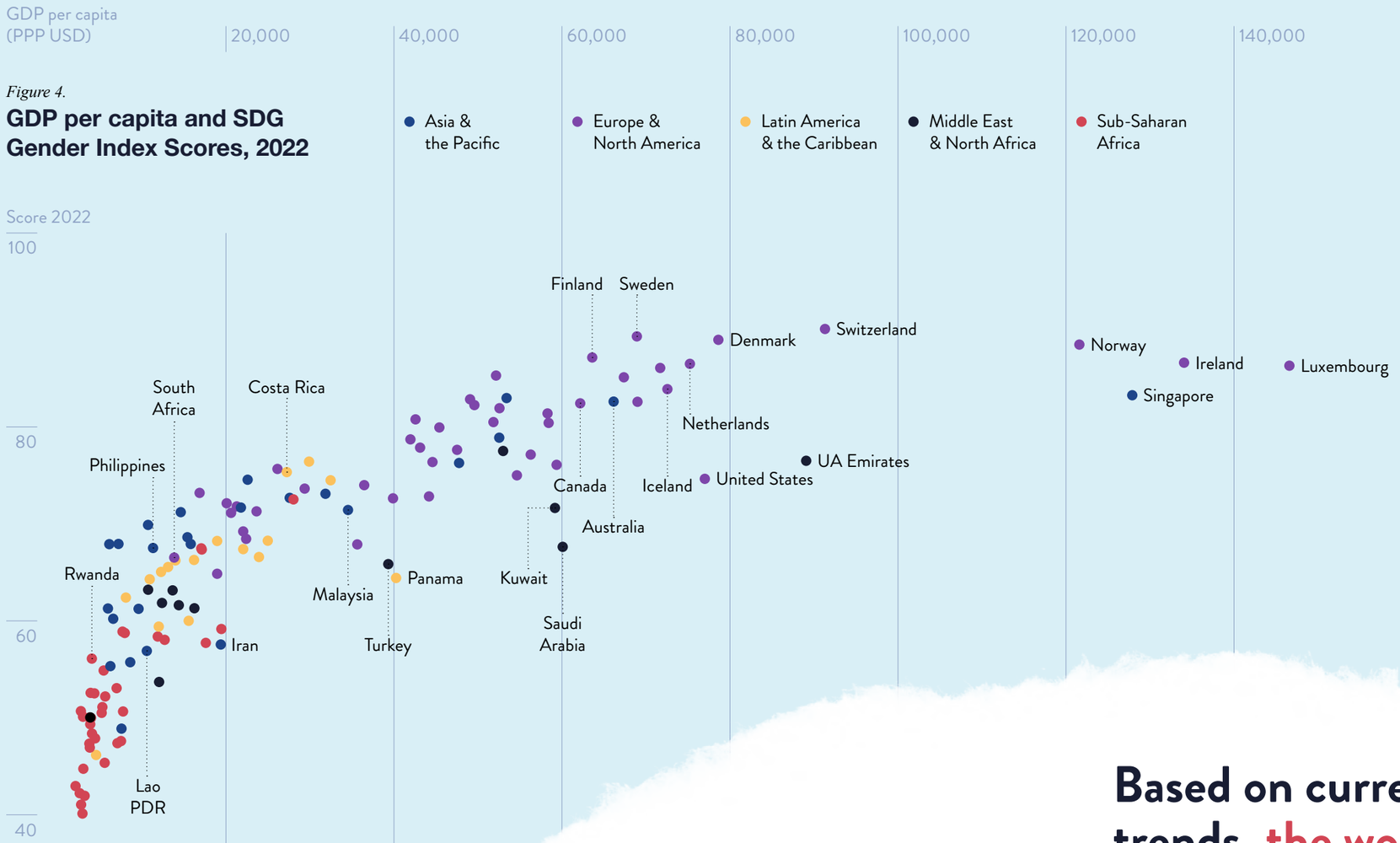
Birth rates amongst adolescent girls (Ind. 3.2) are much higher in countries with 'very poor' Index scores: in these countries, nearly 1 in every 12 girls aged 15 to 19 give birth. Contrast this with the birth rates in countries with 'good' Index scores, where it is 1 in every 167 girls.

Lack of laws that protect LGBTQIA people

Laws that aim to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation (Ind. 10.5) are almost non-existent in countries with 'very poor' Index scores.

Figure 4.

GDP per capita and SDG Gender Index Scores, 2022



Costa Rica outscores the United States with just one third (34 per cent) of its per capita GDP.

The Philippines and South Africa both equal Saudi Arabia's Index score with less than one fifth and about one quarter (17 and 27 per cent) of its per capita GDP, respectively.

Rwanda, Lao PDR, and Iran have very similar Index scores but vastly different per capita GDP: In 2022, Rwanda had per capita income of $3,061, Lao PDR had $8,794, and Iran had $16,591.

Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030 and World Bank.

Doing more for gender equality with less

Gender equality is not wholly associated with a country's level of economic development. While higher-income countries, measured by GDP, generally have higher gender equality scores than lower-income countries, the data show this isn't always the case (see *Figure 4*). Some countries manage to create more gender equal societies with the same or fewer resources, while others underperform relative to their income levels.

Different starting points for gender equality

A country's score on the SDG Gender Index reflects how it is performing on gender equality at a given point in time. But the 2024 Index is unique in that it can go beyond comparing country scores at a single point in time to comparing their pace of progress and their direction of travel. This allows us to look not only at where countries start, but how they are progressing and to consider how past trends might develop into the future (to the 2030 deadline and beyond).

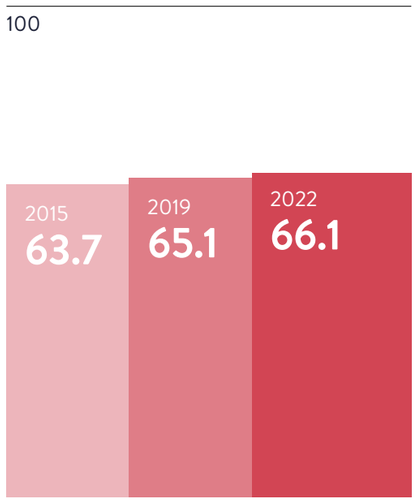
Based on current trends, the world won't achieve gender equality for nearly a century

THE 2024 INDEX PRESENTS A STARK REALITY: global progress towards gender equality is alarmingly slow (see *Figure 5*). The overall global trajectory of gender equality has hardly changed since the SDGs were agreed in 2015.

If current trends continue, global gender equality won't be achieved until the 22nd century. A girl born today would have to wait until her 97th birthday – beyond her expected lifespan in every country – to witness a truly equal society.

Figure 5.

Global average Index score, 2015, 2019 and 2022

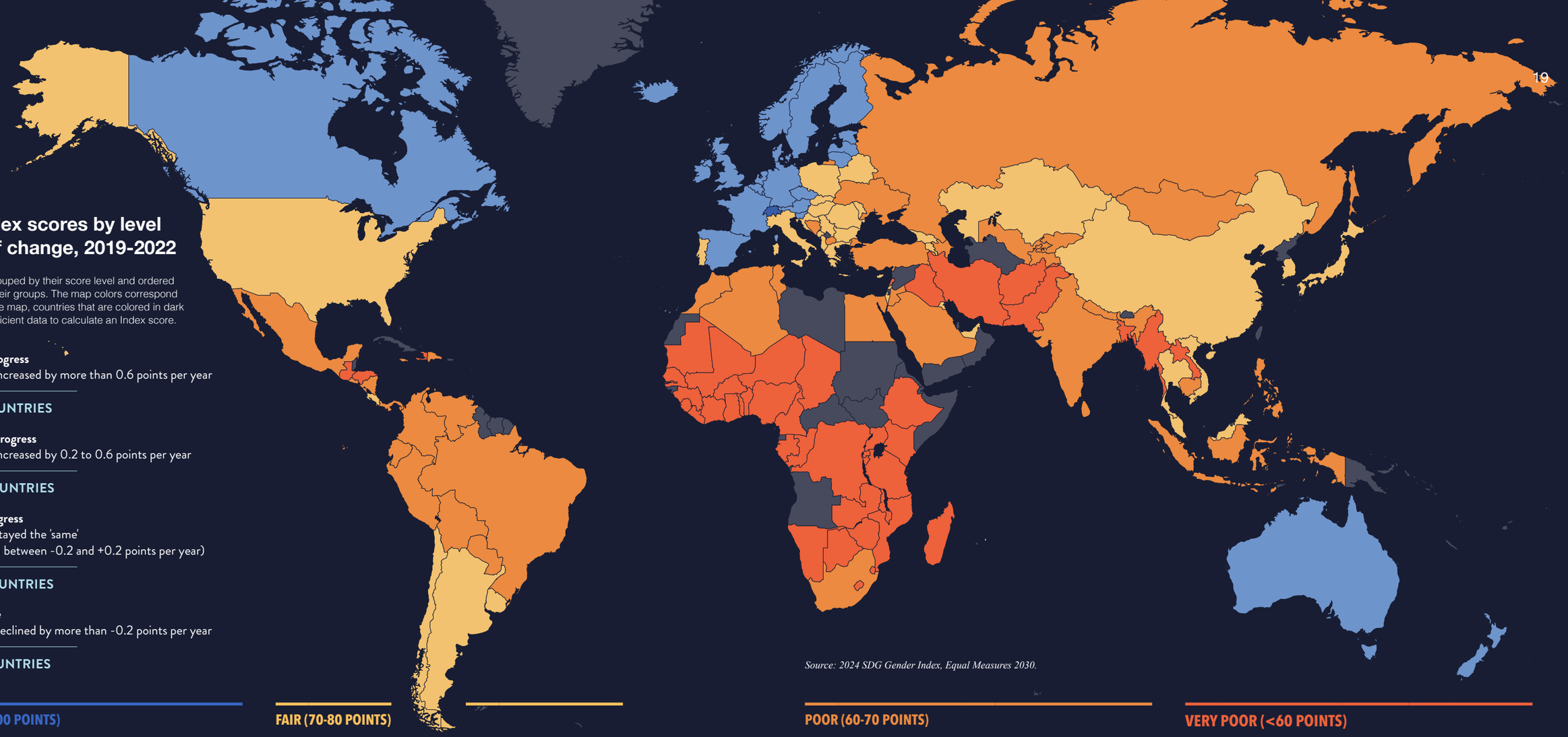


Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

Figure 6.

Country Index scores by level and pace of change, 2019-2022

Note: Countries are grouped by their score level and ordered alphabetically within their groups. The map colors correspond to the score level. In the map, countries that are colored in dark grey did not report sufficient data to calculate an Index score.



PACE OF CHANGE, 2019-2022

- ⏶ **Fast progress** — Score increased by more than 0.6 points per year — 41 COUNTRIES
- ▲ **Some progress** — Score increased by 0.2 to 0.6 points per year — 45 COUNTRIES
- ■ **No progress** — Score stayed the 'same' (margin between -0.2 and +0.2 points per year) — 36 COUNTRIES
- ▼ **Decline** — Score declined by more than -0.2 points per year — 17 COUNTRIES

Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

VERY GOOD (90-100 POINTS)

⏶ Switzerland

1 COUNTRY

GOOD (80-90 POINTS)

⏶ Belgium, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia

▲ Australia, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Singapore, Spain

■ Austria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, France, Iceland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom

23 COUNTRIES

FAIR (70-80 POINTS)

⏶ Argentina, Bulgaria, Chile, Croatia, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, South Korea, Thailand, UA Emirates, Vietnam

▲ Albania, Armenia, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Kazakhstan, Mauritius, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Uruguay

■ Hungary, Israel, Japan, Malta

▼ Belarus, Poland, United States

34 COUNTRIES

POOR (60-70 POINTS)

⏶ Brazil, El Salvador, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Venezuela

▲ Bosnia & Herzegovina, Cambodia, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Paraguay, Russia, Tajikistan

■ Algeria, Bolivia, Ecuador, Egypt, Nicaragua, Peru, Tunisia, Turkey, Uzbekistan

▼ Azerbaijan, North Macedonia, Panama, Sri Lanka, Ukraine

36 COUNTRIES

VERY POOR (<60 POINTS)

⏶ Benin, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Iraq, Togo, Uganda, Zambia

▲ Bangladesh, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Lao PDR, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania

■ Botswana, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, Lesotho, Mozambique, Niger, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe

▼ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, DR Congo, Gambia, Haiti, Iran, Kenya, Lebanon, Myanmar

45 COUNTRIES

Nearly 1/3 of countries made 'fast progress' towards gender equality.

Some countries improving, others going in reverse

On the positive side, nearly a third of countries (41 of 139) made 'fast progress' towards gender equality and more than half of countries (86 of 139) were moving in the right direction between 2019 and 2022 (see *Figure 6*).

However, nearly half of these 'fast progress' countries were starting from a very low starting point, with 'poor' or 'very poor' Index scores (see *Figure 7*). It is not surprising that countries starting with lower Index scores are able to make rapid progress. Countries at the top of the Index will be facing challenges in reaching the most marginalised populations, which can make gaps slower to close (the concept of the 'last mile'). However, there are countries with 'very good' or 'good' scores that still managed to make 'fast progress'.

Between 2019 and 2022 nearly 40 per cent of countries – home to over 1 billion women and girls – stagnated or fell back on gender equality.

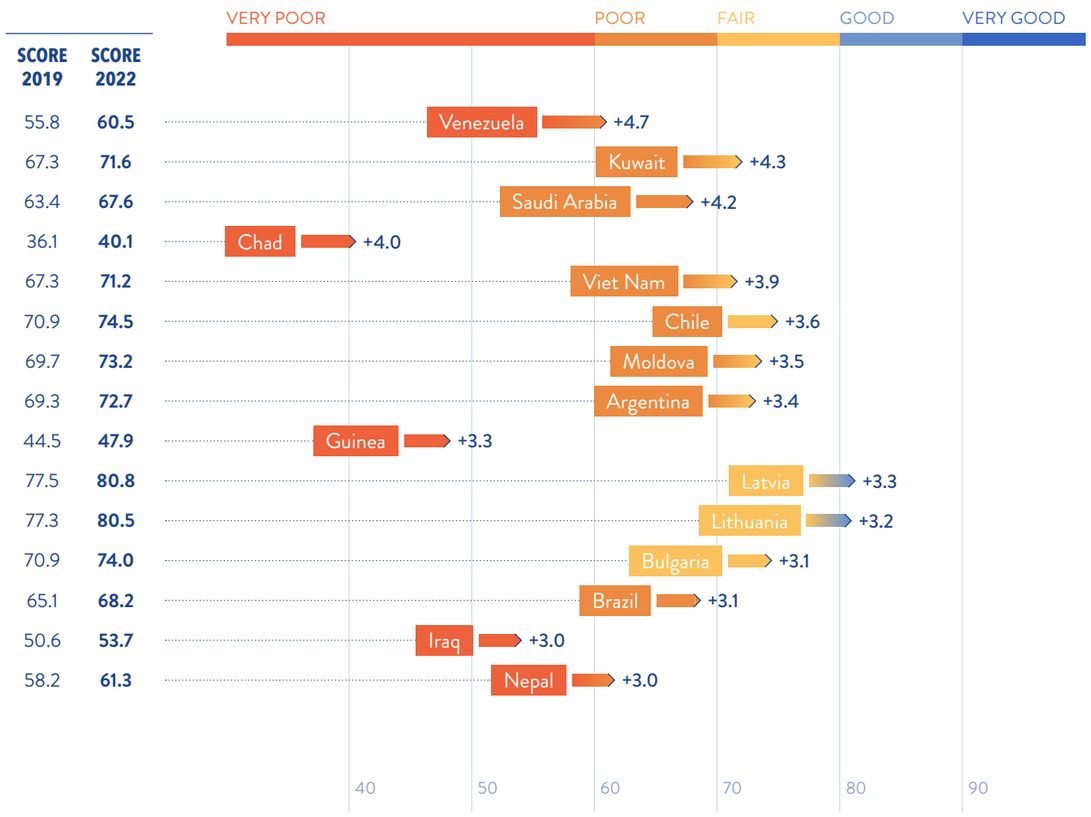
It's not only low-income countries or those with a low starting point for gender equality that are going backwards or staying still – for instance, Austria, France, and Malta were all in danger of slipping into decline, with stagnating Index scores between 2019 and 2022 (see *Figure 6*).

The countries that showed the greatest gains in their SDG Gender Index score since 2019 are highlighted in Figure 7 and those that fell back the most since 2019 in Figure 8.

Figure 7.

Countries that made the fastest progress between 2019 and 2022

Change in Index score points



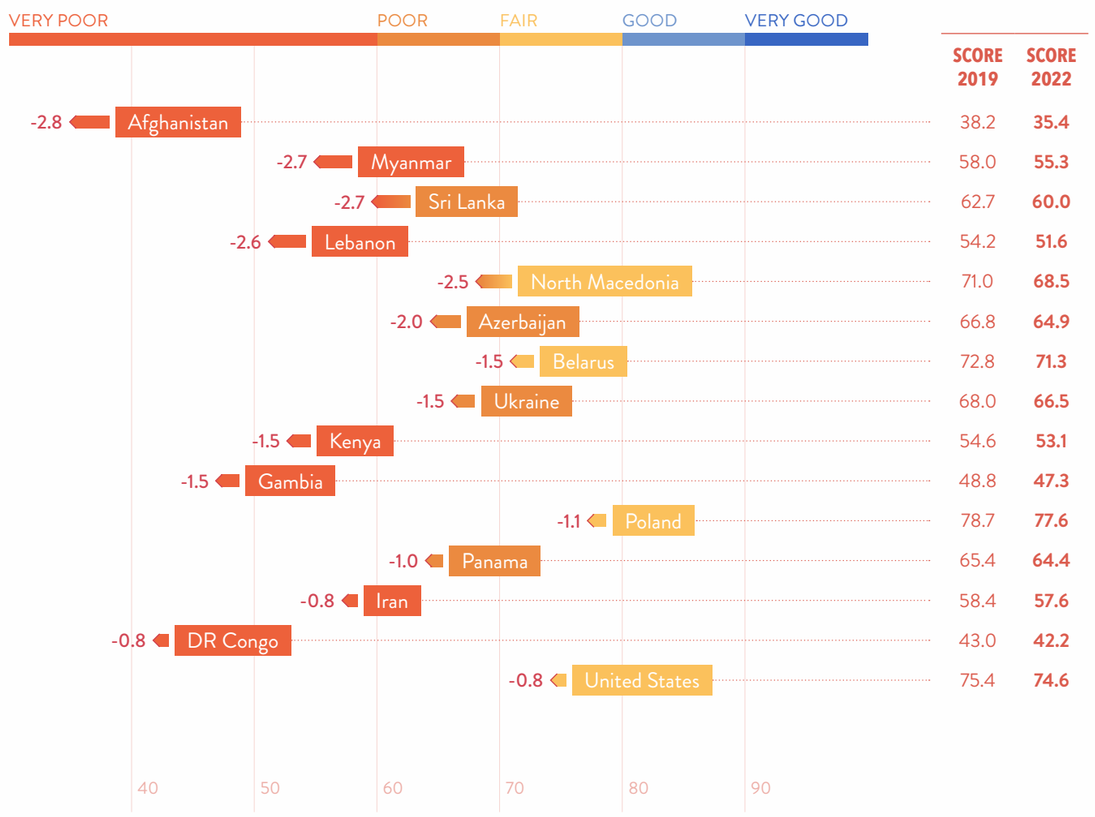
Note: Scores may not sum due to rounding.

Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

Figure 8.

Countries that declined most between 2019 and 2022

Change in Index score points



Note: Scores may not sum due to rounding.

Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

Will the world be less equal in 2030 than in 2015?

IF THE CURRENT TREND IN GLOBAL GENDER equality continues, we'll reach gender equality nearly a century later than promised by the SDGs. As dismal as this scenario is, even that trajectory may be optimistic.

The EM2030 coalition members – gender equality advocates working across every region of the world – are not just anticipating the interconnected crises we explore in *A future of interconnected crises* below; they are already living them. Our coalition members aren't the only ones concerned about the future: 92 per cent of the experts consulted for the World Economic Forum 2024 Global Risks Report described the long-term global outlook as 'unsettled', 'turbulent' or 'stormy'.

With progress on gender equality barely perceptible between 2015 and 2022, it could easily be thrown off course in the final six years of the SDGs.

What if, in the next six years, all countries follow the 'declining' path that we observed in 17 countries between 2019 and 2022? In this scenario, the global gender equality score will be below even the 2015 starting point for the SDGs (see *Figure 9*).

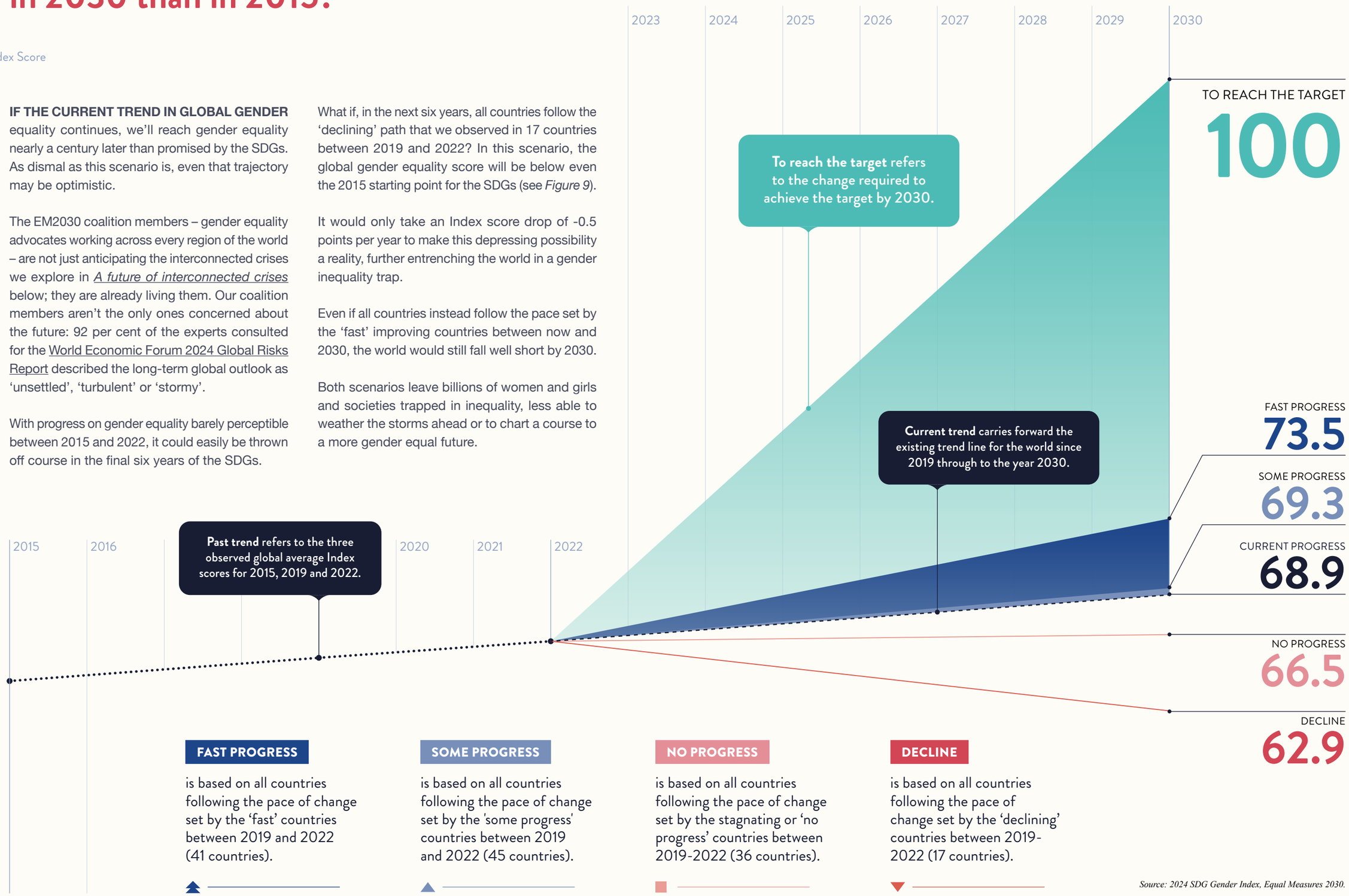
It would only take an Index score drop of -0.5 points per year to make this depressing possibility a reality, further entrenching the world in a gender inequality trap.

Even if all countries instead follow the pace set by the 'fast' improving countries between now and 2030, the world would still fall well short by 2030.

Both scenarios leave billions of women and girls and societies trapped in inequality, less able to weather the storms ahead or to chart a course to a more gender equal future.

Figure 9.

Gender equality progress, potential scenarios to 2030



Source: 2024 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030.

The 'decline' scenario: a real possibility

What makes the EM2030 coalition so concerned about falling into a gender inequality trap in the final six years of the SDGs?

There are warning signs found throughout the Index.

More countries' scores worsened between 2019 and 2022 than in the previous period

More countries moved backwards on gender equality between 2019 and 2022 compared to the 2015 to 2019 period: the number of countries moving in reverse on gender equality jumped from 10 to 17 since 2019.

When a country has a 'declining' Index score, this is a cause for grave concern. Backsliding means that negative change has taken place across a number of the 56 issues in the Index.

And this backsliding trend does not just affect the poorest countries, those facing conflict and fragility, or those at the bottom of the Index (see *Figure 8*): the United States, Poland, Sri Lanka and Kenya all saw declines in their Index scores between 2019 and 2022.

Gender equality getting worse in relation to nutrition and justice

The scores of two entire SDGs fell at the global level between 2019 and 2022. While the declines in these goal scores may seem small, they represent negative change across a range of issues and a large number of countries. This should raise red flags.

Gender equality and SDG 2 ('Zero hunger'): The Index score for SDG 2 fell from 73.8 in 2019 to 72.6 points in 2022, and if current trends continue, it will decrease further to 69.4 points by 2030. The drivers of this change included higher levels of food insecurity (Ind. 2.2) and women's concerns about having enough money to buy food (Ind. 2.4).

Gender equality and SDG 16 ('Peace, justice and strong institutions'): The global average score for SDG 16 was 62.4 in 2022, a drop from 62.6 in 2019, and 62.9 in 2015. The score for SDG 16 declined in two fifths of countries between 2019 and 2022. The decline is driven by drops in women's access to justice (Ind. 16.1) and the functioning of criminal justice systems (Ind. 16.4).

Women's views on key issues worsening

Several indicators in the Index that dropped significantly in recent years are based on women's own views on issues affecting their lives. These perceptions-based indicators (from the annual Gallup World Poll) can reflect changes closer to 'real time' and help to anticipate emerging trends.

The 2024 SDG Gender Index includes 12 (out of 56) indicators based on data from the Gallup World Poll. Four of these are among the indicators that have seen the most negative change of all indicators in the Index between 2019 and 2022:

→ Women who report they did not have enough money for adequate shelter/housing in the past 12 months (Ind. 11.1): **Score declined in 95 countries.**

→ Women who report having had enough money to buy food that they or their family have needed in the past 12 months (Ind. 2.4): **Score declined in 94 countries.**

→ Women who report feeling comfortable with their household income (Ind. 1.4): **Score declined in 65 countries.**

→ Women who report that, if in trouble, they have relatives or friends they can count on to help them whenever they need them (Ind. 5.2): **Score declined in 63 countries.**

Negative trends in women's views on these issues were also evident before COVID-19, so it is not a pandemic-related anomaly. In many contexts, these drops will be related to factors such as rising food, housing and energy costs, alongside reduced access to social safety nets and public services. These trends are exacerbated by the interconnected crises outlined in *A future of interconnected crises* below.

Leaving no one behind?

CERTAIN GROUPS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN all regions experience additional disadvantages and discrimination on the basis of age, income, ethnic or religious identity, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, immigration status, and HIV status, among other factors.

The lack of data coverage and insufficient disaggregation of data holds back effective policy and makes it easier for certain groups to be overlooked or ignored (see *Box 1: Data gaps and the 2024 SDG Gender Index*).

However, we can use disaggregated national data and smaller-scale studies to illuminate examples of the multidimensional deprivations that national averages may hide.

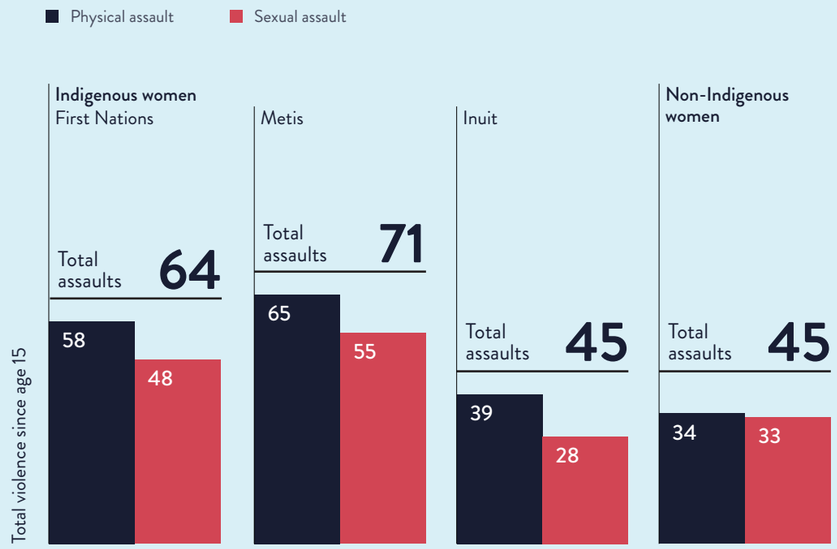
Gender-based violence against Indigenous women in Canada

Measuring the scale of GBV remains enormously challenging, especially in a globally comparable way. However, some countries have been able to conduct surveys that allow a better understanding of GBV in different settings and against women of different backgrounds.

Canada is one of the countries that has focused on improving data collection about GBV. A 2018 survey in Canada on gender-based violence in public and private spaces showed that women from Indigenous groups experienced much greater rates of intimate and non-intimate partner violence compared to non-Indigenous women (see *Figure 10*).

Figure 10.

Physical and sexual assault since age 15 per 100 women by Indigenous identity group in Canada, 2018



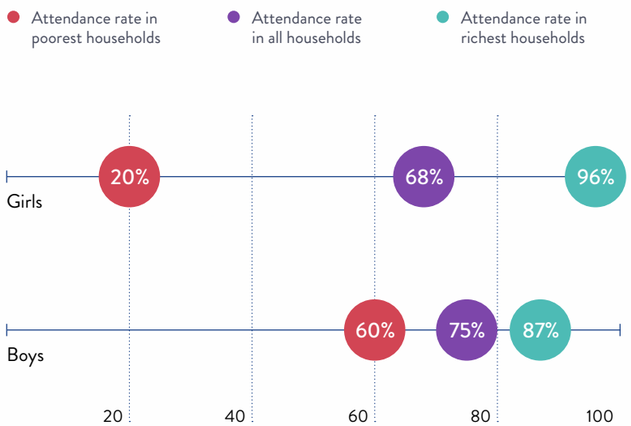
Source: Statistics Canada Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces, 2018.

Poverty amplifies gender disparities

In 2019, 68 per cent of young girls in Uganda were participating in pre-primary education in the year before starting primary, in contrast to 75 per cent of boys. Combining information on gender and poverty reveals much greater disparities between girls and boys: among children from the poorest households, only 20 per cent of girls attended pre-primary education compared to 60 per cent of boys (see *Figure 11*). Based on available data, Uganda is the country with the biggest wealth-related differences in pre-primary education attendance.

Figure 11.

Disparities in pre-primary education attendance rate by wealth quintiles and gender in Uganda, 2019



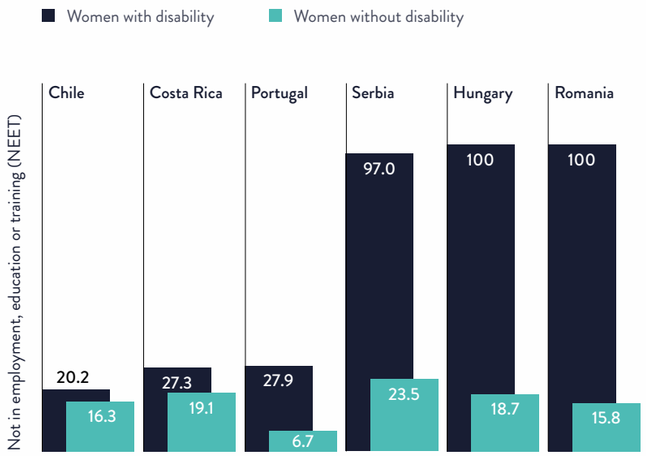
Source: Uganda National Panel Survey (2019) via UNESCO's World Inequality Database on Education.

Young women with disabilities have fewer opportunities

Young women with disabilities are more likely to be 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' ('NEET') than those without a disability (see *Figure 12*). In some countries, the gap was huge – in Hungary and Romania there was not a single case of a 15- to 24-year-old woman with disabilities who was engaged in education, training or employment. In Portugal, young women with a disability were four times more likely to not be participating in education, training or employment compared to young women without a disability.

Figure 12.

Young women not in employment, education or training status by disability status in selected countries, 2021



Note: Countries presented represent the countries with the three lowest and three highest NEET rates for young women with a disability in the ILO database.

Source: ILO database.

A future of interconnected crises

Facing an uncertain future, governments have a choice. They can build resilient, prosperous and equal societies by investing in gender equality, setting us on the path to a gender equal future.

Or they can make their countries even more vulnerable by failing to uphold the rights of half their populations, confining us to a gender inequality trap.

The next six years are certain to bring more challenges that could crush fragile gains in gender equality and push us backwards.

Here are eight looming crises about which EM2030 coalition members and gender champions are especially concerned.

The resource crunch

The social transformation needed for gender equality requires gender-responsive budgets, progressive taxation, and strong investment in public services, as well as international justice and solidarity through fairer trade and tax rules, aid, grants, and loans. However, a range of interconnected shifts and crises are making it less likely that public funds will be invested in the kinds of social infrastructure and programmes needed to protect and advance gender equality.

International financing flows

The score for governments' debt burden (Ind. 17.2) worsened more than any other indicator in the Index between 2019 and 2022, meaning that government debt as a share of GDP rose sharply. More than one in five developing countries paid more to service their debt in 2022 than they received in aid and investment; this could rise to more than one in three by 2025. Unsustainable public debt has a negative impact on gender equality. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that to meet debt payments, at least 100 countries will have to reduce spending on health, education and social protection, which will disproportionately impact women and girls.

In 2024, the OECD noted that the share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) specifically targeting gender equality had dropped for the first time in a decade. Just 4 per cent of total bilateral aid in 2021-22 identified gender equality as a principal objective. ODA is increasingly provided through concessional loans, further contributing to debt burdens.

Unfair global tax rules also mean that poorer countries are disproportionately losing out on vital tax revenue. They are both more reliant on corporate income tax than richer countries and under-represented in the global fora in which tax rules are set. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is also in crisis and developing countries are losing faith that the institution in its current form has anything to offer them.

This is a wider theme in international financial architecture. Colonial legacies continue to skew power, and poorer countries hold far less power in the institutions that govern rules on international financing flows. These pressures combine to increasingly constrain the resources available to governments, and some have chosen, or are forced through concessional loans, to adopt austerity measures.

Austerity

Austerity measures – cuts in government spending that often target public services – disproportionately impact women and girls. Fiscal austerity and cuts in public spending are particularly detrimental in prolonged and complex crises. A 2022 study found that 143 countries were implementing policy measures that undermined the capacity of governments to provide education, healthcare, social protection, and other public services.

The Index shows that women and girls are feeling the impact of austerity measures. Two indicators that capture this come from the Gallup World Poll (see *Women's views on key issues worsening*). Women's views on food costs (Ind. 2.4) and comfort with their household income (Ind. 1.4) both significantly deteriorated between 2019 and 2022, with declining scores on each indicator in more than 57 per cent of countries.

The democracy crunch

Gender equality is closely linked with democracy: it is both a consequence of greater democracy and a force that contributes to increased democratisation. But the foundations of democracies around the world are at risk because of rising economic inequality, societal and political polarisation, and the closing of civic space. Progress on gender equality will suffer as democracies weaken. On the other hand, approaches that promote gender equality would help to invigorate democracy.

Rising economic inequality

Economic inequality has been found to have serious consequences for political equality, government stability, and on whether individuals support democracy itself. In 2022, 10 per cent of the population held 76 per cent of the world's wealth. Looking at the Index, income inequality (Ind. 10.1) stagnated or got worse in three quarters of countries between 2019 and 2022; the 10 countries where the score worsened most were Malta, the Netherlands, Estonia, Mali, Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, and Colombia.

Economic inequality concentrates power – including political power – in the hands of a wealthy elite. The power that comes with that wealth helps the rich rig the rules – including tax rules, competition and monopoly rules, and media ownership – in their favour, leading to further economic inequality. Democracies that are 'captured' in this way will not be making laws and budget decisions with the rights of women and girls – let alone the most marginalised women and girls – in mind.

Countries with high economic inequality have also been found to have greater polarisation in attitudes about equality, social justice, and beliefs in democratic processes and ideals.

Economic inequality concentrates power – including political power – in the hands of a wealthy elite.

Societal and political polarisation

Political and societal polarisation makes it harder for democracies to function by diminishing a sense of shared values and trust in institutions. The rise of right-wing, nationalist, populist, and anti-democratic governments bring with them a rise in anti-feminism, as well as immediate and tangible impacts on laws, policies, and investments in women's and girls' rights to health, education, and more.

Worryingly, there is also a growing gap between the values held by young men and young women: survey data from countries including China, Germany, Poland, South Korea, Tunisia, the United States, and the UK have shown that young women's views on key social issues – such as gender equality – tend to be far more progressive than those of young men.

Civic space and repression

Freedom House's 2024 report found that global freedom declined for the 18th consecutive year, cataloguing examples of election manipulation, prohibition of political parties, and misinformation in a range of countries. In 2023, CIVICUS found that only 3.2 per cent of people lived in countries with open civic space, and nearly a third lived in countries with 'closed' civic space: where rights to peaceful assembly, association, and expression are curtailed.

The Index shows that 91 out of 139 countries were rated 'poor' or 'very poor' in an expert assessment of whether the country protects 'personal autonomy, individual rights, and freedom from discrimination' (Ind. 10.2) in 2022.

The Index also shows that, globally, women's right to openly discuss political issues, both in private and in public spaces (Ind. 10.4) saw a consistent decline from 2015 to 2022, evident across all regions, with Asia and the Pacific experiencing the most significant setbacks, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean.

"The victory of nationalist populist groups allied with conservative parties represents a significant challenge to the fulfillment of the fundamental rights of women and minorities and the upholding of democracy [in Indonesia]."

– KAPAL Perempuan, Indonesia

The safety and security crunch

The concept of 'safety and security' is often seen only through the lens of violent conflict and militarisation, and indeed both are on the rise. Safety and security for women and girls, however, is also more personal and more existential than that. For women, girls and gender expansive people, their very bodies are under attack, with gender-based violence pervasive in every region and patriarchal attacks on their sexual and reproductive health and rights increasing. At the same time the climate emergency is both an immediate and long-term threat to the lives and livelihoods of all, especially women and girls and those with historically marginalised identities.

More than one third of women worldwide are estimated to have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. Globally, in 2022, only just over half (57 per cent) of women across 139 countries said that they felt safe walking in their neighbourhood at night (Ind. 16.3).

During crises, these already-stark figures worsen as entrenched gender norms are revealed and exacerbated. In 2021, a UN Women study in 13 countries found that 50 per cent of women reported that they or a woman they knew experienced a form of violence during the pandemic. Across all humanitarian emergencies and conflict situations women and girls are especially vulnerable, facing increased risk of unwanted pregnancies, maternal mortality, child marriage and other forms of GBV.

"Resourcing feminist organisations remains crucial to defend gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights and justice (SRHRJ) for all in the current context of rising anti-gender and anti rights contexts."

– Sai Racherla, Deputy Executive Director, Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)

At the same time, women's bodies are increasingly instrumentalised and politicised, aimed at limiting their bodily autonomy. Rising conservatism in many contexts has reinvigorated patriarchy and traditional gender roles, framing feminism, the term 'gender', gender expansive identities, and sexual and reproductive rights as a threat to the family unit and society at large. The proponents of this ideology are increasingly active in multilateral spaces, posing a grave threat to previously agreed commitments to bodily autonomy and to advances made towards ensuring safe, legal access to abortion and protection for gender expansive groups.

For women, girls, and gender expansive people, the safety and security crunch hits their bodies, their choices, and their personal safety first.

Conflict

The latest Global Peace Index showed that conflict deaths in 2023 were the highest this century. At the same time, globally, military expenditure (Ind. 17.1) rose as a share of GDP between 2019 and 2022, despite fiscal constraints being the rationale for austerity measures in the majority of countries in the world (see *The resource crunch: Austerity*).

Alongside increases in military expenditure, there has been a steady rise in armed conflicts since 2010, continuing into 2024. The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries reached 614 million in 2022, 50 per cent higher than the number in 2017. Of the bottom 10 countries in the Index, all are considered by the OECD to be 'Fragile' and six are considered 'Extremely Fragile' (Afghanistan, Chad, DR Congo, Burundi, Congo, and Haiti). Substantial evidence from ongoing conflicts continually reveal the huge challenges faced by women and girls, including barriers to safe access to water, food, fuel, and shelter, increases in GBV, and decreased access to education, healthcare, and safe spaces, in addition to the breakdown of community and support structures.

Despite ample evidence that women's participation fosters more robust democracies and longer-lasting peace, women continue to face deep-rooted obstacles to direct participation in conflict resolution and peace processes; out of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022, only six included provisions specifically relating to women, girls, or gender.

"The Colombian Government, in a commitment to peace in Colombia, established its Total Peace policy, opening six negotiation processes with armed actors. This is a difficult task, especially because there is no evidence of political will from these armed groups to cease hostilities. However, women, through various social expressions – such as peaceful and feminist mobilization – maintain their demand for the end of conflicts and the construction of peace."

– Shidhjmatnj Pardo, Programme Coordinator, Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres

Climate emergency

The UN Secretary-General recently warned that we're on a "highway to climate hell," as the world hit a streak of record-breaking temperatures. Women, particularly those who live in rural areas and/or are members of Indigenous or Black communities, are disproportionately affected by climate change. The UN estimates that 80 per cent of the people displaced by climate change are women and girls.

Climate change is expected to force 101 million people – more women than men – into food insecurity by 2030. Even today, the world is already facing a food and nutrition crisis in part driven by climate change: more than 900,000 people worldwide are living in famine-like conditions right now, 10 times more than did in 2017.

In the Index, women's views on environmental policies (Ind 13.2) show dissatisfaction with current efforts to preserve the environment: 93 countries out of 139 had a 'very poor' score for this indicator in 2022.

While they are most affected by its impacts, women and girls are also key agents of change in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. Women-only community forestry groups, for example, have better results in regenerating forests. However, women are rarely included at the world's top climate decision-making tables. The Index shows that 48 countries out of 137 still have a 'very poor' score for the extent to which their country's delegation at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP) was gender balanced (Ind. 13.1).

Rich countries have a greater responsibility than poorer countries in taking action to address the climate emergency: they use six times more resources and generate 10 times the climate impacts than low-income ones. Yet their latest pledge at the 2023 UN climate conference covered just 0.2 per cent of the losses developing countries face as a result of climate change every year.

"We need to stop blaming the climate crisis on the bodies of girls and women in low-income countries. The real issue is overconsumption and fossil fuel reliance in high-income nations. It's time for these countries to take greater responsibility for the climate crisis."

– Dr. Maliha Khan, President and CEO, Women Deliver

A blueprint for governments: advancing gender equality in the face of crises

While the Index showcases where progress is and isn't happening, it also pulls out the cross-cutting themes that appear in countries and regions that are making progress. Drawing on these themes and the experience of the Equal Measures 2030 coalition, we outline seven recommendations that, taken together, provide a blueprint for governments to protect and advance gender equality for women, girls and gender expansive people in all their diversity, contributing to more resilient and prosperous societies in the face of global crises.

01.

Elevate women's and girls' leadership, power, and voice

The participation of women and girls in public life is not only a core human right but is also essential for countries' social and economic health. Research shows that increasing women's parliamentary presence can reduce polarisation, mitigate hostility between political parties and help boost feelings of trust towards politicians. Yet gender norms about leadership, as well as poverty, care burdens and violence against female public figures, often exclude women and girls from decision-making spaces.

Globally, the Index shows steady improvements on the proportion of women represented in parliament (Ind. 5.4), with nearly half (48 per cent) of countries making 'fast progress' between 2019 and 2022. The number of countries with at least 35 per cent representation of women in parliament increased from just 23 in 2015 to 39 in 2022. While these are important gains, just 12 out of 139 countries (8.6 per cent) had achieved gender parity in their parliaments as of 2022.

Meanwhile, the representation of women in ministerial and senior government roles (Ind. 5.5) remained low, despite improvements since 2015. Ninety-one countries out of 139 still had 'very poor' scores on this indicator, meaning fewer than 30 per cent of senior government roles were held by women in these countries in 2022.

"The government of Bernardo Arévalo, in an effort to rescue gender equality in decision-making positions and increase women's leadership, appointed 10 women out of 22 departmental governors in April 2024, an important position that represents the president himself in the departments."

– Danessa Luna, Executive Director, Asociación de Mujeres Generando Equidad, Liderazgo y Oportunidades (ASOGEN)

Women and girls – especially those from racialised or marginalised backgrounds and identities – continue to face significant barriers to holding leadership roles within communities, schools, businesses, and political spaces, and to claiming and holding real power once they are there.

02.

Reform and apply equality laws and policies

The definition and protection of gender equality in law is a crucial step towards achieving gender equality and can have positive effects for wider society. For example, ensuring women have equal legal rights to own land and property (Ind. 1.3) would increase food security. The process of adopting and/or reforming equality laws can engage civil society, government, lawmakers, and the wider public in debate and norm-setting, creating pressure for accountability.

While the fight to reform discriminatory laws can take decades, indicators capturing or reflecting legal foundations for gender equality can also show rapid change. On the extent of legal grounds for abortion (Ind. 5.3), six more countries received a score of 100 since 2019; as of 2022, abortion was broadly legal in 45 per cent of countries. Between 2019-2022, 29 out of 139 countries made 'fast progress' regarding laws that decriminalise, protect, or recognise 'sexual orientation and same-sex conducts' (Ind. 10.5); despite these improvements, 87 countries across income levels and regions still scored 'very poor' on this indicator in 2022. At the same time, we see that legal protections can be vulnerable to rapid rollback, as seen recently in Afghanistan, Argentina, China, Poland, South Korea, and the United States.

Where legal protection for gender equality has advanced, advocates highlight that even the best laws are insufficient in and of themselves. Law reform and policy change need to be backed up by budgets and political will for implementation, alongside social transformation work to shift harmful norms at the individual and interpersonal levels.

03.

Promote 'data feminism' and close gender-sensitive data gaps

Data feminism involves recognising the power imbalances and colonial legacies baked into statistical systems, practices, and institutions. This can be seen when considering which data are prioritised, suppressed or never collected (see *Box 1: Data gaps and the 2024 SDG Gender Index*). It can be seen in the way new data and technology frontiers – including the AI revolution – replicate existing inequalities and biases. And it can be seen in the profiles of those who hold the power and have extracted enormous private wealth from the 'data economy.'

While data feminism relates to every step of the data value chain, promoting more and better gender-sensitive data is a key priority where recent progress has been made. Since 2019, 61 per cent of countries made 'fast progress' towards more disaggregated statistics (Ind. 17.4).

Despite these improvements, as shown in Open Data Watch's *Gender Compass*, many countries still lack the resources and capacities necessary to respond to data demands, and significant gaps in geographic coverage, timeliness and disaggregation persist. National budgets for data and statistics are low, and some 40 per cent of national statistics offices saw a drop in funding during the pandemic.

Only 21 of the 32 official SDG indicators that require sex disaggregation have the latest data available for most countries, and for eight indicators no sex-disaggregated data are available at all.

Closing gender-sensitive data gaps is vital to monitor policies and inform the decisions of policymakers. But we must also go beyond this by engaging data users (especially feminist organisations and movements) as data owners, producers and advisers. This will ensure that data can be used to clearly see and upend – not reinforce – the power inequities of the past.

"In the face of interconnected global crises, our shared future demands real progress–and gender data can deliver. By making a concerted effort to close gender data gaps, governments can better understand the lived realities of their citizens and ultimately accelerate gender equality."

– Krista Jones Baptista,
Executive Director, Data2X

"Data is power. Feminist and gender data continues to disrupt what kind of data and how it is produced, analyzed and used. Today, grassroots women and girls in Kenya are reclaiming their agency as data producers, analysts and users."

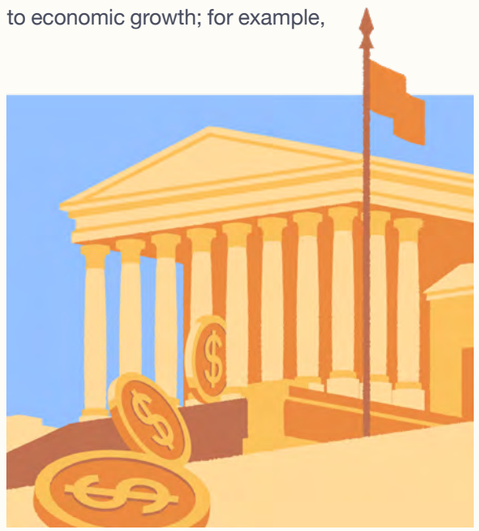
– Rachel Kagoiya, Executive Director,
GROOTS Kenya

04.

Increase resources for and investments in public services and social infrastructure, including care

Progressive taxation and investments in social protection, public services and infrastructure – including care services – are needed to fund the social transformation for gender equality.

On the revenue side, we know that tax systems around the world contain and can reinforce gender biases. Well-designed tax systems could be more equitable and contribute to economic growth; for example, a progressive income tax can boost the economic power of low-income women, especially with lenient tax treatment of, or subsidies for, expenses such as childcare.



On the expenditure side, investment in well-targeted social protection systems, such as state-supported childcare, parental leave benefits, and pensions, is crucial to close gender gaps and can increase men's and women's employment. Research in seven countries showed that investing 2 per cent of GDP in the care economy would create almost as many jobs for men as investing in construction industries and would create up to four times as many jobs for women.

Women – particularly those with other historically marginalised identities – are also more likely to rely on public services and social protection due to higher care burdens and greater likelihood of being in low-paid, informal, and vulnerable work. Women are more likely to be 'contributing family workers' (Ind. 8.2), meaning they provide vital labour but don't receive a regular wage or make the main decisions about their family businesses. 'Contributing family workers' do some of the most unprotected and invisible types of informal work. Globally, 28 per cent of women in informal employment were 'contributing family workers' compared to only 9 per cent of men.

At the same time, it is harder for women to demand better pay and conditions in the workplace as space for unionising and collective action is worsening or stagnating. Between 2019 and 2022, collective bargaining rights (Ind. 8.3) worsened in 30 countries and stayed the same in another 89 countries.

"Robust public systems and gender transformative financing are the cornerstone for achieving gender equality. Now is the time for substantial investments in the care economy!"

– Nilangi Sardeshpande,
Project Lead, SAHAJ

05.

Recognise and respond to the unique needs and life stage of adolescent girls and young women

Nearly 75 per cent of adolescent girls and young women aged 10-24 years live in countries with 'poor' and 'very poor' scores on the SDG Gender Index. Many of them face enormous challenges in the realisation of their rights during this important life stage.

The evidence is clear – when girls' rights are realised, societies flourish. Educated young women are better able to delay pregnancies and ensure the health and education of their children. If every girl worldwide received 12 years of free, safe, quality education, lifetime earnings for women could increase by $15 trillion to $30 trillion globally.

The SDG Gender Index shines a light on issues that especially affect girls and young women. Almost all countries (121 out of 139) have a 'very good' or a 'good' score when it comes to child, early, and forced marriage rates (Ind. 5.1), with 50 countries showing 'fast progress' between 2019 and 2022. Yet, one in three countries have a 'poor' or 'very poor' score on adolescent birth rates (Ind. 3.2), and 59 out of 136 countries also have a 'poor' or 'very poor' score in relation to women's access to modern contraceptive methods (Ind. 3.3).

A lack of age-disaggregated data means that the unique experiences and needs of adolescent girls can be rendered invisible and overlooked. This is evident in areas such as care work where girls often carry out most of the household chores, or health systems where services for girls can be rare.

Experiences and opportunities in this unique life stage can set the tone for an entire future. Adolescent girls and young women need greater power to help shape norms, policies, and programmes that affect their daily lives and the realisation of their rights.

"The data provided in the Index should be an urgent call to action to recognize and respond to the unique needs of adolescent girls and young women. The evidence is clear - when girls' rights are realized, everyone wins."

– Kathleen Sherwin, Chief Strategy & Engagement Officer, Plan International

06.

Invest in and create space for feminist organisations and movements

There is a clear correlation between the presence of strong feminist movements and progress towards gender equality. Feminist mobilisation was found to be the most important factor in securing action on violence against women at the national level. The impact of feminist movements extends beyond gender equality: feminist advocacy confronts discrimination, oppression and human rights violations, in turn addressing cross-cutting issues such as climate change, economic inequality and conflict.

Movements are doing this vital work despite limited access to funding, with Black feminist, LGBTQIA-focused, and youth-, Indigenous-, migrant-, and sex worker-led organisations even less likely to receive flexible, core, or multi-year funding. EM2030 calculations using new data from the OECD showed that just 0.7 per cent of all gender-related aid reached women's rights organisations in 2021-22 ($453 million out of $64.1 billion).

Feminist organisations and movements are impacted by broader trends influencing civic space. They have been adversely impacted in countries where space for civil society and NGO operations is shrinking. Almost half of countries (68 of 139) saw a decline from 2015 to 2022 regarding the extent to which women can "discuss political issues in private and public spaces" (Ind. 10.4).

To bolster healthy, functioning democracies, civic space must be protected so that civil society, particularly intersectional feminist movements fighting oppression across issues and constituencies, can flourish. More and better investment in feminist movements is needed to enable sustainable, cross-movement solidarity and action to achieve equality for all.

07.

Centre gender equality and justice at the heart of international solidarity and cooperation

International justice, cooperation and solidarity in spaces from the G20 to COP to the UN are prerequisites for sustainable worldwide progress on gender equality in the face of interconnected, cross-border crises. But in recent years these are in short supply.

Consensus in global decision-making has dropped significantly over the course of this century. In the recent pandemic treaty negotiations, the United States and EU opposed all ideas proposed by developing countries to strengthen international cooperation and equity in pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. Advocates at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2024 reported significant pushback against 'gender-expansive' text, with several Member States challenging language that has long been accepted.

"The feminist movement has a significant influence in driving change and fighting oppression. However, the experience of training alums for Women Human Rights Defenders across 19 provinces in Indonesia highlighted that they face risks ranging from threats, discrimination, exclusion, and physical and sexual violence. The state must be present to provide legal protection and an adequate budget."

– KAPAL Perempuan, Indonesia

We need continued collaboration in multilateral spaces across governments to both listen to diverse feminist civil society and to ally to protect gender equality commitments against the efforts of anti-rights actors. We need governments – such as those working towards a truly feminist foreign policy – who are loud and proud in standing up for gender equality and the rights of women and girls, even in seemingly unrelated negotiations and spaces on tax, trade, climate, democracy, conflict, and global institutional reform.

We need aid, loans, and grants to be structured in ways that enable and encourage governments to invest in gender equality and the programmes and policies that protect it. We need donor governments to prioritise gender equality as a principal outcome in their aid and, crucially, to direct more and better funding directly to feminist civil society who play an outsized role in protecting and advancing gender equality over the long term in all contexts.

Annex 1:
Index indicators, targets, and data sources

This table presents the 56 indicators that comprise the SDG Gender Index grouped by SDG. It includes the following information:

Ref: The reference number used throughout this document to highlight specific indicators.

Indicator name: The full indicator name and relevant population group(s).

Target: The targets refer to the definition of achievement (=100 points) for each indicator. Some are defined within the official SDG framework and others are based on full inclusion or on the average achievement of top-performing countries.

Data source: The original data sources for the majority of indicators in the SDG Gender Index are the relevant national statistical authorities in a country. They report data to international SDG data custodians (such as UN agencies, the World Bank and others) who compile, and may adjust, indicators in order to meet standards for international comparability. For other indicators, data are provided by market researchers (Gallup), independent NGOs (Center for Reproductive Rights, Freedom House, ILGA, Open Data Watch, World Justice Project), academic researchers (Notre Dame-Gain, Varieties of Democracy) and other organisations who carry out research (World Economic Forum).

Annex Table.

Index indicators, targets, and data sources

REF	INDICATOR NAME	TARGET	DATA SOURCE
SDG 1	**No Poverty**		
1.1	Poverty headcount ratio at $3.65 a day in 2017 PPPs (% of population)	0	World Bank
1.2	Ratio of the combined youth (0-19 years) and senior (65+ years) populations to the working-age women population (20-64 years)	Best score = 100	UN Population Division/DESA
1.3	The extent to which laws afford women and men equal and secure access to land use, control and ownership	Best score = 100	Women, Business and the Law/ World Bank
1.4	Proportion of women (15+ years) who report feeling comfortable with their household income	100	Gallup

REF	INDICATOR NAME	TARGET	DATA SOURCE
SDG 2	**Zero Hunger**		
2.1	Proportion of the population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption	0	UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
2.2	Food insecurity of women, based on the self-reported Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)	0	UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
2.3	Prevalence of anemia amongst non-pregnant women (aged 15-49 years)	0	World Health Organization (WHO)
2.4	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported having enough money to buy food that they or their family needed in the past 12 months	100	Gallup
SDG 3	**Good Health and Well-being**		
3.1	Maternal mortality ratio (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)	0	World Health Organization (WHO)
3.2	Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years)	0	UN Population Division/DESA
3.3	Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have had their need for family planning met with modern methods	100	UN Population Division/DESA
3.4	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that they are satisfied with the healthcare quality in their area	100	Gallup
SDG 4	**Quality Education**		
4.1	Proportion of girls (a year before official primary school age) who are enrolled in pre-primary education	100	UNESCO
4.2	The number of years of education that a girl entering school could expect to attain in her lifetime	17 years	UN Development Programme (UNDP)
4.3	Proportion of young women (aged 15-24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET)	0	International Labour Organization (ILO)
4.4	Proportion of women (25+ years) with at least some secondary education	100	UN Development Programme (UNDP)
SDG 5	**Gender Equality**		
5.1	Proportion of young women (aged 15-19 years) who have been married	0	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
5.2	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that, if in trouble, they have relatives or friends they can count on to help them	100	Gallup
5.3	The extent to which there are legal grounds for abortion	Best score = 100	Center for Reproductive Rights
5.4	Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments	Parity (45-55%)	Intl. Parliamentary Union (IPU)
5.5	Proportion of ministerial/senior government positions held by women	Parity (45-55%)	Intl. Parliamentary Union (IPU)

REF	INDICATOR NAME	TARGET	DATA SOURCE
SDG 6	**Clean Water and Sanitation**		
6.1	Proportion of population using at least basic drinking water services	100	WHO/UNICEF JMP
6.2	Proportion of population using at least basic sanitation services	100	WHO/UNICEF JMP
6.3	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that they are satisfied with water quality where they live	100	Gallup
SDG 7	**Affordable and Clean Energy**		
7.1	Proportion of population with access to electricity	100	World Bank
7.2	Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology	100	World Health Organization (WHO)
7.3	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that they are satisfied with the quality of air where they live	100	Gallup
SDG 8	**Decent Work and Economic Growth**		
8.1	Wage equality between women and men for similar work	Parity (1)	World Economic Forum (WEF)
8.2	Proportion of women recognized as "contributing family workers" as a % of total employment for female employment	Best score = 100	International Labour Organization (ILO)
8.3	Extent of freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in law	Best score = 0	International Labour Organization (ILO)
8.4	Extent to which the country has laws mandating women's parenthood and care equality	Best score = 100	Women, Business and the Law/ World Bank
8.5	Proportion of women who hold a bank account at a financial institution	100	World Bank
SDG 9	**Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**		
9.1	Proportion of women who have made or received digital payments in the past year	100	World Bank
9.2	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that they are satisfied with the quality of roads where they live	100	Gallup
9.3	Proportion of women with access to internet services	100	International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
9.4	Manufacturing value-added in constant 2015 US dollars as a proportion of GDP (%)	Best score = 30	UNIDO via UNSD
SDG 10	**Reduced Inequalities**		
10.1	Palma inequality ratio, the share of income of the richest 10% of the population divided by the share of income of the poorest 40%	Parity (0.97-1.03)	United Nations University (UNU-WIDER)
10.2	Level of personal autonomy, individual rights and freedom from discrimination	Best score = 16	Freedom House
10.3	Proportion of key ratified human rights instruments regarding migration	Maximum treaties = 21	UN Treaty Collection (UNTC), International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Organization for Migration (IOM)

REF	INDICATOR NAME	TARGET	DATA SOURCE
10.4	Extent to which women can openly discuss political issues in private and in public spaces	Best score = 4	Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM)
10.5	Extent to which laws criminalise, protect or recognise sexual orientation, gender identification (SOGI) and same-sex relationships	Best score = 0	Intl. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA)
SDG 11	**Sustainable Cities and Communities**		
11.1	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported having enough money to provide adequate shelter or housing in the past 12 months	100	Gallup
11.2	Greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector	0	International Energy Agency (IEA)
11.3	Proportion of women (15+ years) who report they are satisfied with public transport in their area	100	Gallup
11.4	Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure measured by the logistics performance index	Best score = 5	World Bank
SDG 13	**Climate Action**		
13.1	Extent to which the delegation representing the country at the COP meeting is gender balanced	Parity (45-55%)	Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
13.2	Proportion of women (15+ years) who report they are satisfied with efforts to preserve the environment	100	Gallup
13.3	Level of climate vulnerability	Best score = 0	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index (ND-GAIN)
SDG 16	**Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**		
16.1	Extent to which women have secure, equal and effective access to justice	Best score = 4	Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM)
16.2	Women victims of intentional homicide (per 100,000 female population)	0	UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
16.3	Proportion of women (15+ years) who report that they feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where they live	100	Gallup
16.4	Functioning of the criminal justice system – sub-index of the Rule of Law Index	Best score = 1	World Justice Project (WJP)
SDG 17	**Partnerships for the Goals**		
17.1	Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP (%)	0	World Bank
17.2	Central government debt as a percentage of GDP (%)	0	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
17.3	Proportion of women (15+ years) who reported that government corruption is not widespread in the country where they live	0	Gallup
17.4	Indicator coverage and disaggregation – sub-index of the Openness of Statistics Index	Best score = 100	Open Data Watch

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About EM2030:

Equal Measures 2030 is a coalition of national and international leaders from feminist networks, civil society, and international development. We connect data and evidence with advocacy and action on gender equality, to transform the lives of women and girls and realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The current coalition is a joint effort of:

The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) (Africa region)

Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW) (Asia region)

Asociación Generando Equidad, Liderazgo y Oportunidades – ASOGEN (Guatemala)

Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres – CLADEM (LAC region)

Data2X (Global)

GROOTS (Kenya)

KAPAL Perempuan (Indonesia)

La Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Colombia)

Plan International (Global)

Réseau Siggil Jigéen – RSJ (Senegal)

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Women Deliver (Global)

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