

# **Bending the Curve Towards Gender Equality by 2030**

## Message from EM2030's Director

2020 marks 25 years since 189 countries signed up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – an ambitious and progressive blueprint for gender equality. 2020 also marks the start of the 10-year countdown to the SDGs. The clock is ticking for governments to take action to achieve the promises made to girls and women in these ambitious frameworks.

Gender equality cuts across and throughout the entire SDG framework, and the design of the SDG Gender Index is informed by the insight that gender equality can be a catalytic policy intervention, compounding and accelerating progress across the development spectrum.

The **2019 SDG Gender Index** – the most comprehensive measure of gender equality aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – showed that gender equality is still unfinished business worldwide: across the 129 countries studied, no country has fully achieved the promise of gender equality envisioned in the ambitious 2030 Agenda. We also found that nearly half of the world's girls and women – 1.4 billion – live in countries that get a “failing grade” on gender equality, where the gender gaps are particularly acute.

Since the SDG Gender Index launched in 2019, the Equal Measures 2030 partnership has had conversations about the data with women's rights organizations, advocates and gender equality champions from across sectors. Some of the most common questions we get asked are about pace and nature of change: **are countries moving towards greater equality or in the wrong direction?** What are the prospects for bending the curve to reach the gender equality promises laid out in the SDGs by 2030?

In *Bending the Curve* we begin to answer these important questions within the limits of significant data gaps, using five of the key gender equality issues found in the SDG Gender Index (related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, girls' education, representation of women in leadership, laws on equality in the workplace and safety). Our conclusion is that **there is both reason for hope and cause for concern**. Our ability to bend the curve towards gender equality has the potential to make or break the entire 2030 Agenda.

This briefing finds that 67 countries – home to 2.1 billion girls and women – won't achieve any of the gender equality targets we studied by 2030 if their current pace of change continues. More than a third of countries studied have been moving slowly – or even in the wrong direction – on at least four of the five issues over the past decade or two. At the current rate of progress, we wouldn't reach the target of all girls and women saying they feel safe walking at night until the year 2179.

But, **on the five issues we looked at, we also found there were countries making very rapid progress** – astonishingly fast in some cases. Such rapid progress that **if all countries matched the pace of these fast movers over the next decade, nearly three quarters of the world's girls' and women could instead live in countries that had reached four or even all five of these gender equality targets**. Under this acceleration scenario, 400 million more girls and women would have access to contraception to plan if and when they have children, and 85 million more girls would complete secondary school by 2030 than if the current pace continues. These are just two examples of the potential impact on the real lives of girls and women around the world.

If there is one message to take forward in 2020 it is that **rapid change on gender equality is possible but concerted action is needed to get us there**. Now is the time for real action that will bend the curve towards gender equality.



**Alison Holder**

Director

Equal Measures 2030

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# Progress towards gender equality is

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**Globally, progress on five key gender equality issues has been slow or even flat over the past 10 to 20 years**

Half of countries – home to 2.1 billion girls and women – won't achieve any of the gender equality targets studied by 2030 if the current pace continues.

More than a third of countries have been moving slowly – or even in the wrong direction – on at least four of the five issues over the past decade or two.

At the current rate of progress we wouldn't reach the target of all girls and women saying they feel safe walking at night until the year 2179.

**But rapid change on gender equality is possible**

There are countries all around the world making very rapid progress on each one of five key gender equality issues, astonishingly fast in some cases.

In Rwanda access to contraception for girls and women moved from 12 per cent in 2000 to 69 per cent in 2018. In Ghana, just 5 per cent of girls completed secondary school in 2003 but 40 per cent did 12 years later. And several countries made rapid progress on women in ministerial roles: Uruguay (zero women ministers to 42 per cent in 15 years), Canada (30 per cent to parity in four years), and Ethiopia (10 per cent to 48 per cent in one year).

**What if every country matched the pace of the fast-moving countries over the next decade?**

Nearly three quarters of the world's girls' and women could live in countries that had reached four or even all five of these gender equality targets.

400 million more girls and women would have access to contraception to plan if and when they have children than if the current pace continues.

85 million more girls would complete secondary school than if the current pace continues.

**The five key gender equality issues we studied are:**



**Family planning**



**Girls' secondary school completion**

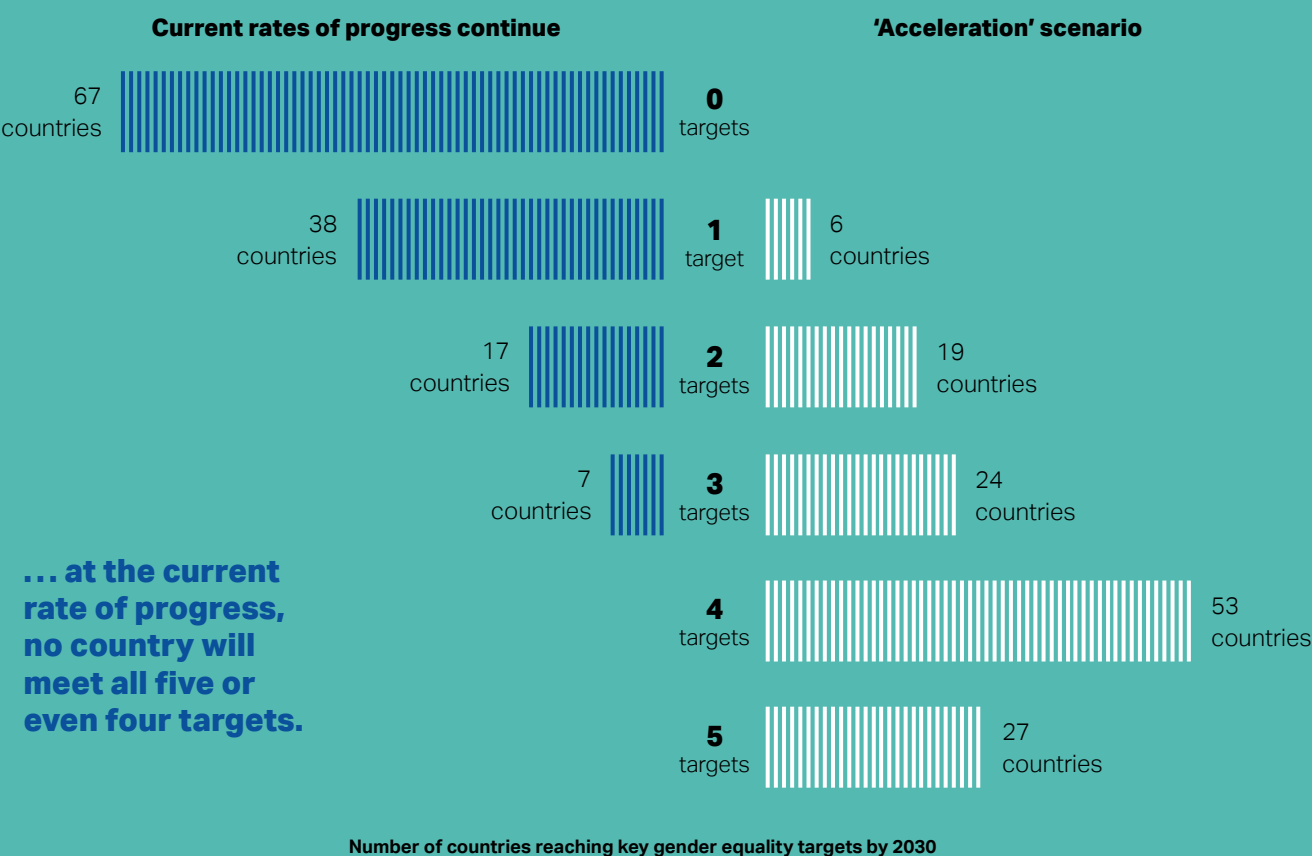
BENDING THE CURVE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY BY 2030

# happening, just not fast enough

We looked at past progress and future prospects on five key gender equality targets across 129 countries and this is what we found ...

**Figure 1** Projections of the number of countries that will achieve key SDG gender equality targets by 2030 based on existing trends and by adopting the pace of the fast-moving countries

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Women in government ministerial roles



Workplace gender equality laws



Women's perceptions of safety in public spaces at night

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**Figure 2** Acceleration needed on five key gender equality issues

Issue	 Family planning	 Girls' secondary school completion	 Women in government ministerial roles	 Workplace gender equality laws	 Women's perceptions of safety in public spaces
Relevant SDG	SDG 3	SDG 4	SDG 5	SDG 8	SDG 16
Year the global average* would meet the target, at current rate of progress	2066	2063	2066	2051	2179
Year the global average* would meet the target, if all countries matched fast movers	2028	2028	2022	2025	2032
Acceleration needed to meet target by 2030	 <b>3x</b>	 <b>3x</b>	 <b>2x</b>	 <b>2x</b>	 <b>13x</b>
Key facts	If all countries matched the pace of the fast movers, by 2030 <b>400 million more girls and women</b> would have access to contraception to plan if and when they have children, than if the current pace continues.	If countries accelerated to match the fast movers, <b>85 million more girls</b> would complete secondary education than if the current pace continues.	Where there is political will, <b>representation can change almost overnight.</b> In Ethiopia, the cabinet went from being 10 per cent women in 2018 to 48 per cent in 2019.	Changes in workplace laws in the last decade have meant that <b>215 million more women</b> are now entitled, in principle, to 14+ weeks paid maternity leave, among other benefits.	Globally there has been virtually <b>no progress on ensuring women feel safe.</b> If current rates continue, it will take more than six generations for all girls and women to feel safe walking at night.

\*These figures represent the overall global average – some countries will take more time and some will take less time to reach the target

# Summary of approach and findings

2020 marks 25 years since the landmark 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on women's rights and is just 10 years from the endpoint for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This new research sheds light on what progress has been made on a set of key gender equality issues and how much faster the world needs to move in order to reach key targets linked to the SDGs. These targets, and all gender-relevant aspects of the SDGs, are fundamental to the fulfillment of girls' and women's rights and to the achievement of sustainable development for all.

## Introduction to the five gender equality issues studied

*Bending the Curve* looks at progress in 129 countries (across five regions of the world, representing 95 per cent of the world's girls and women) and focuses on five issues that are critically important to gender equality and for which there were sufficient data available to analyse.

There is a strong rationale for the inclusion of each of the indicators and for grouping the five indicators together as a set that says something meaningful about the broader state of gender equality. The indicators cover a range of issues that speak volumes about the lived realities of girls and women around the world and capture information about their ability to participate fully in society, including whether they can control when and if they have children, whether they complete at least 12 years of schooling, and whether the law dictates equality for women at work.

**The indicators cover a range of issues that are critical to the lived realities of girls and women around the world**

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Ideally, this analysis would cover all the world's countries, rather than just 129. However, a number of countries, especially small states and states affected by instability, lack sufficient data across the indicators to be included in the 2019 SDG Gender Index or in this trend analysis (learn more about the index on page 25). There are also many issues that we would like to have captured in this research but could not due to insufficient data coverage globally (see more on Data Gaps on page 20). The value of this research is its trend analysis.

The selection of the five indicators included in *Bending the Curve* is based on:

- **Significance to girls and women:** indicators reflect a range of issues – such as economic rights, safety and violence, and political leadership – that are critical to girls' and women's rights and lived realities.
- **Sufficient data coverage over time:** data are available for the majority of the 129 countries in the SDG Gender Index over the past (at least) 10 years.
- **SDG Coverage:** the set of five indicators cover issues relevant to girls and women across the SDGs (SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 8, SDG 16).
- **Alignment with advocates' priorities:** in the 2018 EM2030 Gender Advocates Survey,<sup>1</sup> a global survey of 613 gender advocates, the four top-priority themes that emerged were gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, economic empowerment, and education.
- **Relevance across regions and countries:** the set of issues are relevant in different contexts, with good data coverage and applicability to high-, middle-, and low-income countries.

<sup>1</sup> *Equal Measures 2030, Advocates Survey 2018, (Equal Measures 2030, 2018), <https://data.em2030.org/2018-global-advocates-survey>.*

## Box 1 Issues covered in *Bending the Curve*

### Family planning

Girls' and women's bodily autonomy and access to safe, voluntary family planning is central to gender equality and is also a key factor in reducing poverty. Girls and women who are unable to access modern family planning methods and make informed decisions about their bodies face greater health risks, including contracting sexually transmitted diseases, having children at a young age, and being unable to safely space pregnancies.<sup>2</sup>

### Secondary education completion

Gender equality in education is not only an important human right, it also benefits girls, their families, and their communities. The development impact of girls' secondary education is clear: completion of secondary school is linked to decreased rates of early marriage, childbearing, and intergenerational poverty, and to increases in literacy and women's economic empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

### Ministerial roles

Women's political participation is essential for gender equality and genuine democracy. More inclusive and representative governance can be a step towards laws and policies to safeguard the rights of those who experience intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>4</sup> Yet women are critically under-represented worldwide in national parliaments and leadership roles.

### Laws on workplace equality

Legal rights for women are the building blocks of gender equality in the workforce. Yet, in many countries, discriminatory laws affect women at various stages in their lives, from when they start a job and how they are compensated, to whether they can take parental leave and how they receive a pension.<sup>5</sup> The package of laws considered for this research includes anti-discrimination, equal pay, paid leave, treatment of pregnant workers, and whether laws restrict what jobs women can do<sup>6</sup> (as measured by the World Bank *Women, Business and the Law* research).

### Women's perceptions of safety at night

Gender-based violence is persistent in all countries and regions of the world. The impact of such violence – including femicide, domestic violence, and psychological abuse – on girls' and women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health is profound.<sup>7</sup> Comparable global data on gender-based violence are patchy and beset with problems; capturing women's perceptions of their own safety when walking at night is one – albeit imperfect – way of looking at this issue.

2 WHO, *Family Planning/Contraception* (Geneva: WHO, 2018), [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception).

3 GPE, "The Benefits of Education", accessed Feb 19th 2020, [www.globalpartnership.org/education/the-benefits-of-education](http://www.globalpartnership.org/education/the-benefits-of-education).

4 UNDP, *The World's Women: Power and Decision-making* (New York: UNDP, 2015), [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015\\_chapter5\\_t.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter5_t.pdf).

5 World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law* (Washington, DC: WB, 2020), <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/reports>.

6 For the full list of the seven laws including in this workplace equality laws composite measure, see the Methodology on page 23.

7 UN Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: UN Women, 2018), [www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report](http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report).



# Key findings

The analysis overwhelmingly shows that we need to pick up the pace of progress for girls and women – and some countries demonstrate that rapid change is possible. At a global level, each issue is trending in the right direction – but diving deeper, we can see that progress cannot be taken for granted. Some countries are stagnating or even moving backwards on key issues. And globally, we are not even close to being on track to reaching these five key gender equality targets by 2030. The analysis finds that:

- **Countries are not moving fast enough:**

At current rates of progress, no country will achieve all five or even four out of five targets by the SDG deadline. Only 24 countries will achieve two or three of the five targets and 38 countries will achieve only one of the five gender equality targets by 2030. A full 67 countries (52 per cent) will not achieve any of the five targets by 2030 (see Figure 1). If all countries matched the pace of the fast-moving countries, however, almost all countries studied (123 out of 129) would achieve at least two targets.

- **Several high-income countries are stagnating or even seeing reversals in progress on some issues:** While high-income countries tend to have higher levels of gender equality overall (see Figure 3), a number of these richer countries have been moving at a very slow pace or even in the wrong direction on the issues studied. For example, Serbia and Japan saw access to family planning decrease over the past two decades.

- **Progress is evident but not always consistent:** For example, the pace of change in women's representation in ministerial roles globally grew more quickly from 2000 to 2008 but has slowed down since 2008. Countries in North America and Europe that had the highest proportion of women ministers in 2001 (holding at least 20 per cent of cabinet roles) have since seen slower rates of progress towards parity than in the region overall. We may be moving in the right direction, but not nearly fast enough and not consistently.

- **Looking issue by issue, there are countries that have made rapid progress towards gender equality over the past 10 to 20 years:**

For example, several countries (including Ghana, Angola, Belize, and Viet Nam amongst others) have been increasing the number of girls who complete secondary school by more than ten per cent per year since around 2000.

- Factors contributing to rapid progress vary by issue and by country, but **common themes include government prioritisation and commitment, coordinated investment, implementation of equality-focused policies including quotas, and the influence of gender equality advocates and champions (including feminist movements).** Systematic research about the factors behind the fast-moving countries on each issue is beyond the scope of this study, but represents an important angle for future investigation.

- **Renewed efforts are needed to reach the most vulnerable:** Girls and women facing intersecting forms of discrimination are most likely to be left behind, even when progress is made for girls and women overall. For example,

while violence against girls and women remains pervasive globally, some groups are more acutely affected: in the United States, "Native American and Alaska Native" women experience higher rates of gender-based violence than any other group; "First Nations and Inuit" women in Canada face violence at three times the rate of non-indigenous women.<sup>8</sup>

- There is hope: **some countries – across all regions of the world – are already moving at an accelerated pace on one or more of the five key gender equality issues studied.** In this way, *Bending the Curve* provides a starting point for deeper evaluation of how change for girls and women can be accelerated and how success stories can be replicated in order to bend the curve towards gender equality by 2030.

<sup>8</sup> UN Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York: UN Women, 2018), [www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report](http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/sdg-report).

# Comparing levels of gender equality and rates of progress

It is critical to consider the pace of recent **change** on five issues that affect girls and women's lives within the context of overall **levels** of gender equality. Figure 3 combines these two important aspects of measuring progress, using country scores on the 2019 SDG Gender Index and Bending the Curve's trend analysis on five key issues drawn from the Index. The 2019 SDG Gender Index presented a snapshot of the state of girls and women around the world, comparing 129 countries across 51 gender issues and 14 SDGs.

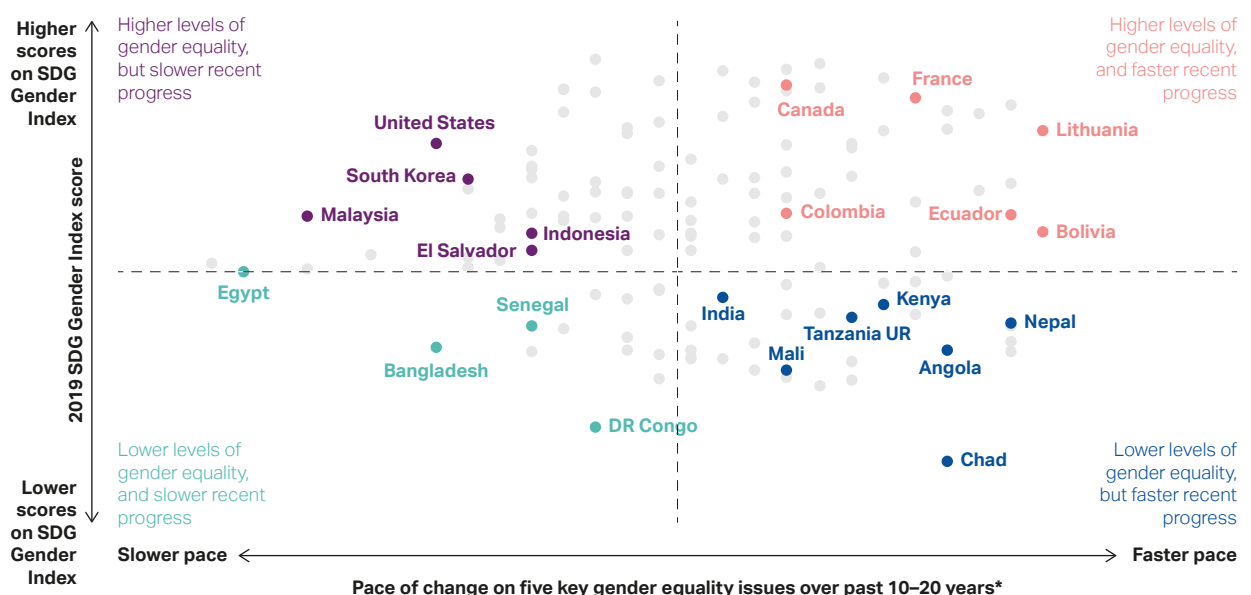
Above the horizontal line are countries with relatively high levels of gender equality as measured by the index. Yet some have been slow to make progress in recent years (**top left quadrant**): this may be because countries are close to or have met targets (e.g. girls' secondary education, workplace equality laws), so their starting point makes rapid change challenging. However, there are differences amongst countries with similar levels of gender equality. The United States and South Korea, for example, stand out as countries with fairly high levels of gender equality (though not as high as similarly wealthy countries) that are moving slowly or persistently falling short on some issues (e.g. workplace equality laws, women's representation in politics).

Other countries with relatively high levels of gender equality have made faster progress in recent years (**top right quadrant**). For example, Lithuania, Portugal, and Romania started at lower levels of gender equality in the baseline year across all indicators compared to other European countries, so they were able to make quicker leaps (e.g. Lithuania had a 30-percentage point increase in women feeling safe, Portugal a 20-percentage point increase in women ministers, and Romania a 25-percentage point increase in family planning access).

Many countries below the horizontal line have low levels of gender equality but are managing to progress despite limited resources (**bottom right quadrant**). Factors contributing to rapid pace of change vary by issue and country. In some cases, change is caused by government prioritization and investment in gender equality. In other cases, economic development or transition out of conflict may spur change.

There are also countries with low levels of gender equality that are progressing slowly or backsliding (**bottom left quadrant**). Egypt and Bangladesh, for example, are less than half-way to the target for women's economic equality, and neither has progressed on the indicator since the baseline year.

**Figure 3** Levels of overall gender equality compared with the pace of change since early 2000s



\*For results for all countries, please visit the Gender Advocates Data Hub: [data.em2030.org](https://data.em2030.org)

Source: Equal Measures 2030.

# Key findings by issue

Significant acceleration globally is needed on all of the gender equality issues studied, but the end target is closer on some issues than others:

Progress on **access to family planning** needs to accelerate globally by **three times** to reach the target by 2030. This would lead to over 400 million more girls and women having access to contraception to plan if and when they have children than if the current pace continued to 2030.

The world also needs to move **three times** faster than it has over the past 10 to 15 years to ensure that every girl **completes secondary school** by 2030. 85 million more girls would complete secondary school by 2030 if countries moved at this accelerated pace than if the current pace continues.

Just 23 per cent of **government minister posts globally are held by women** and 77 million girls and women live in countries that do not have a single female minister. More than 650 million girls and women in 64 countries have never had an elected or appointed female head of state or government. Progress on this issue has slowed in recent years and 40 countries have moved backward since 2001.

Progress needs to accelerate by **nearly two times** to ensure women are equally represented in the most powerful political positions by 2030.

In 2009, just 16 countries (all in Europe and North America) received a top score of 100 (based on data from the World Bank) for their **workplace equality laws**. By 2020, this number more than doubled to 36 countries (spread across four regions). We need 93 countries to bring their laws up to this standard by 2030 to meet the target globally (an acceleration in pace of **more than two times**). Changes in workplace laws in the last decade have meant that 215 million more women are now entitled, in principle, to 14+ weeks paid maternity leave, among other benefits.

Nearly half of women globally don't **feel safe walking at night** and this figure has barely changed since 2006. In fact, perceptions of safety worsened in nearly half of countries studied between 2006–2018. At the current rate of progress we wouldn't reach the target of all girls and women saying they feel safe walking at night until the year 2179 – more than six generations from now. Progress needs to accelerate by **nearly 13 times times** – the greatest acceleration needed across the five issues studied – to ensure that by 2030 every girl and woman reports feeling safe.



Photo: European Week of Action for Girls

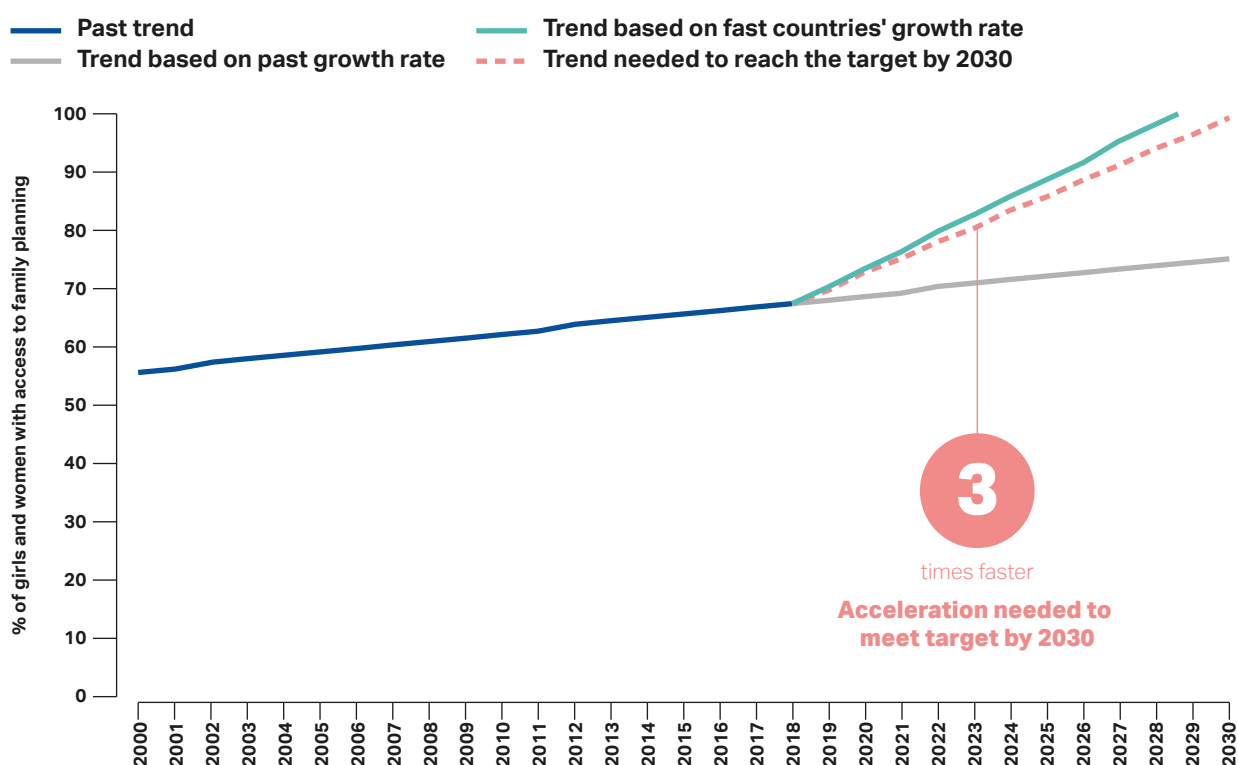


# Access to modern family planning

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Access to safe, voluntary modern methods of contraception is central to gender equality. The indicator used to measure access is the proportion of women married or in a union (aged 15–49 years) whose need for family planning is met with modern methods. It is indicator reference 3c in the SDG Gender Index and is an official SDG 3 indicator. Data coverage is from 2000 to 2018 and the data source is UNPD. There are new UN estimates available to measure both married and unmarried women, but we have retained this indicator to be consistent with the data used in the 2019 SDG Gender Index.

**Figure 4** Past trend and projected growth scenarios for change in access to modern family planning methods, 2000–2030



Source: UNPD, authors' calculations

## Key facts and figures

% of girls and women with access to family planning, globally (2000)	55.7%
% of girls and women with access to family planning, globally (2018)	67.7%
Average annual rate of change, 2000–2018	1.08% per year
Rate of change needed to reach the target by 2030	3.31% per year
Year in which the target (100% girls and women) will be reached at current rate of change	2066
Year in which the target will be reached if all countries match fast movers	2028

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- Access to modern methods of family planning increased slowly between 2000 and 2018, from 56 per cent of girls and women globally to 68 per cent. In 14 countries the proportion of women with access to modern methods of family planning actually *decreased* in this time.
- If all countries moved as fast as the fast-moving countries, 400 million more girls and women would have access to contraception to plan if and when they have children by 2030 than if the current pace continues.
- Europe and North America had the highest levels of access, but very few gains between 2000 and 2018, and seven countries in the region slightly declined. Up to one in five women lack access to modern methods of family planning.
- Sub-Saharan Africa saw the strongest gains: the regional average improved from just 32 per cent in 2000 to 54 per cent in 2018 and seven countries saw improvements of more than 30 percentage points in access to family planning. Access to family planning correlates with lower levels of births amongst adolescent girls (see Figure 5).

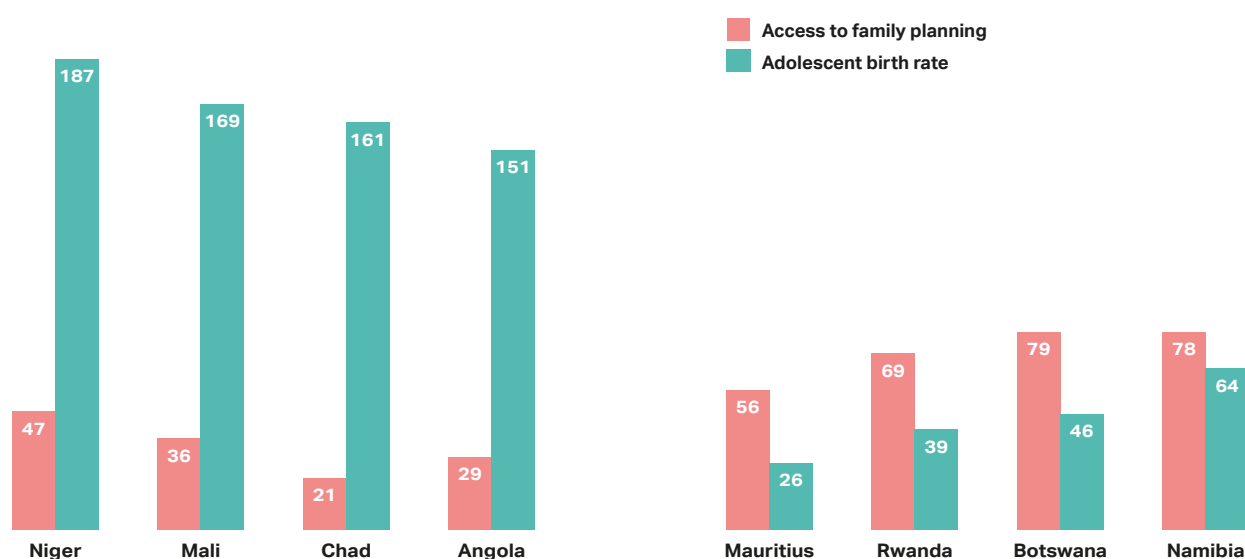
#### 5 countries with highest % of girls and women with access to modern family planning (2018)

China	94.8%
United Kingdom	94.8%
France	90.7%
Thailand	90.0%
Finland	89.9%

#### 5 countries with fastest average annual rates of change (2000–2018)

Rwanda	10.1%
Ethiopia	8.6%
Burkina Faso	6.9%
Sierra Leone	6.8%
Mauritania	5.7%

**Figure 5** Comparing access to family planning and adolescent birth rates in eight Sub-Saharan African countries, 2018



Source: UN Population Division, WHO

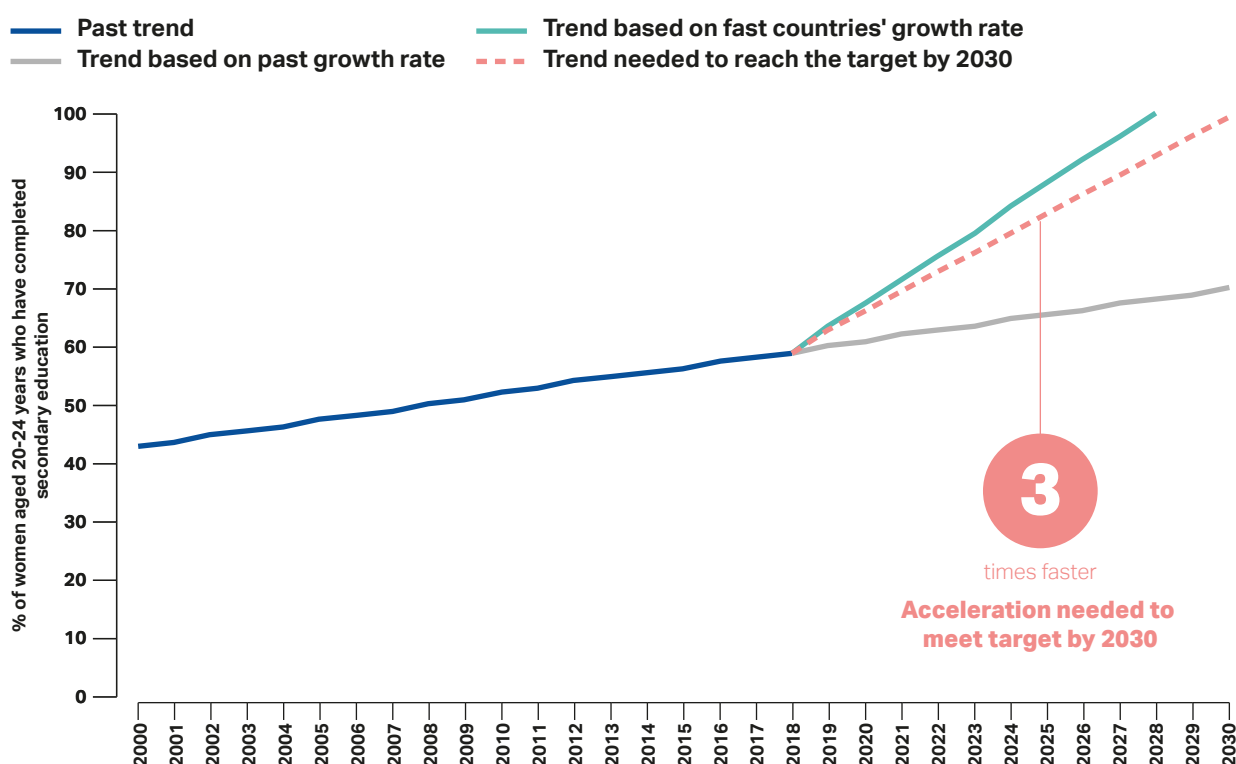
Notes: Access to family planning is the % of women married or in a union, aged 15–49 years, whose need for family planning is met; the adolescent birth rate is the number of births to women aged 15–19 years per 1,000 women.



# Girls' completion of secondary education

Completing secondary education is a fundamental right for girls. It has a profound impact on a girl's individual opportunities but also positively affects broader society. The indicator used is the share of women aged 20–24 years who completed secondary education. This is indicator reference 4a in the SDG Gender Index and is related to SDG indicators for Goal 4. Data coverage is varied for individual years from 2000 to 2018 and the data sources are UNESCO, UNICEF, DHS and Barro and Lee.

**Figure 6** Past trend and projected growth scenarios for girls' upper secondary education completion rates, 2000–2030



Source: UIS, authors' calculations

## Key facts and figures

Percentage of women who completed secondary school, globally (early 2000s)	43.2%
Percentage of women who completed secondary school, globally (2018)	59.3%
Average annual rate of change, 2000–2018	1.77% per year
Rate of change needed to reach the target by 2030	4.46% per year
Year in which the target (100% women, aged 20–24 years) will be reached at current rate of change	2063
Year in which the target will be reached if all countries match fast movers	2028

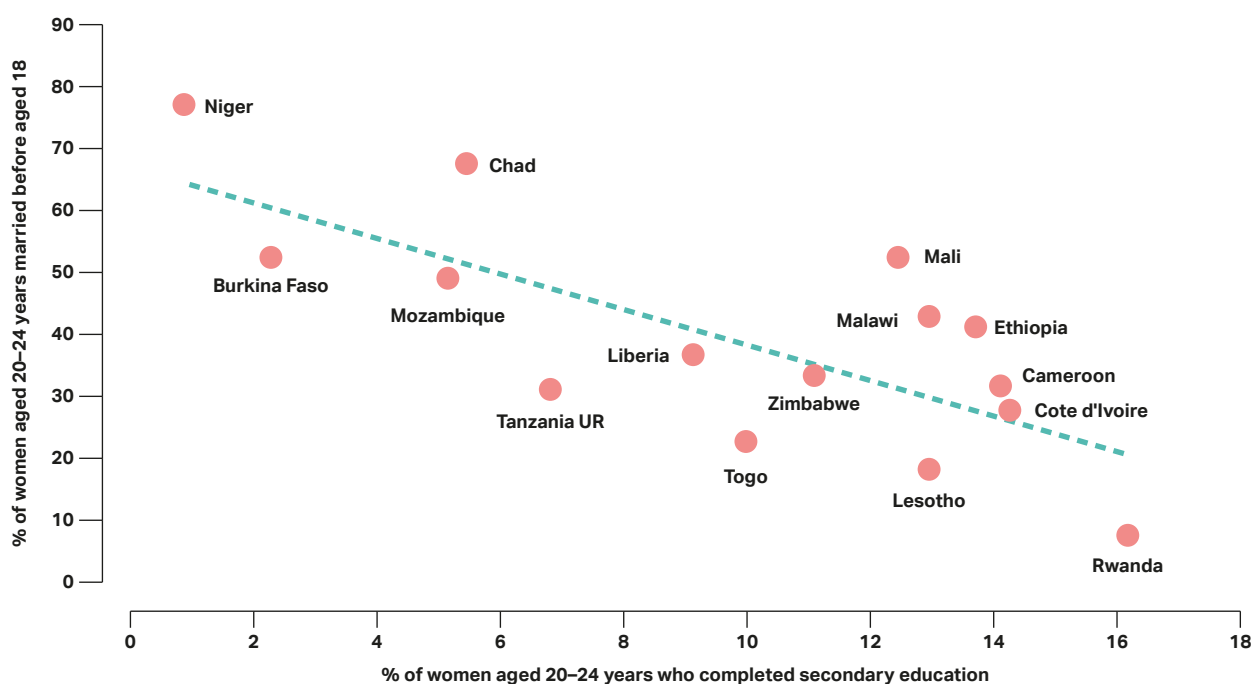


- At the current global rate of change, 24 countries will meet the target of universal secondary education by 2030. If all countries matched the pace of the fast-moving countries, 85 million more girls would complete secondary school by 2030 than if the current pace continues.
- 14 countries saw rates of upper secondary completion go in the wrong direction over the past 10 to 20 years among women 20–24 years-old. These were mostly small declines but significant in the cases of Russia, Egypt, Sri Lanka and Bulgaria.
- 28 countries, coming from every region and income level, recorded improvement of more than 3 per cent per year in girls' secondary completion rates. High-income countries making progress included Germany, Hungary and Saudi Arabia.
- Higher rates of secondary education correlate with lower levels of marriages among women of the same age group (20–24 year-olds), as illustrated by Rwanda, Niger and other African countries (see Figure 7).

**Percentage of girls who completed secondary school in four countries that have also made rapid progress on the indicator**

	Period	Annual growth rate	Completion rate (latest year)
Ghana	2003–2015	20.0%	41.2%
Angola	2007–2016	14.7%	52.7%
Belize	2006–2016	13.2%	51.0%
Viet Nam	2000–2014	10.3%	60.4%

**Figure 7** Where secondary completion rates are higher, child marriage rates are lower in sub-Saharan Africa, 2018



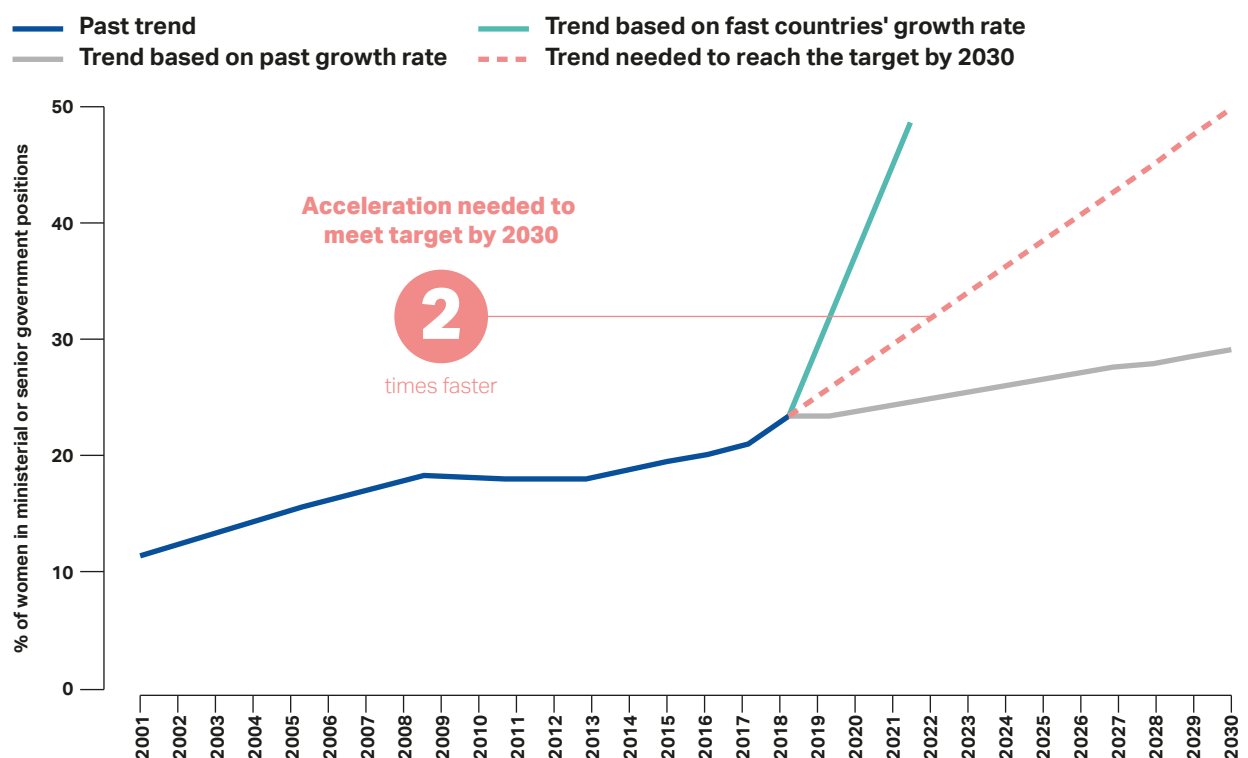
Source: UIS, UNICEF



# Ministerial or senior government positions held by women

Women's political participation is essential for gender equality and genuine democracy. The indicator used to measure representation is the proportion of women who hold ministerial or cabinet-level senior government roles. This is indicator reference 5e in the SDG Gender Index and it is related to SDG indicators for Goal 5. Data coverage is from 2001 to 2019 and the data source is the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

**Figure 8** Past trend and projected growth scenarios for proportion of women in ministerial or senior government positions, 2001–2030



Source: IPU, authors' calculations

## Key facts and figures

Percentage of ministerial roles held by women (2001)	11.1%
Percentage of ministerial roles held by women (2019)	23.2%
Average annual rate of change, 2001–2019	4.18% per year
Rate of change needed to reach the target by 2030	7.24% per year
Year in which the target (50% women) will be reached at current rate of change	2066
Year in which the target will be reached if all countries match fast movers	2022

- The pace of progress on gender parity in political leadership is slowing: the pace of change from 2008 onwards is slower than between 2000–2008, and 40 countries have slid backwards since 2001.
- Gender parity can be reached rapidly when commitments are made by leaders: in Ethiopia, parity in the cabinet was reached by going from two women of 20 ministers (10 per cent) in 2018 to 10 women of 21 ministers (48 per cent) in 2019.
- In 2019, 77 million girls and women live in six countries without any women in ministerial roles. Worldwide, only Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Rwanda, South Africa, and Sweden have reached parity in both parliaments and cabinets.
- Asia and the Pacific and the Middle East and North Africa have lower numbers of women in parliaments and cabinets compared to all other regions (see Figure 9), and Asia and the Pacific has the slowest pace of change.

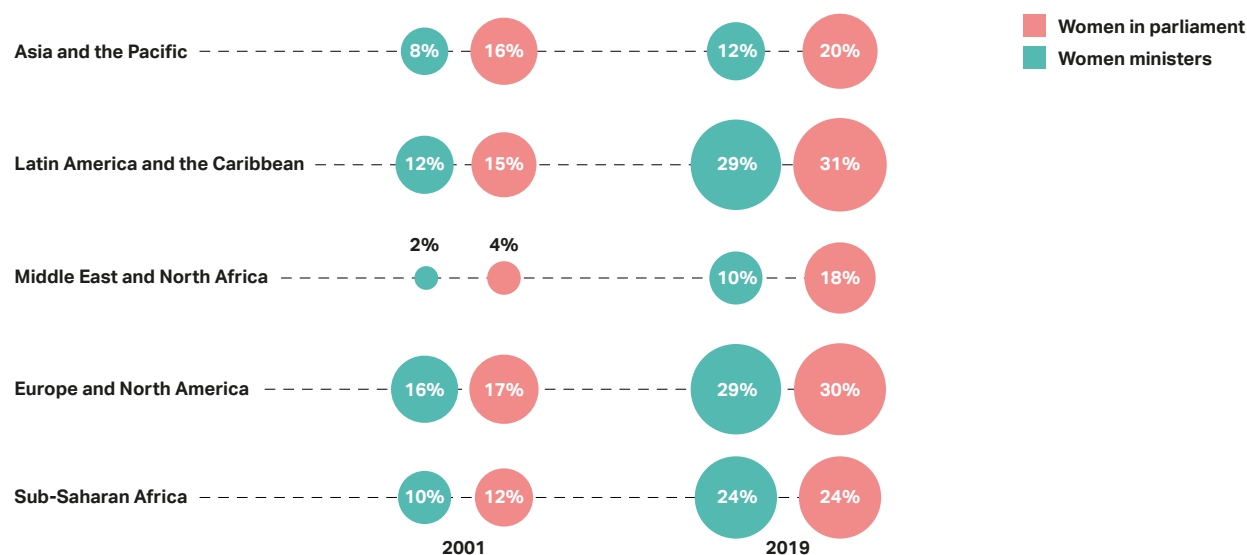
#### Countries with highest % of women in ministerial or senior government roles, 2019

Spain	64.7%
Nicaragua	55.6%
Sweden	54.5%
Albania	53.3%
Colombia	52.9%
Costa Rica	51.9%
Rwanda	51.9%
Canada	50.0%

#### Countries with fastest annual rates of change (2001–2019)

Bolivia	10.9%
Nigeria	10.5%
Armenia	9.6%
Japan	9.3%
Guatemala	8.9%
Morocco	8.9%
Brazil	8.4%
China	7.3%

**Figure 9** Percentage of women in parliaments and cabinets by region, 2001 and 2019



Source: IPU, authors' calculations

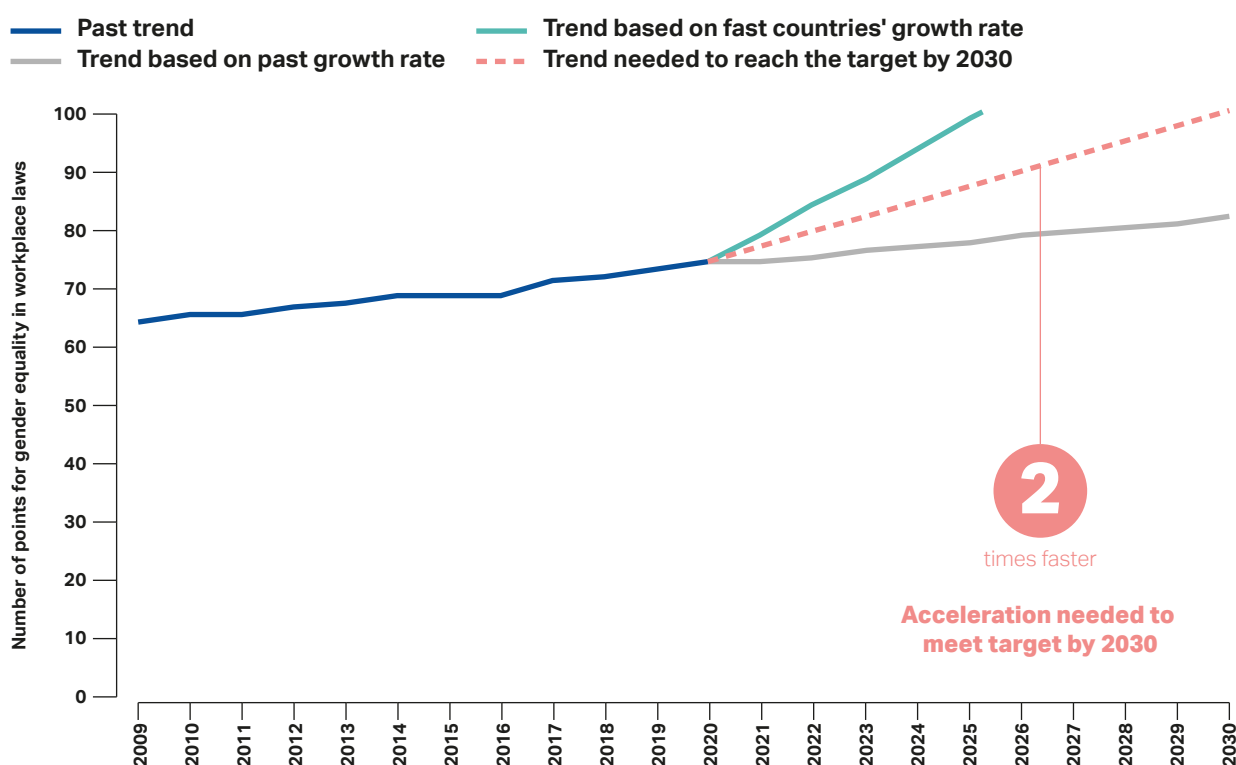


# Laws on workplace equality

DATA.EM2030.ORG

In many countries, legal systems do not protect women against discrimination in the workforce. The indicator that captures the extent to that countries have laws mandating gender equality in the workplace comprises seven laws (including anti-discrimination, equal pay, paid leave, treatment of pregnant workers, and laws that put restrictions on the types of jobs women can do) assessed by the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law (WBL) research. This is indicator 8d in the SDG Gender Index and is related to SDG indicators for Goal 8. Data coverage is from 2009 to 2020 and the data source is WBL.

**Figure 10** Past trend and projected growth scenarios for laws on gender equality in the workplace, 2009–2030



Source: Women, Business and the Law, authors' calculations

## Key facts and figures

Average score for key workplace equality laws (2009)	64.5/100
Average score for key workplace equality laws (2020)	74.3/100
Average annual rate of change, 2009–2020	1.29 points per year
Rate of change needed to reach the target by 2030	3.01 points per year
Year in which the target (all countries score 100) will be reached at current rate of change	2051
Year in which the target will be reached if all countries match fast movers	2025

BENDING THE CURVE TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY BY 2030

- In 2020, every region except the Middle East and North Africa has at least one country that meets the target for workplace equality laws.
- In 2009, just 16 countries (all in Europe and North America) had met the target for workplace equality laws. This number more than doubled to 36 countries (across four regions) by 2020. Ninety-three more countries must change laws to meet the target by 2030.
- The number of girls and women living in countries with the mandated right to 14+ weeks paid maternity leave increased from 862 million in 2009 to 1,360 million in 2020.
- Even though workplace equality laws are changing in many countries, levels of pay inequality remain high (see Figure 11). More needs to be done in every country to ensure workplace equality laws are fully implemented.

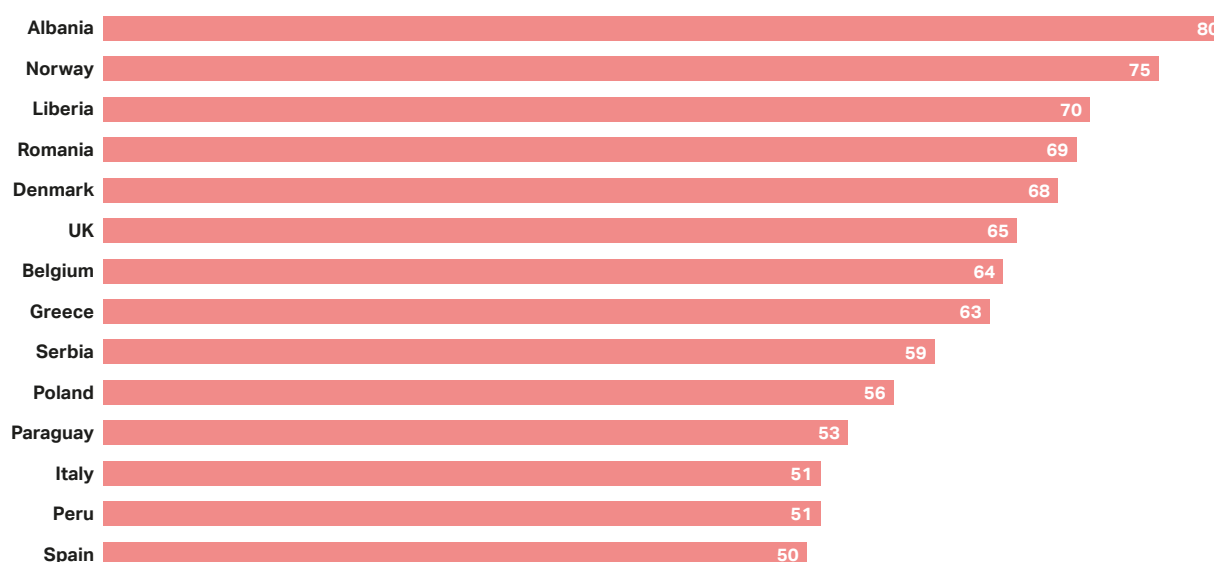
## In 2020, just 36 countries have met the target for laws protecting women against discrimination in the workplace

### Share of women (15–49 years) with legal right to paid maternity leave, 2009 and 2020

	% of women, 15–49 years	
	2009	2020
Asia and the Pacific	3%	9%
Europe and North America	54%	63%
Latin America and Caribbean	16%	18%
Middle East and North Africa	48%	64%
Sub-Saharan Africa	28%	41%
Global average	18%	25%

	No. of women 15–49 years (in millions)	
	2009	2020
Asia and the Pacific	37.8	121.6
Europe and North America	202.4	233.5
Latin America and Caribbean	28.8	38.4
Middle East and North Africa	48.5	81.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	57.2	114.4
Global total	374.7	589.6

**Figure 11** Proportion of World Economic Forum (WEF) survey respondents who reported that gender wage equality was achieved in their country, 2018



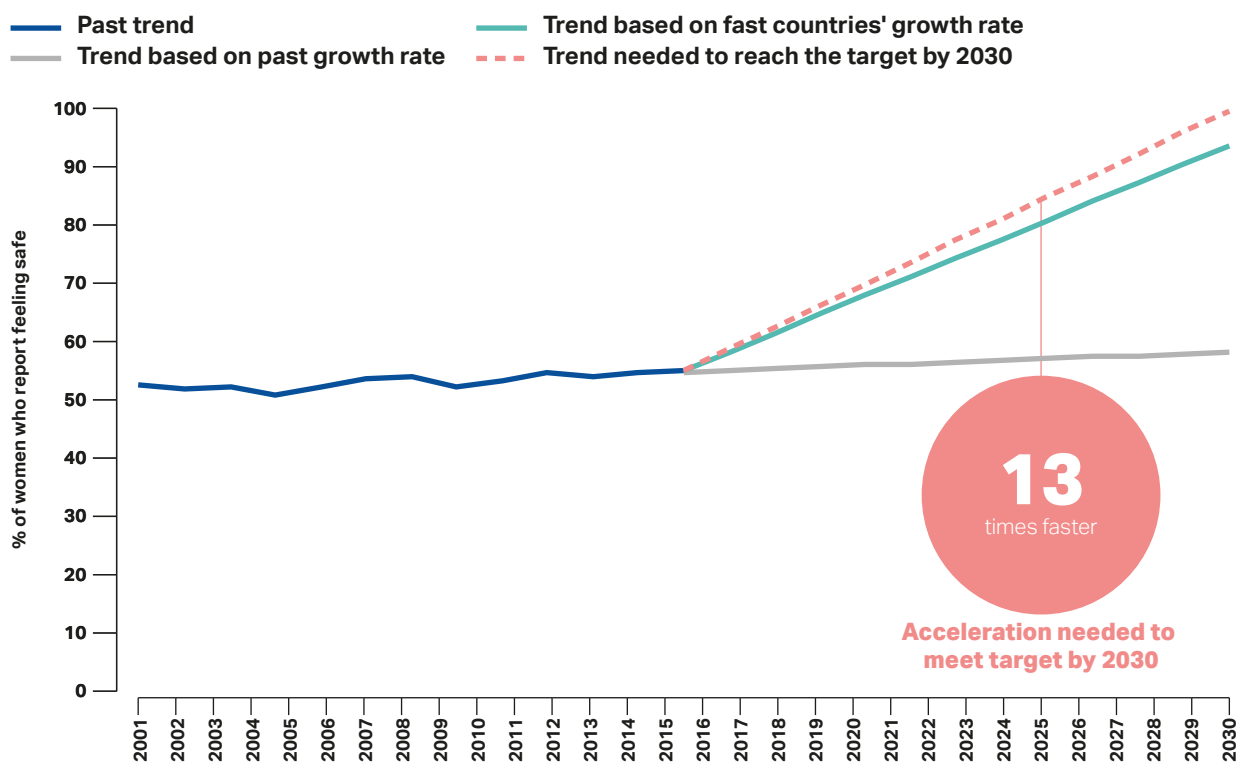
Source: World Economic Forum, 2019



# Women's perceptions of safety

Gender-based violence is persistent in all countries of the world and the impact of such violence on women's physical and mental health is profound. While comparable global data on gender-based violence are not available for many countries; women's perceptions of their own safety is one – albeit imperfect – proxy for gender-based violence. The indicator used is the percentage of women aged 15+ who report that they “feel safe walking at night in the city or area where you live.” This is indicator 11c in the SDG Gender Index and an official SDG indicator for Goal 16 (16.1.4). Data coverage is varied, with data available starting between 2001 and 2006 and running to 2018 and the data source is Gallup.

**Figure 12** Past trend and projected growth scenarios for change in women's perception of safety, 2001–2030



Sources: Gallup, authors' calculations

## Key facts and figures

% of women globally who say they feel safe walking at night (2001/2006)	52.6%
% of women globally who say they feel safe walking at night (2018)	55.1%
Average annual rate of change, 2001/2006–2018	0.40% per year
Rate of change needed to reach the target by 2030	5.08% per year
Year in which the target (100% women) will be reached at current rate of change	2179
Year in which the target will be reached if all countries match fast movers	2032



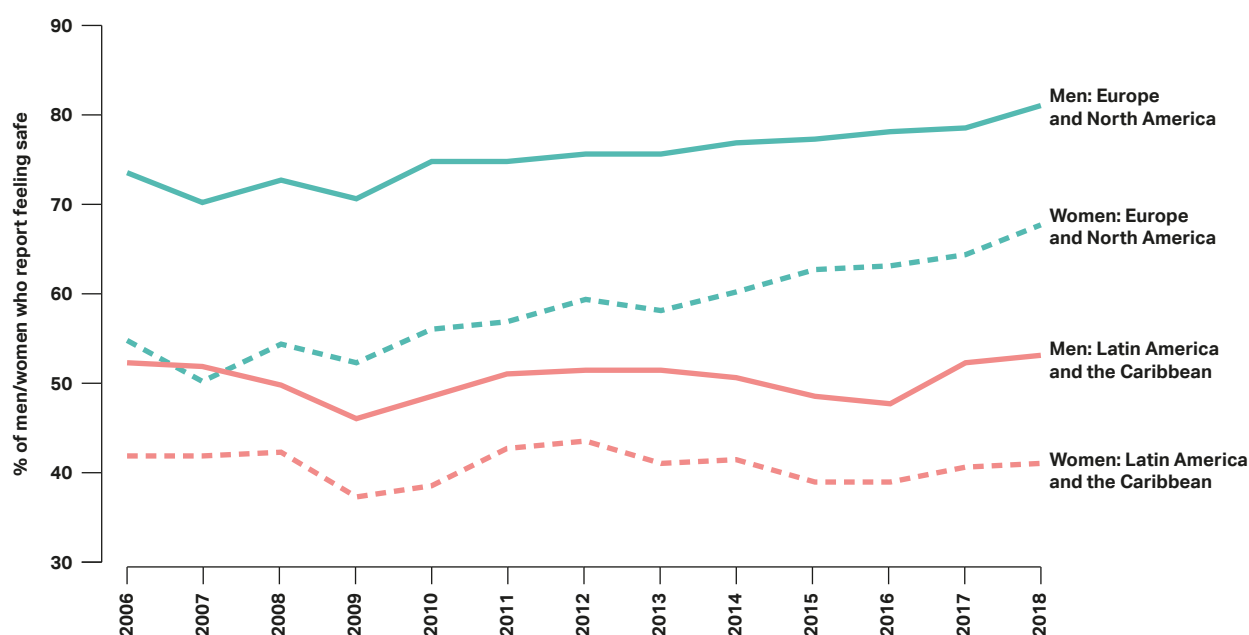
- Globally there has been virtually no progress on ensuring women feel safe – the trendline is almost flat. If current rates continue, it will take more than six generations for all girls and women to feel safe walking at night.
- Perceptions of safety walking at night worsened in nearly half (43 per cent) of countries studied between 2006 and 2020. In over half of the countries where perceptions of safety declined most, no legislation exists to address domestic violence.
- In Europe, four countries were the most improved: Czechia, Russia, Lithuania and the United Kingdom.
- More than 500 million women worldwide live in countries where less than half of women feel safe. Yet higher proportions of women in Latin America and the Caribbean consistently report feeling unsafe than women in all other regions (see Figure 13).
- Perceptions of women show that they feel far less safe than men in all regions and this fact has persisted throughout the 2000s (see Figure 13 for a breakdown by gender in two regions).

#### 10 countries with steep declines in percentage of women who say they feel safe (early 2000s–2018)

Mauritania	-28.0%
Niger	-27.0%
Tunisia	-25.0%
Senegal	-21.0%
Venezuela	-21.0%
Madagascar	-19.9%
Myanmar	-19.9%
Yemen	-18.0%
Mexico	-18.0%
Mali	-17.0%

## More than 500 million women live in countries where less than half of women feel safe

**Figure 13** Perceptions of safety in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe and North America by gender, 2006 to 2018



Source: Gallup

# Data gaps

Data gaps impede the measurement and trend analysis of many indicators of gender equality. In pulling indicators from the 2019 SDG Gender Index to use in this trend analysis, there were significant constraints in terms of country coverage and time series that extend back far enough to be used.

More broadly, the lack of sufficient data coverage is linked to gender discrimination and a lack of prioritisation of issues that affect girls and women in many data systems. Some issues have far better data differentiated by gender (as well as age, diversity and other key characteristics) than others – education and health indicators lead the way in terms of clarity, comparability, and country coverage. In addition, close to 80 per cent of countries worldwide regularly produce sex-disaggregated statistics on mortality, labour force participation, and workforce training.<sup>9</sup> Yet less than a third of countries disaggregate official statistics by gender on other measures that are critical to gender equality, including informal employment, ownership of businesses, violence against women, and unpaid work.<sup>10</sup>

## The lack of sufficient data coverage is linked to gender discrimination in many data systems

Quality data are essential to measuring progress towards all of the SDGs. Currently, less than one quarter of the 232 official indicators used by the UN to measure progress towards the SDGs refer explicitly to girls or women or specify disaggregation by sex. And – based on analysis by EM2030 partner Data2X in their *Ready to Measure II* report – for the 53 indicators in the SDGs that relate specifically to gender, only 15 are generally available and sufficiently well-defined to measure at present.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the ways forward include using existing data sources in new ways and mining innovative new data sources. First, existing international databases and censuses, micro-level surveys, and service and administrative records (for example through hospitals, schools, civil registries, tax authorities) often have data that could be disaggregated by sex – but are not currently – and analysed to address gender data gaps. Second, new data sources, including ‘big data’, hold the potential to fill some gender data gaps and provide deep insights into the lives of girls and women.<sup>12</sup>

The current gap in financing a fully functioning gender data system in lower-income countries has been estimated at between USD \$170 and \$240 million per year,<sup>13</sup> between now and 2030. More work needs to be done to map areas for investment and estimate costs: together with their partners, Data2X is taking a leading role in estimating the real costs of financing gender data gaps for the SDGs. We know that in addition to real financial investment, it will take time, political will, and strong advocacy to both build capacity and produce the indicators needed to monitor the SDGs.

9 Data2X, Grantham, K, *Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update*, (Washington, DC: Data2X, 2020), <https://data2x.org/resource-center/mapping-gender-data-gaps-an-sdg-era-update/>.

10 Ibid.

11 Data2X, Open Data Watch. *Ready to Measure: Phase II*, (Washington, DC: Data2X, 2019), <https://data2x.org/resource-center/ready-to-measure-phase-ii/>.

12 For more on the potential of big data for gender equality, see: McKinsey Global Institute, *Future of Women in the Workplace*, (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019), [www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-future-of-women-at-work-transitions-in-the-age-of-automation](http://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-future-of-women-at-work-transitions-in-the-age-of-automation).

13 Data2X, Grantham, K, *Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update*, (Washington, DC: Data2X, 2020), <https://data2x.org/resource-center/mapping-gender-data-gaps-an-sdg-era-update/>.

# Leaving no one behind

## Averages mask inequalities

*Bending the Curve's* findings give an idea of the global acceleration needed to meet targets for five gender equality issues. But these findings must be considered alongside the recognition that rates of progress vary widely for different groups of girls and women.

National averages can mask stark differences in opportunities, outcomes, and fulfillment of rights for certain groups of girls and women – including rural girls and women, ethnic or religious minorities, girls and women with disabilities, widows, sex workers or LGBTQ+ women, and refugees or internally displaced people. Measuring progress based on averages – as much of the 2030 Agenda

does – runs the risk of failing to identify and address pockets of extreme inequality while masking intersecting forms of discrimination.

## Example: Reaching women from poorer backgrounds and in rural areas with family planning

Regardless of a country's income level, the richest quintile of the population on average has the most access, and the poorest has the least access, to family planning. And across the board, women in urban areas are better able to meet their demand for modern contraception than those living in rural areas. In 2017, there was a 12 per cent gap globally between women living in urban and rural areas, with the greatest gap in sub-Saharan Africa (17 per cent).

Yet many countries have made significant progress in expanding coverage of contraceptive services in recent years, and some countries have also been successful in reducing inequalities of access. Data from Rwanda and Lesotho (see Figure 14) illustrate that both can be done – and, importantly, that comparing the national averages alone does not give the full picture about gaps and persistent inequalities between groups of women.

## Measuring progress based on averages runs the risk of failing to identify and address pockets of extreme inequality while masking intersecting forms of discrimination

### Box 2 Averages can hide slow progress or backsliding for some groups

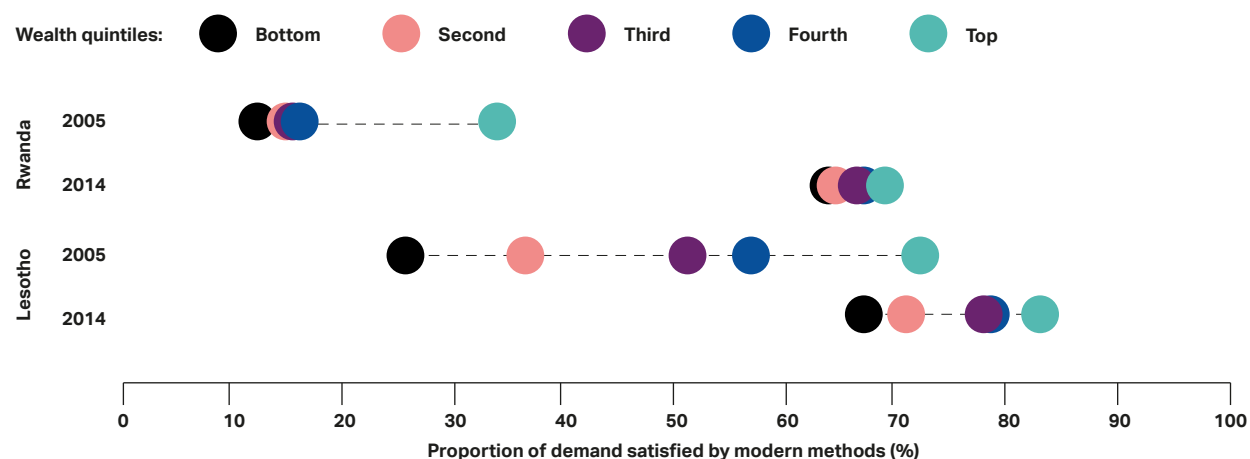
- Before Syria descended into civil war, the health system offered free family planning that was used by 58 per cent of women in 2007. Yet a UNFPA survey among Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2013 found that contraception use had dropped to 27 per cent among non-pregnant married women.
- Sierra Leone saw significant increases in secondary school completion rates for girls between 2008 and 2016, but the benefits have not been shared equally. Girls from better-off families made up most of the increase, and completion rates have barely moved for girls in the poorest two quintiles.
- The proportion of women in cabinet-level positions in the United States has increased 1.6 per cent per year since 2001, but representation of African American women has not: only five African American women have ever held US cabinet posts and only two since 2001.
- Data concerning women's legal rights focus on the most populous groups, which may mean that family law that differs across religions or restrictions that apply only to minority populations are omitted.

Sources: UNFPA, "Why Isn't Family Planning Prioritized in Refugee Settings?," (NY: UNFPA 2013), [www.unfpa.org/news/why-isnt-family-planning-prioritized-refugee-settings](http://www.unfpa.org/news/why-isnt-family-planning-prioritized-refugee-settings); UIS (Geneva: 2020), <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/sl>; World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law*, (Washington, DC: 2020), <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/reports>.

In both countries, rates of change in access to family planning have been fastest for the countries' poorest women over the past decade. But while Lesotho has a higher total proportion of demand for family planning met by modern contraception (75 per cent of all women in 2015) compared to Rwanda (66 per cent in 2014), Rwanda effectively closed gaps among all five wealth quintiles within a decade, whereas Lesotho still has sizeable gaps between different wealth quintiles.

These examples highlight how some groups of women may be hidden in stories of overall progress towards gender equality. Fulfilling the principle of leave no one behind will require raising awareness about discrimination, expanding information on vulnerable groups that have historically been invisible in official statistics and other data, supporting vulnerable groups as right holders, and pushing policymakers to make concerted policy efforts to reach those groups.

**Figure 14** Proportion of demand for family planning satisfied by modern contraception in Rwanda and Lesotho, by wealth quintile



Source: UNFPA, *The State of the World Population 2017*

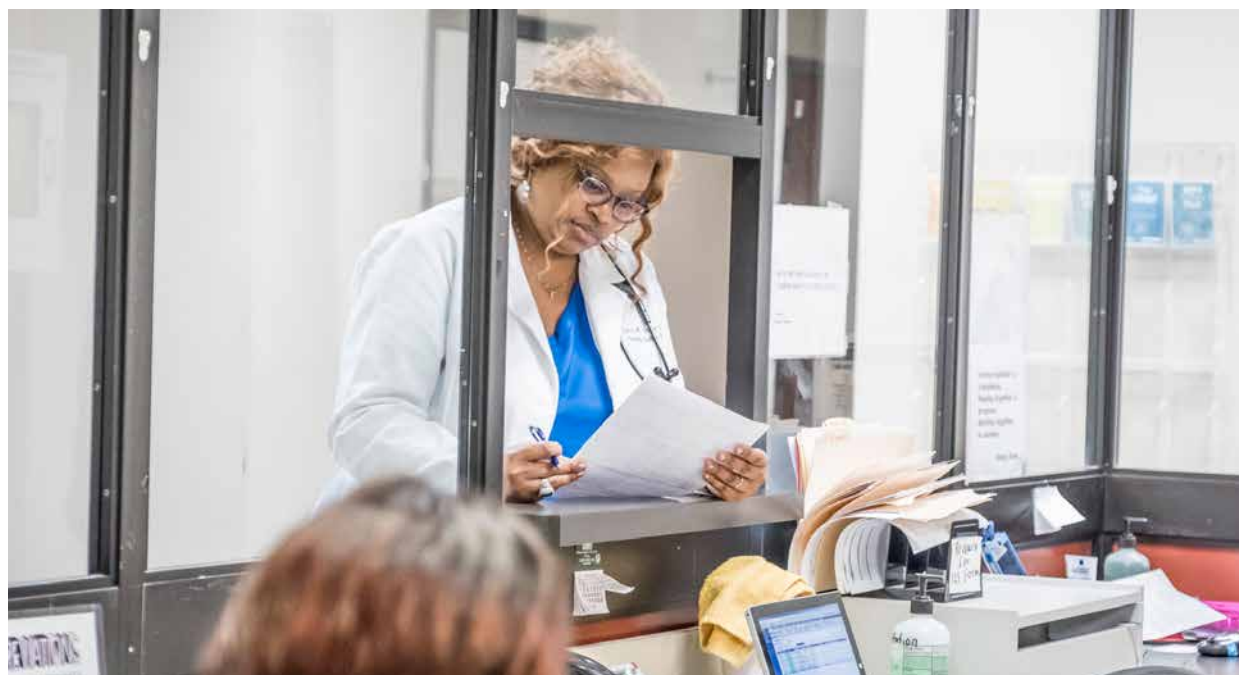


Photo: Nina Robinson/The Verbatim Agency/Getty Images

# Methodology

This section describes the methodological approach and serves to answer the two research questions:

- If global gender equality trends continue, how close will we be to achieving gender targets for the SDGs in 2030; and,
- If global gender equality trends followed the average rate of change as for groups of top performing countries, recognizing that countries have different starting points, could they potentially achieve the gender targets in the SDGs by 2030?

To start, we chose a small set of gender equality indicators from the SDG Gender Index, which were prioritized by gender advocates, that met key criteria: the ability to capture gender equality issues in the SDG targets, and the availability of data for the last 10 to 20 years. These indicators have different properties (see Table 1) and include one which is a composite score based on seven aspects of gender equality in the workplace.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1** Indicator characteristics and data sources

Indicator	Official SDG indicator or complementary?	Source	Unit	Target	First year	Latest year	# Data points	Age range
% of women married or in a union (aged 15–49 years) whose need for family planning met	SDG	UNDP	Per cent	100	2000	2018	19	15–49
% 20–24-year-old women completing upper secondary education*	Comp.	UIS	Per cent	100	2000	2018	19	20–24
% ministerial positions held by women**	Comp.	IPU	Per cent	50	2001	2019	9	All
Laws in workplace gender equality	Comp.	WBL	Score	100	2009	2019	12	15–64
% of women who feel safe walking at night	SDG	Gallup	Per cent	100	2006	2018	13–18	All

\* Secondary sources included: OECD, Barro and Lee database, WIDE; For the average (based on estimations for missing data points).

\*\* Secondary source included: US Department of State, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/world-leaders-1/>

14 The seven workplace equality laws included in the composite indicator are as follows: Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender? Does the law mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value? Can women work the same night hours as men? Can women work in jobs deemed dangerous in the same way as men? Are women able to work in the same industries as men? Is paid maternity leave of at least 14 weeks available to women? Is dismissal of pregnant workers prohibited?

In order to look at the rate of change for these indicators across the 129 countries, and then extrapolate the same trend out to 2030, a linear regression was calculated to find the best fitted trend line among the values over time. That trend was used to calculate the value in 2030. As the time series data for some of the indicators were volatile over time, we did not use the average annual rate of progress between the earliest and the latest years available.

Instead we used compound annual growth rates (CAGR), for observed values, and projected annual growth rates were calculated using the following formula:

$$CAGR = \left( \frac{\text{Ending Value}}{\text{Beginning Value}} \right)^{\left( \frac{1}{\text{number of years}} \right)} - 1$$

Drawing on these formulae, we used a linear regression model to better accommodate indicators that were more volatile and to estimate the value in 2030 if the trend remains constant; and the rate of change needed to achieve the target by 2030. The resulting change rates and groupings are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Composition of country groupings and average rates of change, 2000 or earliest year to 2019 or latest year

Indicator	Current rate of change			Number of countries by grouping			
	Slow*	Medium	Fast	Slow	Medium	Fast	Negative
% of women married or in a union (aged 15–49 years) whose need for family planning met	0.47	1.74	3.12	62	36	14	17
% 20–24-year-old women completing upper secondary education	0.39	2.03	4.13	34	53	28	14
% ministerial positions held by women	1.51	4.76	8.74	58	33	10	28
Laws in workplace gender equality	0.48	1.40	2.43	61	21	8	39
% of women who feel safe walking at night	0.49	1.68	3.24	30	29	20	50

\* Excludes countries with negative values

Countries were grouped by pace of change (e.g. slow, medium, fast) based on a separate distribution for each individual indicator.

In addition to these differences, it is important to note that the indicators would require different levels of effort in order to achieve a target. For example, in Ethiopia, gender parity was reached by going from women holding two out of 20 ministerial roles (10 per cent) in 2018 to 10 out of 21 ministerial roles (or 48 per cent) in 2019. Creating the infrastructure to serve millions of girls and women with family

planning or secondary education or changing social norms around violence and the perception of women about their safety is more difficult to reach within a short time frame. Nonetheless a number of countries have made great strides in widening access to family planning services and secondary education since 2000.



# The SDG Gender Index and Gender Advocates Data Hub

*Bending the Curve* has been shaped by our work with partners across seven initial focus countries – Colombia, El Salvador, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Senegal, and Tanzania – as well as dialogue with thousands of other stakeholders worldwide. It has been informed by previous EM2030 research, including the findings of a 2017 survey of policymakers, a 2018 survey of advocates, a 2018 pilot index, and, most significantly, by the 2019 SDG Gender Index. This prior research shaped our understanding of policy priorities, demand for gender-related data, and the challenges and opportunities ahead.

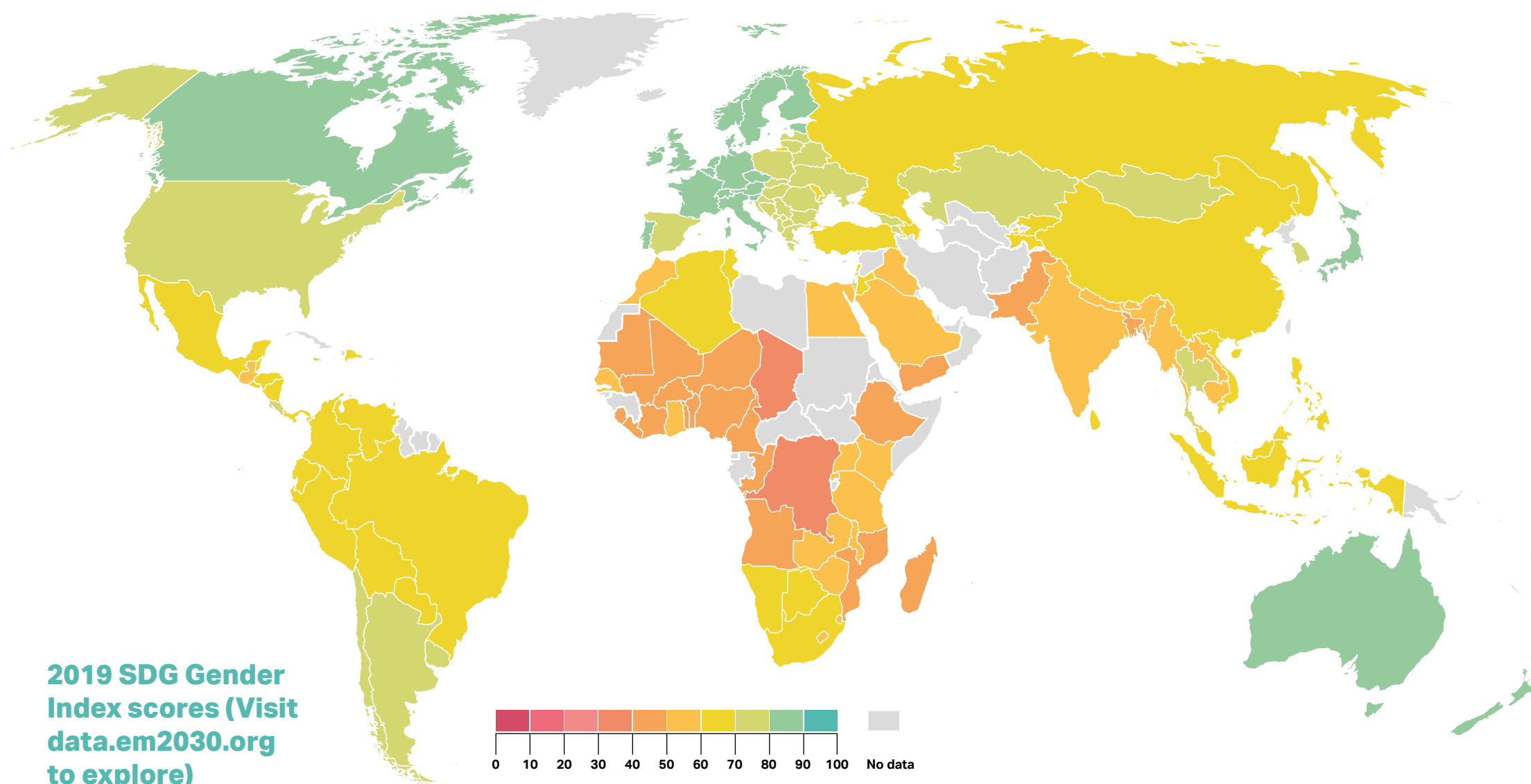
In 2018, in response to the urgent need for tools to support data-driven analysis and to hold governments accountable for gender equality in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals,

EM2030 and its partners launched the pilot SDG Gender Index. The index was launched in each of our focus countries, shared in meetings with officials in national statistical offices and national development planning ministries, and discussed at regional events. The contextualized experiences of partner organizations in applying the pilot index to frame advocacy efforts were core to the approach of designing the revised 2019 SDG Gender Index.

The 2019 SDG Gender Index includes 51 indicators across 14 of the 17 official goals and covers 129 countries across all regions of the world (95 per cent of the world's girls and women). The indicators are both those that are gender-specific, and those that are not, but nonetheless have a disproportionate effect on girls and women. The index finds that no country has yet reached gender

equality, and with just 10 years to go until 2030, nearly 40 per cent of the world's girls and women – 1.4 billion – live in countries failing on gender equality. The index is hosted on the Gender Advocates Data Hub where interactive tables and analysis can be found and downloaded.

This unique mix of country engagement, global consultation and research also informed the design of *Bending the Curve*. This analysis pulls five indicators, across five SDGs, from the 2019 SDG Gender Index for deeper evaluation and trend analysis. Where the SDG Gender Index gives us a snapshot of where the world stands linked to the vision of gender equality set forth by the 2030 Agenda, *Bending the Curve* lets us look closer at the pace of progress over time to see where we need to accelerate change for girls and women.



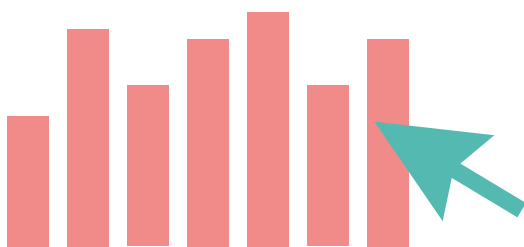
## Acknowledgements

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We appreciate the ongoing financial support of BMGF and Plan International which made this research possible. We also thank Soapbox for bringing the index data to life through their efforts on the briefing design and online development of our Gender Advocates Data Hub. In addition, the data visualisations on the Data Hub are the result of ongoing support from the Tableau Foundation. This research was led by the Equal Measures 2030 Secretariat team: Hellen Malinga Apila, Amanda Austin, Ibrahima Beye, Mary Bridger, Anne Connell, Martha Flynn, Cecilia García Ruiz, Alison Holder, Helen Kearney, Saran Koly, Alison Livingstone, Albert Motivans and David Stewart, along with technical expertise from independent consultants Aurélie Acoca and Anna Rose Miller.

Explore the Gender Advocates Data Hub, an online platform showcasing the results of the 2019 SDG Gender Index, other data and evidence, data visualizations, stories, tools, and country-, region-, and issue-specific resources for and by advocates.

Explore now: [www.data.em2030.org](http://www.data.em2030.org)



# Equal Measures 2030 Partners



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## About EM2030

Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030) is a unique cross-sector partnership of leading organizations from civil society and the development and private sectors. We work to ensure that girls' and women's movements, advocates and decision makers have the data they need, in a format they can use, to guide and drive faster progress towards the gender equality commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

To achieve this, we connect data and evidence with advocacy and action – using existing gender equality related data, supporting calls to fill data gaps, and training and equipping advocates to use data and evidence in their efforts to reach the transformational agenda of the SDGs by 2030.

EM2030 was formed in 2016 by a group of cross-sector partners who united their resources, skills, networks and ambition to use data and bring new and critical insights, stories and action to help achieve collective impact for girls and women.

The current partnership is a joint effort of leading regional and global organizations from civil society and the development and private sectors, including: the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Comité de América Latina y El Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM), Data2X, the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), KPMG International, ONE Campaign, Plan International, and Women Deliver.

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