

# FAST TRACK

or



# BACKTRACK

THE PROSPECTS FOR  
GENDER EQUALITY BY 2049

# Progress on gender equality around the world is too slow and patchy, placing the entire 2030 Agenda at risk.

**Our fight for the rights of women and girls is a fight for everyone's future.**

Every aspect of sustainable development is interwoven with the advancement of gender equality.

Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of the 169 targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been found to be directly or significantly reliant on gender equality.

Yet, across the world we see a widespread failure by governments to act on gender equality as a strategic necessity for a truly equitable and sustainable future for all.

Equal Measures 2030's SDG Gender Index shows that recent progress on gender equality has been alarmingly slow, patchy and fragile.

In 2020, more than three billion girls and women were living in countries with "poor" or "very poor" scores for gender equality.

Less than a quarter of countries are making fast progress towards gender equality; and a third of countries are either making no progress at all or are moving in the wrong direction.

On these trends, we forecast that the global average Index score will only reach 71 out of 100 by 2030, the deadline for the SDGs.

At this pace, it will take until the year 2108 (the 22nd century!) for the world to reach gender equality. But is the current trajectory likely to continue?



# Change is possible: the "fast track" scenario

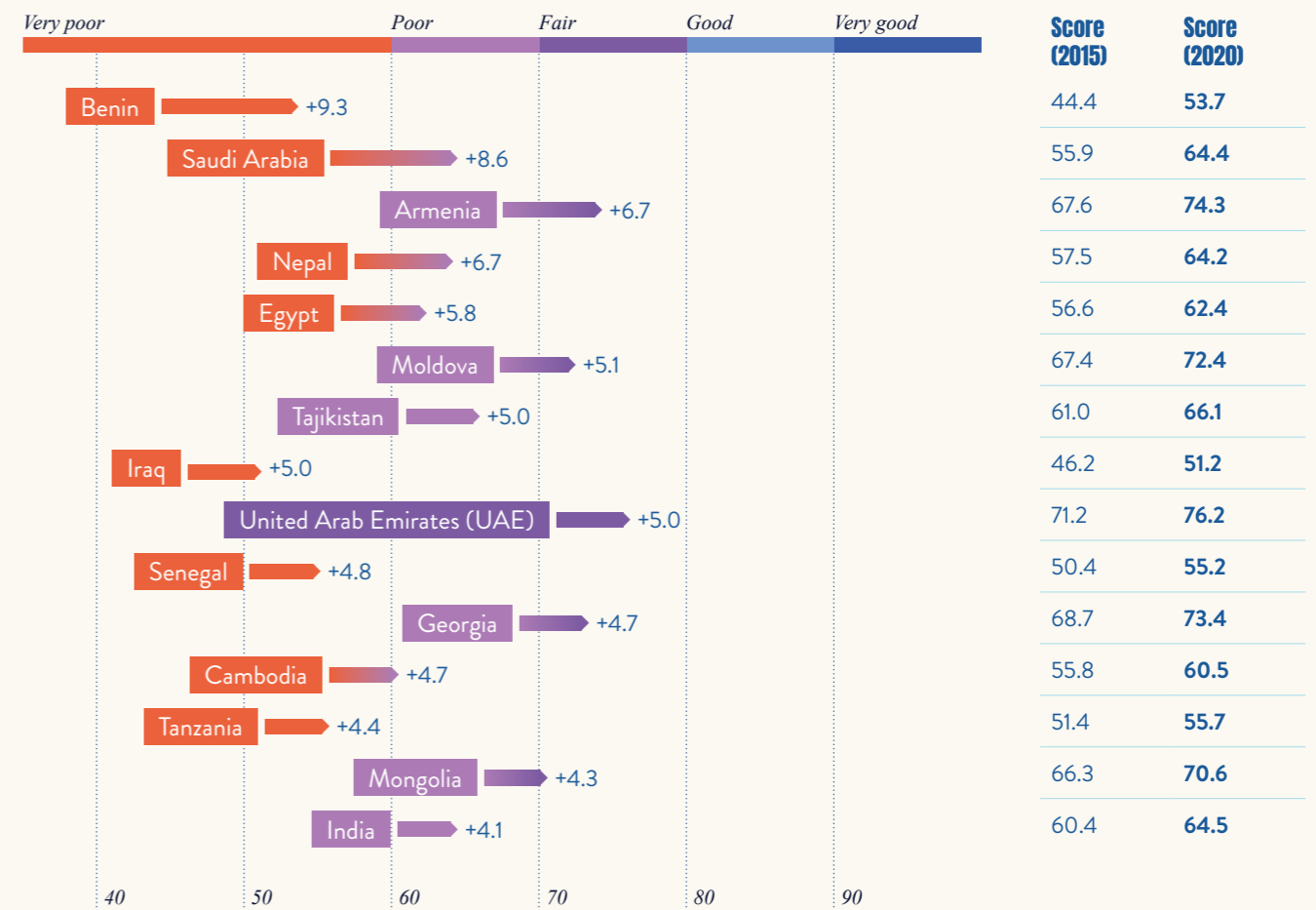
With just six years left until the SDG deadline, achieving global gender equality by 2030 looks impossible. But there is still cause for some hope: between 2015 and 2020, more than half of countries worldwide were moving in the right direction on gender equality.

Over this same period, the 15 fastest-improving countries increased their SDG Gender Index score by an average of 5.6 points. (See Figure 1)

Figure 1.

## The 15 countries that made the fastest progress between 2015 and 2020

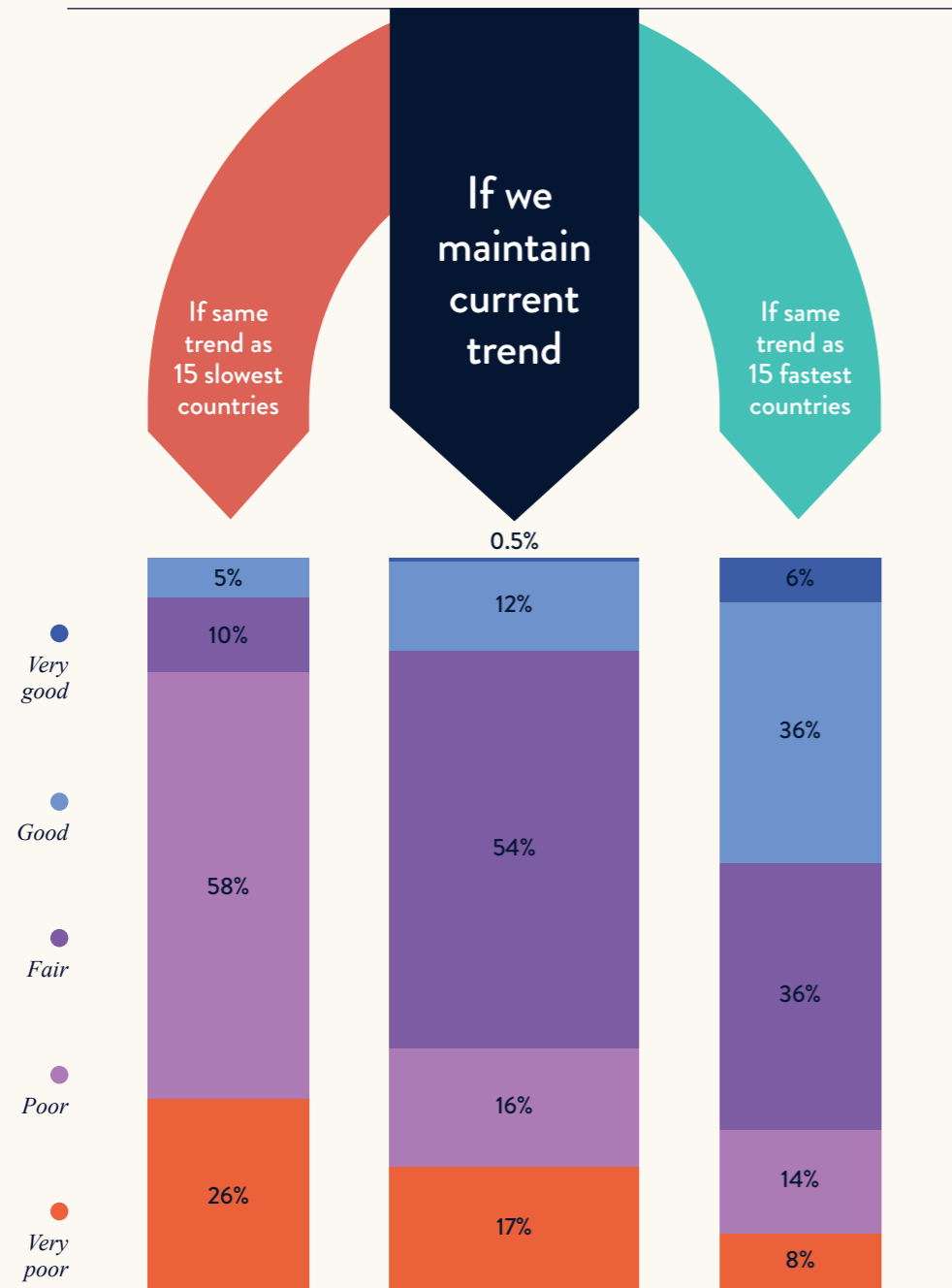
Note: May not sum to total due to rounding. Source: The 2022 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030



If all countries followed this accelerated path, the global score for gender equality could reach 79 out of 100 by the year 2030; a "fair" score, on the verge of tipping into the "good" category.

Figure 2.

### Proportion of population of girls and women living in countries by SDG Gender Index score level (in the year 2030)



In this "FAST TRACK" scenario, by 2030, nearly 1.7 billion girls and women could be living in countries rated "excellent" or "good" for gender equality — over a billion more than if current trends continue.



Note: May not sum to total due to rounding  
Source: The 2022 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030



By accelerating progress, the world could reach gender equality as soon as the year 2049, 19 years after the SDG deadline of 2030.

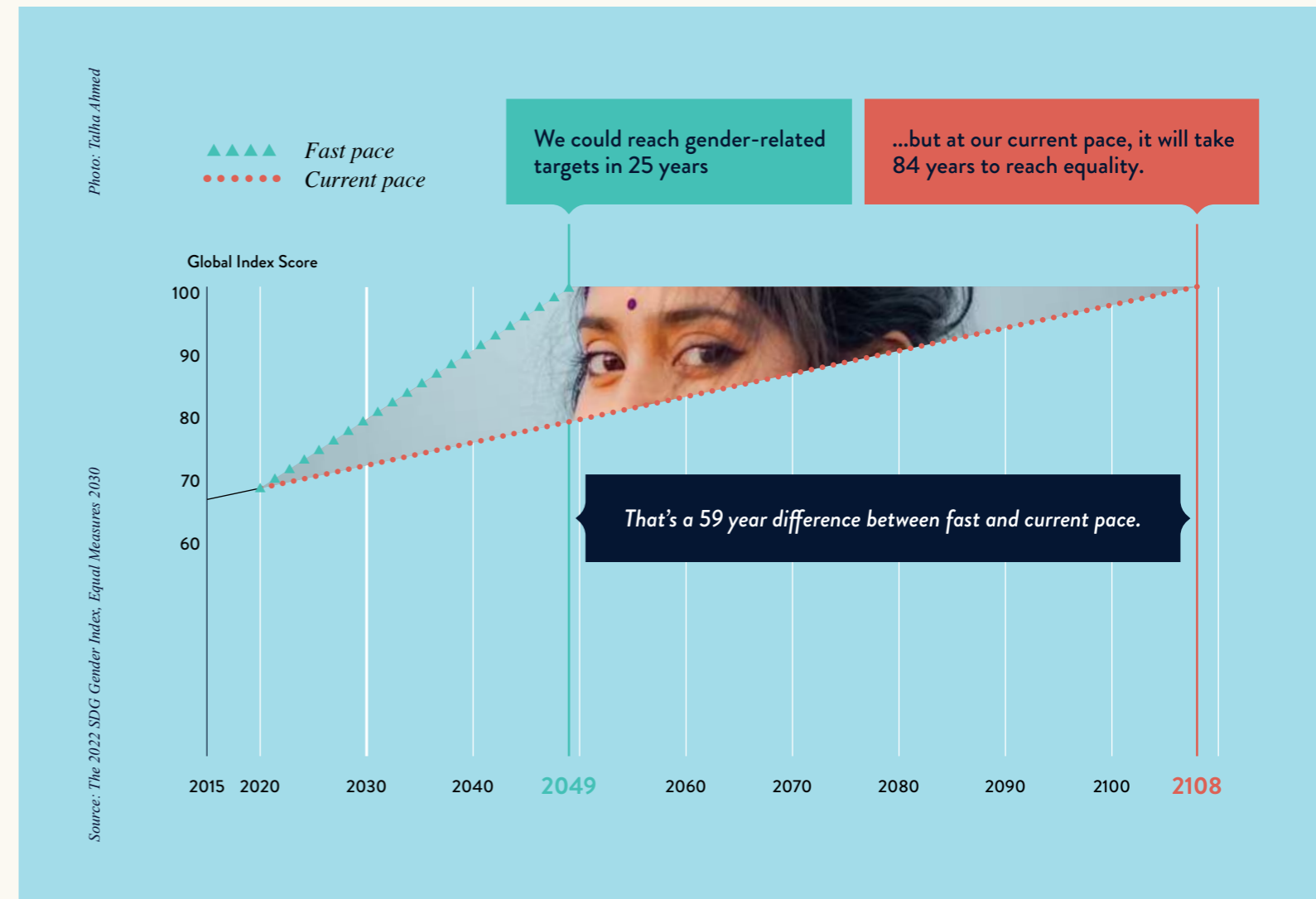


Figure 3.

Progress on global gender equality too slow to meet targets by 2030

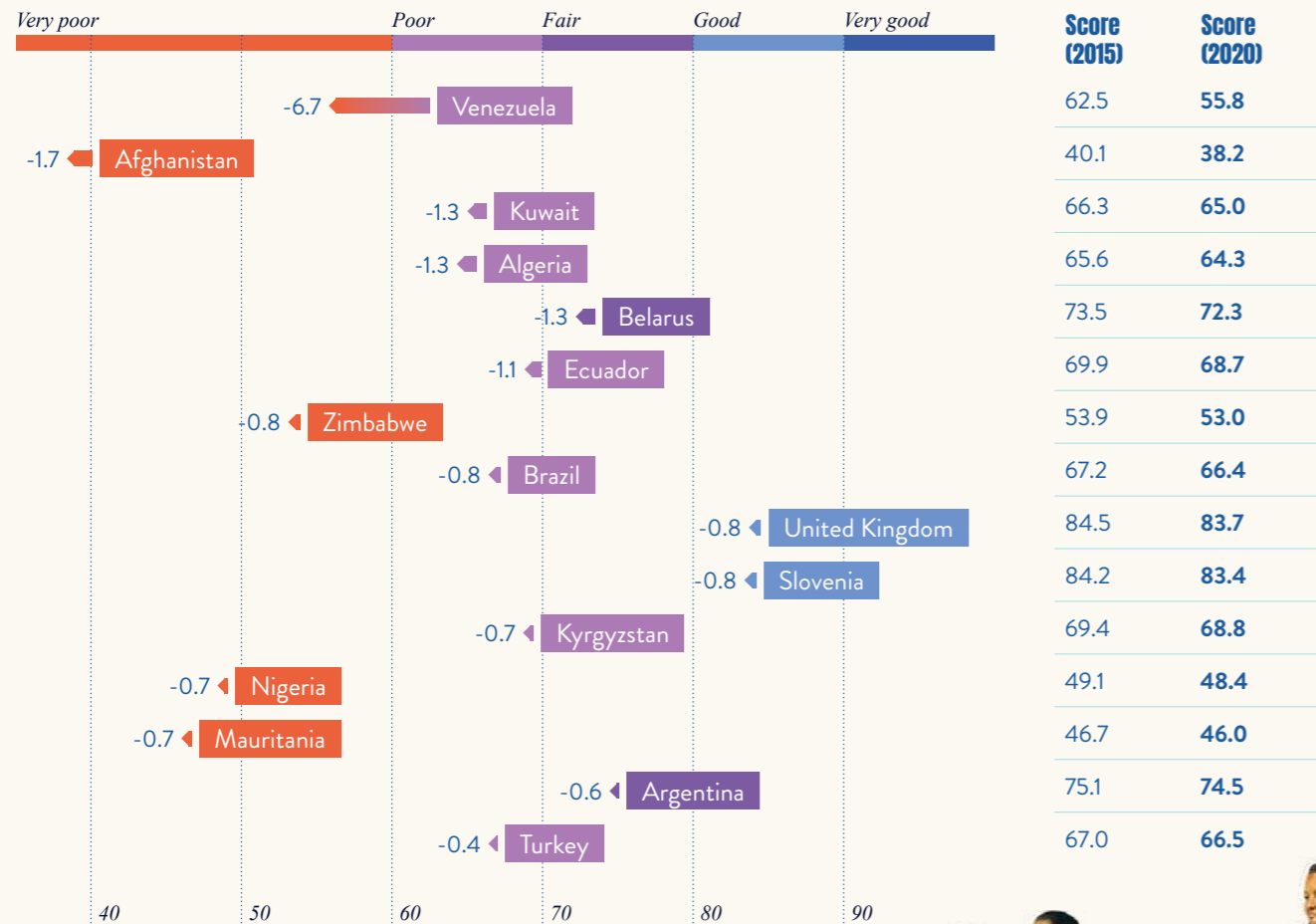
# Stagnation and backsliding are real dangers: the “backtrack” scenario

However, many countries are standing still – or even going backwards – on gender equality. Between 2015 and 2020, 1 in 3 countries either made no progress at all or moved in the wrong direction on gender equality.

The 15 countries with the largest decline in gender equality score over this period reduced their SDG Gender Index score by an average of 1.3 points between 2015 and 2020. (See Figure 4)

Figure 4.

## The 15 countries that declined the most between 2015 and 2020



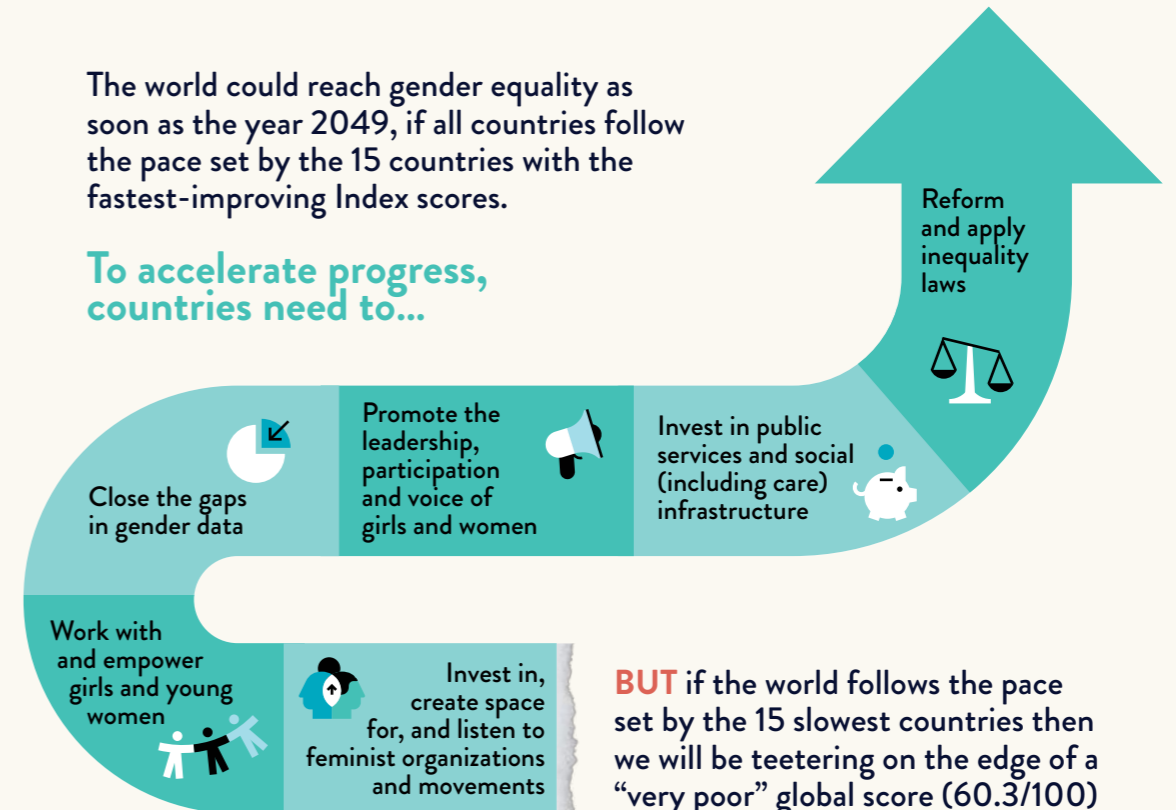
Note: May not sum to total due to rounding. Source: The 2022 SDG Gender Index, Equal Measures 2030

If all countries backtracked in this way, it would lead to a dangerous reversal for gender equality.



The world could reach gender equality as soon as the year 2049, if all countries follow the pace set by the 15 countries with the fastest-improving Index scores.

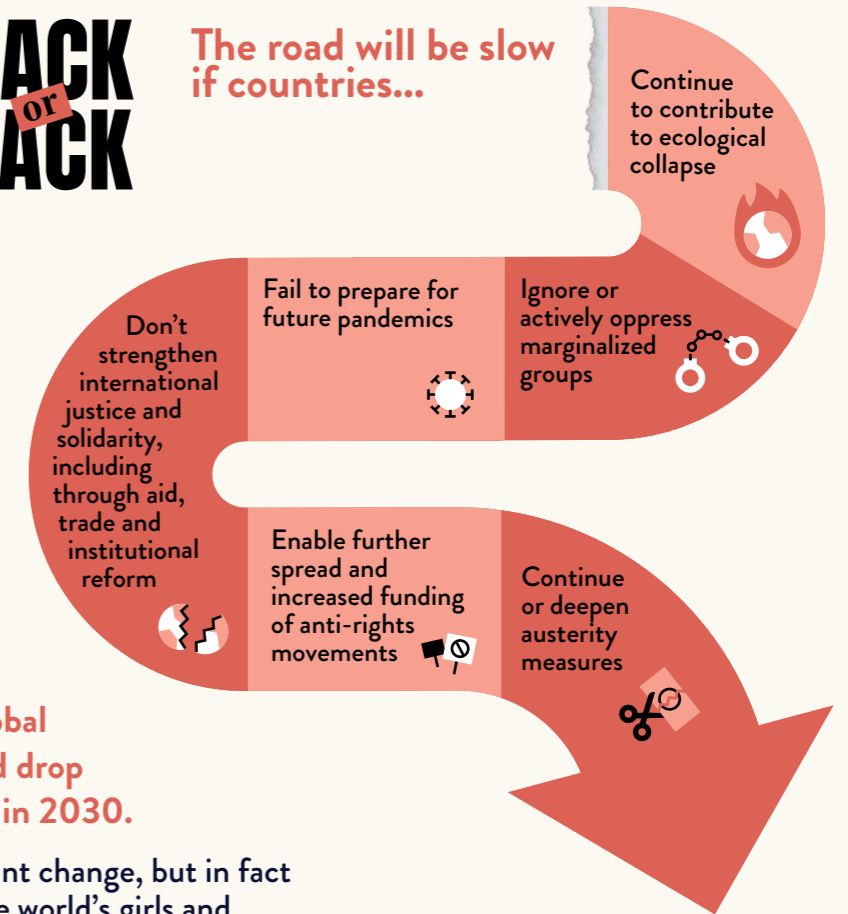
To accelerate progress, countries need to...



BUT if the world follows the pace set by the 15 slowest countries then we will be teetering on the edge of a “very poor” global score (60.3/100) for gender equality by 2049.

# FAST TRACK OR BACKTRACK

The road will be slow if countries...



Based on this trend, the global gender equality score would drop from 67.8 in 2020 to 65.2 in 2030.

This may appear an insignificant change, but in fact would leave 85 per cent of the world's girls and women (3.4 billion) living in countries with “poor” or “very poor” scores for gender equality, and, under this scenario, there would be no countries in the world with “excellent” scores at the end of the SDGs.

Source: Equal Measures 2030, Blueprint for Gender Equality. 'Back to Normal' is Not Enough: the 2022 SDG Gender Index

# Gender equality crossroads: what path will we take?

Is the world more likely to follow the fast track, continue the current slow trajectory, or follow the dangerous path behind the countries who have moved backwards on gender equality in recent years? What do the data in the 2022 SDG Gender Index tell us about the prospects for gender equality?

We dug into the Index data and examined changes that took place between 2015 and 2020 (aligned with the six recommendations in our Blueprint for Change), to better understand what the future holds. We found both causes for hope and sources of fear.

- Signs we are on the right track
- Signs we are backtracking

## 01 Reform and apply inequality laws

- ◆ **56 out of 135 countries** have made “fast progress” regarding laws that decriminalize, protect, or recognize “sexual orientation and same-sex conducts” (Ind. 10.5).
- ◆ **88 countries** still receive a “very poor” grade on laws related to “sexual orientation and same-sex conducts” (Ind. 10.5).
- ◆ **More than half of countries** (56 per cent) worsened their “collective bargaining and freedom of association” laws (Ind. 8.3).

## 02 Invest in public services and social (including care) infrastructure

- ◆ **Over 90 million more girls and women** (15 to 49 years old) had access to modern methods of contraception (Ind. 3.3).
- ◆ Women’s use of digital banking (Ind. 9.1) progressed rapidly in recent years (**33.7 per cent** increase between 2015 and 2020).
- ◆ **86 out of 104 countries** have seen “fast progress” when it comes to women accessing internet services (Ind. 9.3).
- ◆ There were dramatic increases globally in the share of women who say they don’t have adequate income to pay for food (Ind. 2.4) or housing (Ind. 11.1). These two measures worsened more than any other indicator in the Index between 2015 and 2020.
- ◆ **2/3 of countries** increased their military spending between 2015 and 2020 (Ind. 17.1).
- ◆ Since 2015, **only 12 countries out of 135** made progress to reduce climate vulnerability (Ind. 13.3).

1 Based on EM2030 experience compiling the 2022 SDG Gender Index data  
 2 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/generation-equality-forum>  
 3 <https://allianceforfeministmovements.org/>  
 4 <https://www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/development-finance-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment.htm>

Source: The majority of the facts in this table are drawn from the 2022 SDG Gender Index, and the specific Indicator number is referenced in brackets. The full list of indicators in the Index, and their sources, can be found on the [Index section of the EM2030 website](#). The indicators from the Index can be explored [here](#). Any facts not from the EM2030 Index are referenced with a footnote.

## 03 Promote the leadership, participation and voice of girls and women

- ◆ **Nearly 3/4 of countries** moved in the right direction towards equal representation of women in parliament (Ind. 5.4).
- ◆ **78 out of 135 countries** made “fast progress” on equal representation in senior government/ministerial posts.
- ◆ **More than half of countries** (55 per cent) made “some” or “fast” progress on increasing women’s participation in climate change leadership (Ind. 13.1).
- ◆ **39 countries** saw a decline in the number of women in ministerial roles (Ind. 5.5), and 11 saw no progress.
- ◆ **22 countries** moved backwards on representation in parliament (Ind. 5.4), with fewer women represented in 2020 than in 2015.
- ◆ In 2020, **5 countries** had zero women in senior government/ministerial roles (Ind. 5.5) (Armenia, Thailand, Viet Nam, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia).

## 04 Close gender data gaps

- ◆ **3/4 of countries** made progress towards more “disaggregated statistics” (Ind. 17.3).
- ◆ Data gaps meant that key issues were dropped from the 2022 Index, as sufficient data coverage was not available (social assistance expenditure, obesity among women, women’s perceptions of partner violence, share of women judges, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

## 05 Invest in, create space for, and listen to feminist organizations and movements

- ◆ The 2021 Generation Equality Forum (GEF) generated **USD 40 billion** in financial commitments, alongside policy and program commitments, for gender equality.<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ Since its launch in 2022, the Alliance for Feminist Movements has expanded its membership to include 11 national governments, 11 private philanthropic organizations, 36 women’s and feminist funds, 264 feminist civil society organizations and 95 other allies. All have committed to work together to increase support for feminist movements and agendas.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ The extent to which women can “discuss political issues in private and public spaces” (Ind. 10.4) has decreased or stagnated in every region. A very steep decline was observed in Belarus, Philippines, Côte d’Ivoire and El Salvador.
- ◆ When it comes to the level of “personal autonomy, individual rights and freedom from discrimination” (Ind. 10.2), **65 out of 135 countries** had a ‘very poor’ score.
- ◆ Aid (ODA) to women’s rights organizations and movements dropped by over 20 per cent between 2018-19 and 2021-22, **from USD 581 million to USD 453 million**.<sup>4</sup>

## 06 Work with and empower girls and young women

- ◆ The share of women (25+ years) with at least “some secondary education” (Ind. 4.4) rose in all regions.
- ◆ The Sub-Saharan Africa region is the only one that managed to reduce its child marriage rates (Ind. 5.1). Sierra Leone, for example, dropped from 31 to 19 per cent.
- ◆ **More than half of countries** made no progress or moved in the wrong direction on early marriage for girls (Ind. 5.1).
- ◆ The vast majority of countries (**more than 80 per cent**) either made no progress or moved in the wrong direction on adolescent birth rate (Ind. 3.2).

## Pushing us towards the backtrack scenario: the anti-rights movement

It is now well-recognized that there is a coordinated and well-funded community of actors dedicated to halting and rolling back gender equality. The Global Philanthropy Project estimates that, from 2013-2017, anti-gender equality actors globally received USD 3.7 billion, more than triple that of LGBTQI+ groups.

Previous gains by feminist movements are fragile in the face of such a well-resourced backlash. EM2030's 2022 SDG Gender Index showed stagnation and backsliding in 44 countries. In the US, the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade has had ripple effects globally, with anti-choice politicians energized and vindicated by the decision. The new government in Argentina immediately abolished its Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity and is seeking to repeal access to abortion. Even stalwart promoters of gender equality have been swept by the far-right wave; Sweden – the first government globally to adopt a 'feminist foreign policy' in 2014 – has recently abandoned this approach.

At the same time, civic space to fight this rollback is shrinking: CIVICUS reports that civil society is under 'severe attack' in 118 of 198 countries. Amnesty International has listed 50 countries where anti-NGO laws have been implemented or are in the pipeline. These forces are slowing down – or even reversing – the world's progress on gender equality.

## Accelerating towards the fast track: strong feminist movements

The increasing restrictions on civic space are no accident. There is a clear correlation between the presence of strong feminist movements and change for gender equality. Feminist mobilization was found to be the most important factor in securing action on violence against women at the national level. The impact and focus of feminist movements extend beyond gender: feminist advocacy confronts discrimination, oppression and human rights violations, in turn addressing cross-cutting issues such as climate change, economic inequality and conflict.

They are doing this vital work in the face of a coordinated attack from anti-rights actors, and with significantly less access to funding, despite their outsized impact. New data from the OECD show that just 0.7 per cent of all gender-related aid reached women's rights organizations in 2021-22 (USD 453 million out of USD 64.1 billion). Half of women's rights organizations applying for funding from the Global Fund for Women between 2015-2019 had annual budgets of less than USD 30,000.

The second part of this report contributes to the growing evidence that feminist movements have played a critical role in driving towards gender equality in five countries – Argentina, Canada, Malawi, Nepal, and Uruguay – and that better and more investment in feminist organizations and movements is needed across all countries if we are to follow the fast track toward a gender-equal future.

## CASE STUDIES: Feminist movements driving progress towards gender equality

The SDG Gender Index shines a spotlight on countries' progress – or lack thereof – toward gender equality aligned with the SDGs. Equal Measures 2030 is regularly asked: what and who is really driving these changes, and what can we learn from success stories in order to foster greater gender equality in many more countries?

The research presented in the case studies below is founded on these questions. Equal Measures 2030 worked with the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion team at ODI to identify 16 initial case studies where a significant improvement seemed to occur in one or more Index domains. In reviewing this analysis, we found that strong feminist movements were consistently highlighted as a crucial driver of change. In a second stage of research, Equal Measures 2030 and the Alliance for Feminist Movements selected five of the case studies to consider the role played by feminist movements: Argentina, Canada, Malawi, Nepal, and Uruguay.

Supported by feminist consultants, we spoke to national-level actors through key informant interviews to validate and strengthen these stories of change, which are shared below. Across the five unique contexts, interviewees from within feminist movements were most keen to talk about their urgent and unfinished work. Many spoke about the power of the collective, avoiding attribution to individual actors or organizations. They consistently expressed their work as ongoing, recognizing previous positive change as a step within a longer journey started by their predecessors and continuing through the vital work of their movements.

In sharing these stories, we aim to contribute to a growing evidence base to demonstrate that progress is possible, especially through better investment in – and the consistent, meaningful engagement of – feminist movements.

# ARGENTINA

## Activism against femicide

Although 18 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have recognized and criminalized femicide, the region has the second poorest score in the [SDG Gender Index on female homicide](#).<sup>5</sup> Feminist activism against femicide gained traction in the region from the 1990s. In Argentina, the movement came to a head with major protests in 2015, achieving landmark legal and policy changes to better address gender-based violence (GBV). The achievements of feminist movements in Argentina have been monumental, and their continued work is essential in the face of recent political shifts.

### Mass mobilization in 2015

In May 2015, 14 year-old Chiara Paez was murdered by her boyfriend and buried in his parents' backyard. Her murder was one of a string of femicides, accompanied by a [victim-blaming media discourse](#) and indifference by authorities. In June 2015, these events triggered the wave of protests known as #NiUnaMenos.



We were expecting people, but we were expecting a normal mobilization of 10,000 people...during those three weeks we dedicated ourselves to everyone, all the important figures in the country, even TV presenters who did comic shows raised their sign of NiUnaMenos and called for mobilization.

— Journalist and one of the founders of #NiUnaMenos

The first march in Buenos Aires, organized by a [group of journalists through Twitter](#), gathered some [300,000 women](#) bearing banners, placards and photos of lost ones to demand an end to the widespread normalization of GBV. The movement called for the government to fully implement existing GBV legislation, raise corresponding budgets, provide gender-sensitive police training, create national statistics on femicide and improve support for survivors. It aimed to speak not just to government, but to the media and society as a whole.

### The power of a unifying message

The initial #NiUnaMenos protest had a single, unifying goal: to stop the murder of women and girls. By creating an accessible discourse, not tied to party politics, #NiUnaMenos was able to [bring together existing movements](#), as well as to [mobilize women who had not previously been part of feminist activism](#). The simple poetic communications of the movement, and [the use of media](#), were key to its success in Buenos Aires and the expansion to other [Argentine cities and elsewhere in LAC](#). The first #NiUnaMenos protests also coincided with a general election, ensuring that femicide remained at the top of the political agenda.



One could even say it was revolutionary... Because it really changed the foundations, it changed the language, it changed the way in which women saw themselves, they saw men, they saw the State as a key actor to intervene in issues of violence, they began to demand that the State intervene.

— Feminist activist, author of "Nunca seremos las mismas"

### Legislative changes in response to activism

#NiUnaMenos did not happen overnight. The movement was built on [many years of feminist activism](#) against GBV, including [by LGBTQI+ activist groups](#). The movement was central to the passing of Law 26.485 in 2009, recognizing diverse forms of GBV and establishing measures for its prevention; in 2012, [Law 26.791 criminalizing femicide](#) was also passed.

Gains from the 2015 protests included the creation of a [Femicide Registry](#) providing annual statistics to inform

prevention policies, a law [supporting the children of femicide victims](#) and an amendment of the Penal Code raising the [maximum sentence for rape to 30 years](#). In 2017, following [the murder of Micaela García](#), the federal law 'Ley Micaela' was passed, making gender-based violence awareness training mandatory for all government employees. Since then, GBV laws have expanded to include [2019 legislation recognizing violence against women in politics and street harassment as GBV](#) and the 2021 [Decree on the Prevention of Transfemicides](#).

### The ongoing fight for gender equality in Argentina

While celebrating legal and legislative wins, feminist activists [continue to denounce the lack of implementation](#) of existing laws and policies and to highlight the challenges in [shifting the power to the State to define femicide](#). In 2021, just [six cases of femicide](#) resulted in conviction.

Argentina's election in 2023 marked significant changes in the relationship between feminist movements and the government. Upon gaining power, President Milei [dissolved the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity](#) and advanced efforts to [delegitimize the fight for gender equality](#). This shift in political leadership endangers the historic achievements of feminist movements in Argentina. For their work to continue and to hold the line against national efforts to roll back rights, movement actors require greater funding and solidarity from and with donors and the feminist community globally.

<sup>5</sup> In Latin America, the terms "femicide" and "feminicide" have been codified in the criminal law of 17 countries. They both refer to the gender-based killing of women, giving political weight to a social phenomenon with its own characteristics that distinguish it from the term "homicide". (UN-Women/ MESECVI, 2018).

## CANADA >>> Improving data on gender-based violence

*Gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive: data show that roughly 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and/or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. According to self-reported perceptions of public safety one in three women did not feel safe walking at night in 2022.*

*While many countries have been able to produce a national prevalence rate, few have been able to translate it into more nuanced and policy-led data collection. Canada has made a significant commitment to collect data to inform evidence-based action, showing that technical obstacles to data feminism can be overcome with political will and targeted funding.*

### Advocating for GBV to be a national priority

The Canadian government's focus on GBV was shaped by many years of lobbying and engagement by feminist actors, who had continually stressed the urgency of addressing GBV and the importance of better data to do so. Women's Shelters Canada (WSC), a GBV-focused coalition, had called for a National Action Plan (NAP) on GBV since 2013, drawing on UN guidelines, including the need for "regular collection and dissemination of comprehensive statistical data".

In 2017, Canada launched its first federal GBV strategy, and the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) was made an official department of the government in 2018. In 2021, WAGE commissioned the WSC to develop a roadmap for the NAP, with funding for the consultation process. The roadmap was developed in just three months by the WSC coalition, featuring 100 recommendations and a step-by-step guide for implementation. The government's 10-year NAP was published by WAGE in November 2022.

### Prioritizing data

Canada's federal GBV strategy – and WAGE's subsequent plan – placed a significant emphasis on research and data collection, with a corresponding budget allocation of CAD 30.1 million over five years (14 per cent of the total). Investments in survey data were deemed critical to complement administrative data, given chronic underreporting of GBV and the need for data on forms of violence that do not meet criminal thresholds.



**It all comes back to the feminist movements. That's why WAGE is a department, and that's why [it has] millions of dollars.**

— Anonymous

WAGE collaborated with Statistics Canada to develop three population-based surveys: the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS), the 2019 Survey of Individual Safety in the Postsecondary Student Population and the 2020 Survey of Sexual Misconduct at Work. While previous victimization surveys were limited to recent criminal acts, these surveys sought "to measure the entire continuum of gender-based violence, by including violent victimization experiences throughout peoples' lives, their experiences of unwanted sexual behaviours and online victimization".

The data collection aimed to address gaps in support for diverse populations, considering indigenous status, sexual and gender identity, residence in Northern, rural, and remote communities, disability, migration/refugee status and age. Requiring an initial outlay of CAD 17.1 million, the surveys filled important gaps, including the first-ever nationally representative data on transgender and gender-diverse people in Canada. Statistics Canada intends to repeat these surveys every five years.

### Continued learning and collaboration between feminist civil society and government

WAGE has sought to ensure that experts, service providers and GBV survivors inform its activities, though feminist actors highlight that this is a gap at sub-national levels. Whilst celebrating the adoption of the GBV National Action Plan (NAP), feminist actors, including WSC, continue to play a vital role in highlighting challenges and calling for greater clarity in monitoring and accountability.



**There are certain populations that are always going to be excluded from [the] surveys because of their living conditions or their language aptitude...from my perspective, that's why we really need to rely on qualitative study.**

— Anonymous

Actors have highlighted that the use of households as a sampling frame, for example, has meant that surveys excluded individuals living in institutions, shelters, or other collective dwellings. WSC has stressed the need for additional forms of collection: "data that [go] beyond disaggregated numbers, [apply] an intersectional lens, and [are] collected in ways that are inclusive, honor lived realities, and go beyond the traditional, narrow, number-driven methodologies; that is, not just surveys".

Responding to these points, the Canadian government has been increasingly looking to fund qualitative research studies on GBV. Feminist actors have played a vital role in shaping the government's GBV prevention and response strategies, but this work is ongoing, with feminist actors currently pushing for regular engagement and action that is intersectional, trauma-informed and able to capture the nuance of the lived experience of gender-based violence in diverse populations.

Their continued role is crucial in both supporting and challenging the government to respond to the evolving needs of those affected by gender-based violence and to ensure advocacy and policy implementation intersect to effect meaningful change in addressing GBV.



## MALAWI » Ending child marriage and protecting girls' rights

*Child marriage constrains girls' opportunities in many respects, resulting in a higher likelihood of leaving school early, of physical and mental ill-health, of income poverty and of intimate partner violence. Despite declines in child, early, and forced marriage, globally 19 per cent of women aged 20-24 in 2022 had been married before age 18. In Malawi, the rate is still twice as high – 38 per cent in 2020 (latest data available) – despite a significant fall from 48 per cent in 2018. Feminist and girls' rights actors in Malawi have been at the forefront of local and national advocacy to challenge social norms, secure buy-in from local leaders, and change legislation in order to achieve the progress to date.*

### Change at the local level

Local activists, together with NGOs and UN agencies, have actively worked to address the high rates of child marriage in Malawi, especially since the early 2000s. This period also saw an increase in community bylaws related to child marriage alongside national government action prioritizing maternal health and girls' education.

The creation of community bylaws – local rules and norms defined and enforced by communities and traditional and local leaders – has been a common approach in Malawi to address issues from natural resource management to education to adolescent health. Bylaws relating to child marriage can require men who marry girls under the age of 21 to give up their land in the village and/or pay a penalty of goats or chickens and can impose social sanctions on parents who allow the marriage of their underage daughters.



**When I go and talk to a girl and ask her, “Do you know your human rights compared to how it was maybe 10 years ago?” She says yes...Now, they say they want to be doctors and teachers.**

— Joy Hayley Munthali, Co-Executive Director, Green Girls Platform

In some cases, the establishment of bylaws has come from direct advocacy by feminist actors and girl advocates. In 2011, the Girls Empowerment Network (GENET) and Rise Up launched the Stop Child Marriage campaign. Girls participating in the campaign in Chiradzulo district successfully lobbied 60 village chiefs to enact bylaws related to child marriage, supported by local civil society including GENET.

Continuous engagement between local feminist and girls' rights actors and local systems of power has been

critical. The engagement of traditional leaders as champions has been particularly effective in some communities. For example, local leader Chief Kachindamoto annulled around 3,500 child marriages in central Malawi and continues to campaign

around the country to end child marriage. Chief Kapoloma has championed girls' education in southern Malawi; he claimed to have seen a reduction in local child marriages from 10 to 15 each year, to just two in 2017.

### The continued role of feminist and girls' rights actors



**Poverty and financial stability are major drivers of child marriage. If a family is very poor, girls are married off because their families see it as one less thing to worry about. Girls are removed from poverty and given a net of safety in marriage.**

— Immaculate Maluza, Human Rights Lawyer and Gender Activist

In 2015, President Mutharika signed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act, raising the legal age of marriage to 18, and in 2017 some feminist actors were instrumental in efforts to secure alignment within the Constitution of Malawi itself.

These national-level successes are significant, and community bylaws continue to be impactful in reducing child marriage. At the same time, feminist actors interviewed for this research highlighted the continued need to address underlying social norms and the root causes of child marriage, many

of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change such as school closures, forced displacement, and loss of livelihoods. Local entities supporting bylaw enforcement have also reported challenges including "lack of support from police, cultural beliefs and practices, lack of knowledge regarding the legal marriageable age, and false reporting of children's ages".

These challenges – and the continued high rates of child marriage in Malawi despite recent declines – demonstrate the critical ongoing role of feminist and girls' rights actors, especially at the local level where education and community engagement can be so effective. Feminist actors interviewed for this research stressed the need for more and better resources to keep this work going and to continue to reduce child marriage rates in every community across Malawi.



**Even child marriage is a feminist and political issue – it concerns the right to your body, to decide who you should be with, and to sexual pleasure. The feminist movement in Malawi, especially the young feminist movement and the grassroots movements, for me, are our hope. Except they are not given enough resources.**

— Anonymous

## NEPAL » Women's participation in local government

Following more than 50 years of feminist activism and advocacy on political reform, Nepal adopted a landmark quota system to guarantee the representation of women – including women from marginalized groups – across all levels of government.

The first local election since the quotas – in 2017 – and the most recent – in 2022 – both saw women elected to roughly 41 per cent of local government roles. Feminist movements continue to advocate for social norm change to ensure that women candidates in Nepal – including those from the Dalit<sup>6</sup> community – can hold the highest local office and can participate safely and effectively in local government to contribute to change for gender equality.

### Feminist activism for political change

Feminist movements have played a leading role in advocacy and activism for political reform in Nepal for decades, persistently pushing back against patriarchal and discriminatory systems. Building on this long history, focused activism and collective efforts led to the inclusion of women in the newly-established Constituent Assembly in 2008.

**A lot of feminist and women's groups were key in making sure that the 30 per cent quota system was implemented in all aspects of governance.**

— Anonymous

The 2015 Constitution and subsequent local election laws established a quota system whereby at least one woman must be selected for either mayor or deputy mayor (reflecting similar commitments at the national level). The gendered experience of caste was also recognized: the Local Level Election Act required at least two women to be appointed to the local ward committee, of whom one must be a Dalit woman.

The first local elections in 2017 marked a significant and historic moment in women's political representation, with Nepal placed as the 16th best-performing country globally on representation of women in local government.

### Realities for women elected at the local level

Prevailing gender norms mean that women elected in 2017 and/or 2022 have usually filled deputy mayoral (rather than mayoral) positions. Following the 2022 local elections, just 4 per cent of mayors were women and 78 per cent of deputy mayors were women. However, the deputy mayor role is far from ceremonial. Deputy mayors coordinate local judicial committees, NGO programs, and budget oversight and implementation. The rise in women's local representation has also positively influenced women's wider political engagement, as well as perceptions of their roles and abilities.

Of the women elected to local government in 2017, nearly half were Dalit women, with most holding roles in local ward committees to fulfill the quota requirements. However, the quota system has not transformed the discrimination faced by the Dalit community. In 2022, as many as 123 reserved seats for Dalit women remained vacant, with political parties claiming an inability to identify suitable candidates. Interviewees for this research highlighted that very little attention is paid to Dalit participants in committee meetings and decision-making processes. Local and international feminist actors have aimed to support women candidates, especially those from the Dalit community, to facilitate their political participation.

### Continued activism from feminist movements

Feminist movements continue to challenge persistent patriarchal attitudes and practices that hinder women's representation and power in local politics. These begin even before a woman is elected: interviewees for this research stated that women candidates are often severely underfunded and struggle to find the resources they need for their campaigns.

The commitment to collective action is borne out in feminist movements' determination to pool funding and support one another, learning from and drawing on experiences of women's cooperatives across the country. One interviewee noted

recent collective efforts to raise funds to distribute to and support women candidates in the upcoming 2025 elections.

**Whenever there is a political campaign, male members have greater access to resources. They go into communities and offer snacks and alcohol to their cadres in exchange for their support. Women don't have comparable resources to campaign.**

— Anonymous

While significant barriers still stand in the way of Nepali women's meaningful political participation, movement actors are determined to build on the strong history of powerful women and collective action that has preceded them, and to continue to push for true intersectional leadership by women to exist in reality, and not just on paper.

**I am aware that when we want to talk about gender issues, it is not always easy – because they are considered taboo topics. However, in Nepal, it has become so politicized that no one can shy away from these issues anymore. Of course, we have not seen the results we want to see, but it is an issue that no one can hide from, and the movements are very much there, and conversations are ongoing...A lot of young people are engaged in these spaces and that makes it hopeful.**

— Dr Nisha Onta, Founder & ED, Governance Lab

<sup>6</sup> "Dalit" is a term used to refer to any member of a wide range of social groups that were historically marginalized in Hindu caste society.

# URUGUAY

## A national approach to care

*Decades of powerful feminist advocacy on care, combined with a stable political environment, robust economy, and ageing population, all contributed to the Uruguayan government launching a pioneering and comprehensive approach in 2015: the Sistema Nacional Integrado de Cuidados (SNIC) (National Integrated Care System). Feminist movements have played a crucial role in placing care firmly on the political agenda to enable recent progress on access to care and in broader labour rights. They continue to call for a transformation in care-related social norms and for accountability for SNIC commitments to all groups within Uruguay.*

### Feminist activism and influence: the foundations of the SNIC

Decades of collaborative efforts and interconnected networks have been the backbone of Uruguayan feminist movements, fostering a comprehensive approach to addressing gender equality issues. Alliances like La Red Género y Familia (Gender and Family Network) have brought together women's movements, female politicians and feminist academics to ensure that care and labor rights are firmly embedded in both public discourse and political agendas.

In the public sphere, their endeavors have propelled discussions on women's labor rights into the forefront of social dialogue, particularly concerning the distribution and recognition of care responsibilities. Their advocacy was supported by a growing body of evidence from institutions like the University of the Republic and the national statistics office, which have sought to quantify gender gaps in unpaid work and the country's 'care deficit'.

Continuous engagement between groups like La Red Género y Familia—later evolved into La Red ProCuidados—and the ruling political party and government has been a pivotal strategy, ensuring care and labor rights are firmly placed on the political agenda. As early as 2008, a commitment to a national care system formed a part of the electoral campaign of the political party, Frente Amplio, which held power between 2005-2020.

### Care on the political agenda

Following sustained engagement with feminist actors, the Uruguayan government established the SNIC in 2015, and with it, positioned care as a societal, rather than private, issue. This established care as a national priority, essential to the progression of human rights and enshrined in law as the "legal right to care and be cared for". The National Care Plan 2016-2020 had three key provisions: 1) care for children under three; 2) care for elderly people and those with disabilities; and 3) professionalization of the paid care workforce.

In designing this first national plan, the government had held a national dialogue to raise awareness of care, share information on the proposed system, and to

better understand how local realities might influence approaches. This participatory approach boosted the project's visibility and credibility.

### Increased access to care

The annual spending on services under the SNIC was USD 206 million in 2019, roughly 1.5 per cent of total public social expenditure. The National Care Plan for 2021-2025 emphasizes reducing the significant gaps in access to care. Data from 2022 suggest progress towards this goal: total public coverage of care for children under three due to the SNIC was over 78,000 in 2022, an overall coverage rate of 53 per cent of the target population, up from 43 per cent in 2019. These improvements are worth celebrating, and the SDG Gender Index score for wage equality in Uruguay has also improved by six points in recent years (while remaining "poor" at just 61 out of 100 points).



**Not all women have the same information and not all of them want the same thing, when we make the intersections by race, by territory, and by migrant status, this gets deeper because some groups, such as trans people, have been left out of the SNIC. We don't talk about this, we don't touch it.**

— Member of CLADEM Uruguay and president of the Afro-descendant institute for study, research and development

National feminist actors also highlighted that social norms related to care work in Uruguay remain conservative and that work to shift this has been an ongoing challenge.

The continued role of feminist actors and allies within and outside of government is critical to achieve better and more inclusive systems for care workers and those receiving care, as well as wider public engagement on the norm change needed to truly transform care across society.

### Continuing roles for feminist movements to drive progress

Feminist actors interviewed for this research highlighted continued challenges for individuals experiencing multiple disadvantages who do not fit as easily into the predefined categories of the SNIC, such as those with irregular immigration status. They emphasized the importance of representation from marginalized groups during conversations shaping SNIC implementation, especially on the trade-offs between a universal program and targeted support to those most impacted by care burdens.



**Equal marriage, the Law for Trans People, the Law of Affirmative Actions for Afro Descendants, the National Gender Law, the National Care System,...we have everything! But Uruguayan culture has not changed. So men are not seen as caregivers.**

— Member of CLADEM Uruguay and president of the Afro-descendant institute for study, research and development

## Research Note

The data used to forecast scenarios in global gender equality from the opening section of this report are drawn from the existing EM2030 2022 SDG Gender Index. An overview of the Index data can be found in the [2022 Back to Normal Is Not Enough report](#). The 2022 SDG Gender Index data can also be explored on the [SDG Gender Index section of the EM2030 website](#).

The approach used to consider future scenarios for global gender equality is simple and transparent: it takes the 2020 global average Index score of 67.8/100 as the baseline. To calculate the “current pace” scenario, we extrapolated from this baseline using the global average change in Index scores between the year 2015 and 2020. During this period the Index changed by 1.8 points in five years (from 66.0/100 in 2015 to 67.8/100 in 2020). By applying this rate of change, the global average Index score would reach 100 in the year 2108.

For the “fast track” scenario, we applied the rate of change set by the 15 countries that showed the most rapid improvement on their Index score between 2015 and 2020. This rate of change was an average of 5.6 points in five years. By applying this “fast track” rate of change from 2021 onwards, the global average Index score would reach 100 in the year 2049.

For the “backtrack” scenario, we applied the rate of change set by the 15 countries that showed the greatest decline or slowest progress between 2015 and 2020. By applying this declining rate of change from 2021 onwards, we calculated that the equivalent global average Index score would be 60.3/100 in the year 2049.

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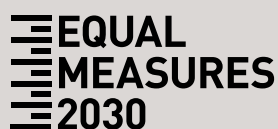
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The Alliance for Feminist Movements is a collaborative multi-stakeholder initiative with members from governments, philanthropy, women's and feminist funds, civil society, and other allies. The Alliance and its members are dedicated to increasing and improving the quality of resources and political support for diverse feminist movements, agendas, and policies.

Visit our [website here](#) or email us at [info@allianceforfeministmovements.org](mailto:info@allianceforfeministmovements.org).



Equal Measures 2030 is a coalition of national, regional and global 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)

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