Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Gender equality and women’s empowerment have advanced in recent decades. Progress in enrollment at all education levels has been observed, yet wide gender disparities exist in some regions and countries at higher education levels. Maternal mortality has declined and skilled care during delivery has increased. Progress has been made in the area of sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Childbearing among adolescents has decreased. However, gender inequality persists worldwide, depriving women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will require more vigorous efforts, including legal frameworks, to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination that often results from patriarchal attitudes and related social norms.

Intimate partner violence against women and girls is found in every region

Physical and sexual violence is common against women and girls in all regions, and much of it is at the hands of intimate partners. When perpetrated by an intimate partner, violence can be especially traumatic and debilitating. According to surveys undertaken between 2005 and 2016 in 67 countries (including 30 from developed regions), 19 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 said they experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The prevalence of violence against women varies within and among regions. Levels of intimate partner violence are highest in Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand, ranging from 19 to 44 per cent in countries with data. Prevalence is lower overall in Europe, with levels of less than 10 per cent in most of the 29 countries with available data.

In the most extreme cases, violence against women and girls can result in death. In 2012, almost half of all women who were victims of intentional homicide worldwide were killed by an intimate partner or family member, compared to 6 per cent of male victims.

Social acceptability and widespread impunity for perpetrators are among the main challenges contributing to violence against women. In 37 countries, for example, perpetrators of rape are exempted from prosecution if they are married to or subsequently marry the victim.

Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 to 49 years subjected to physical or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, 2005-2016 (latest available) (percentage)
Child marriage is slowly declining, but remains commonplace in Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa

Child marriage violates the rights of children in a way that often leads to a lifetime of disadvantage and deprivation, especially for girls. Typically, child brides have limited opportunities for education and employment, are at increased risk of domestic violence and other assaults to their physical and mental health, and have little decision-making power within the household, especially when married to older men.

The practice of child marriage has been slowly declining. Around 2015, just over one in four women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married before the age of 18; around 2000, the ratio was one in three. Faster progress has been made in delaying the marriage of girls under age 15, which declined from 11 per cent around 2000 to 8 per cent around 2015. That said, progress has been uneven across regions and countries.

In Southern Asia, the proportion of women married before age 18 dropped by about 27 per cent; the proportion married before age 15 declined by about 44 per cent. In sub-Saharan Africa, the proportions dropped by 19 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively. Nevertheless, early marriage in these regions remains commonplace, with more than one in three women reportedly married before age 18. Indeed, the 10 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are found in these two regions.

Proportion of women between 20 and 24 years of age who were married or in union before ages 15 and 18, around 2000 and around 2015 (percentage)
Despite progress, childbearing among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa remains high

Child marriage is closely linked to childbearing among adolescents and a concomitant loss of opportunities. Target 5.7 calls for universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services (including family planning), information and education, which should help to prevent adolescent childbearing and unintended pregnancies.

Reducing the adolescent birth rate is integral to the health and well-being of adolescent girls and to their social and economic prospects. Globally, childbearing among adolescents declined by 21 per cent between 2000 and 2015. Central and Southern Asia made the greatest progress: the region reduced the adolescent birth rate by more than 30 per cent, largely due to advances in Southern Asia. Rates remain highest in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, despite progress in both regions.
Adolescent birth rate, 2000 and 2015 (number of live births per 1,000 adolescent women aged 15 to 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa and Western Asia</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Southern Asia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern and South-Eastern Asia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Northern America</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia and New Zealand</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data are based on time-use surveys conducted between 2000 and 2014 in 59 countries, 30 from developing regions and 29 from developed regions. Oceania* refers to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand throughout the publication.

The prevalence of FGM remains high in some countries, despite overall progress

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a human rights violation affecting girls and women worldwide, but especially in communities where it persists as a social norm. The practice can cause severe pain, excessive bleeding, infections (including HIV), infertility, complications during childbirth and sometimes death. The exact number of girls and women affected globally is unknown, but at least 200 million have been subjected to FGM in the 30 countries (half of them in Western Africa) where the practice is concentrated and that have nationally representative prevalence data.

Prevalence rates for this harmful practice have declined by 24 per cent since around 2000, with some countries making rapid progress. FGM remains widespread in other countries with data. On average, more than one in three girls aged 15 to 19 have been subjected to FGM in the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated, compared to nearly one in two around 2000.

Proportion of girls aged 15 to 19 who have undergone female genital mutilation in 30 countries with representative prevalence data, around 2000 to around 2015 (percentage)

- 2000: 46%
- 2008: 43%
- 2010: 40%
- 2015: 35%

Note: The figures are population-weighted averages based on comparable data from 30 countries where the practice is concentrated and with representative prevalence data. The values for 2015 refer to the latest available data collected between 2010 and 2016.
Women spent almost three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men.

The time spent on unpaid housework and caregiving undermines women’s ability to engage in other activities, such as education and paid labour. The average amount of time women spend on unpaid domestic work and caregiving at home is almost triple that of men, according to survey data from 83 countries and areas.

Data for a subset of countries (mainly from Latin American and European countries) suggest this disparity widens during periods when women are most likely to have young children at home. Women dedicate more time than men caring for family members, especially children. This activity often overlaps with domestic duties, making it difficult to capture accurately in time-use surveys.

Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, women and men, 2000–2016 (latest available) (percentage of time spent per day)

- **Unpaid domestic and care work (83)**
  - Women: 18.4%
  - Men: 7.0%

- **Unpaid domestic work (71)**
  - Women: 15.1%
  - Men: 6.3%

- **Unpaid care work (71)**
  - Women: 2.7%
  - Men: 0.9%

Note: The figure reflects available data for 83 countries and areas over the period 2000–2016. Data disaggregated by unpaid domestic work and unpaid care work are only available for 71 countries. The number of countries and areas represented in each type of unpaid work is indicated in parentheses.
The corridors of political and economic power continue to be dominated by men

Effective policymaking to achieve gender equality demands broad political participation. Yet women’s representation in single or lower houses of parliament in countries around the world was only 23.4 per cent in 2017, just 10 percentage points higher than in 2000.

Even in the two regions most advanced in terms of women’s representation—Australia and New Zealand and Latin America and the Caribbean—women occupy fewer than one out of three seats in parliament. Northern Africa and Western Asia has made impressive advances; the proportion of seats held by women rose nearly fourfold between 2000 and 2017. Nevertheless, women still hold fewer than one in five parliamentary seats in the region.

Slow progress suggests that stronger political will and more ambitious measures are needed. Quotas to boost women’s political participation and empowerment have been helpful. 75 out of 190 countries (39 per cent) have used some form of quota system to increase women’s representation, and election results in 2016 show that the strategy is working. However, quotas may also impose a false ceiling on women’s representation; they therefore need to be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure continued progress.

Women are also underrepresented in managerial positions, especially in senior and middle management. In most of the 67 countries with data from 2009 to 2015, less than a third of senior- and middle-management positions were held by women. Modest improvements can be observed in some countries. Over the past decade, the share of women in senior and middle management increased in about half of the countries with available data. However, the proportion of women in these positions remains significantly lower than the share of women in total employment for all of the countries studied. The data also suggest that more women are in junior, rather than middle- or senior-management positions and need to break through the glass ceiling in order to reach top-saloon positions.

Proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliament, 2000 and 2017 (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia and New Zealand</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Northern America</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern and South-Eastern Asia</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Southern Asia</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa and Western Asia</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania*</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only half of women in selected countries make their own decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care

Women and girls’ autonomy in decision-making over sexual relations, contraceptive use and access to sexual and reproductive health services is key to their empowerment and to fully exercising their reproductive rights. In 45 countries with available data, 43 of which are in developing regions, just over half (52 per cent) of women aged 15 to 49 years who are married or in union make their own informed decisions about sexual relations and the use of contraceptives and health services.
Proportion of women aged 15 to 49 years (married or in union) who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care, 2007-2015 (latest available) (percentage)

- Middle Africa (5) 26.8
- Western Africa (13) 29.6
- Eastern Africa (12) 49.0
- Southern Africa (3) 60.9
- Asia (6) 68.5
- Latin America and the Caribbean (4) 70.8
- Europe (2) 71.3

Note: The figure reflects available data from 45 countries (covering 7 percent of the world's population) over the period 2007-2015. The number of countries represented in each region is in parentheses.