

# The Women, Peace, and Security Index: A Global Index of Women's Wellbeing

Achieving gender equality has been a prioritized goal of the international community for many years, yet women in the world today still face injustice, exclusion and violence. To track progress on women's rights and female empowerment, quantitative and comparable indices on a global scale are useful. This is the background for introducing the new Women, Peace, and Security Index, created by researchers at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). Women's wellbeing is measured along three dimensions – inclusion, injustice, and security. The index provides an important tool with which to understand key achievements, as well as insights into the work that remains to achieve gender equitable societies.

## Brief Points

- The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index bridges insights from gender and development indices with those from peace and security indices.
- Countries are ranked across three dimensions of women's wellbeing: inclusion, justice and security.
- The index ranks 153 countries and covers more than 98 percent of the world's population.
- The index reveals that there are significant differences both across and within regions. There is potential for improvement in all regions, including in those countries that are ranked among the top ten.
- The WPS Index is useful to several key stakeholder groups, such as policy makers, civil society, businesses and investors, academics, and the international development community.

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, increasing women's participation and incorporating gender perspectives in peace and security efforts have been the focus of several initiatives taken by the United Nations (UN). The most important breakthrough for advancing this agenda was the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which recognizes that women's rights are vital to achieving peace and justice. This resolution has become the normative framework under which new initiatives are developed. Further, achieving gender equality is listed as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are the priorities for 193 UN member states to achieve by 2030. Gender equality is one of the keystone goals, and there is widespread consensus that women's empowerment is crucial to progress on the other SDGs.

Scholars have found gender equality to correspond with a wide range of positive outcomes. Several studies report that gender-equal societies have lower risk of civil war outbreak. Some studies indicate that peace agreements are more sustainable when women are included in the negotiations. Moreover, research has highlighted the way in which women are affected by armed conflict, also after the conflict formally ends. Some findings suggest that while more men die during conflict, more women than men die in the aftermath. Further, studies report that women's life expectancy is reduced more than men's, and that maternal mortality rates are elevated in the aftermath of conflict. How we understand notions of peace and security need to incorporate an awareness of the gendered aspects of these concepts.

Policy makers, the development community and researchers emphasize that women are at the heart of efforts to achieve sustainable peace through inclusion, justice, and security. To reveal patterns in gender inequality and conflict risk, and to compare national progress against such goals, both policy makers and researchers need high quality data. Global indices are increasingly popular because they can distill an array of complex information into a single number. But while there are a growing number of global indices, none has brought together the three critical dimensions of women's inclusion, justice, and security. Current gender indices are typically limited to indicators of inclusion,

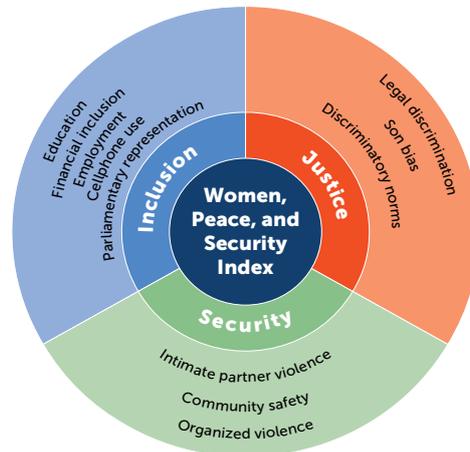


Figure 1: The WPS Index consists of 3 dimensions and 11 indicators

such as whether women complete secondary school or are in paid work.

The new Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index is unique among indices on both gender and security fronts, precisely because it incorporates the security dimension of women's wellbeing. Below, we explain the content of the index, together with some key findings and highlights. In the conclusion, we summarize the importance of the index together with recommendations for how to use the insights and tools that we provide.

## The New Index

The WPS Index is the first gender index to be developed in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN member states in September 2015. The "Sustaining Peace" agenda aims at strengthening the UN system's ability to prevent conflicts, and a gender perspective is incorporated. The WPS index ranks 153 countries and covers 98 percent of the world's population. The ranking is calculated based on 11 separate variables, all taken from publicly available data, that cover three basic dimensions of women's well-being. The three dimensions – inclusion, justice, and security – are illustrated in Figure 1.

Inclusion is measured by women's achievements in education, employment, and parliamentary representation, as well as access to cellphones and financial services. Justice is captured in both formal and informal aspects through indicators that measure the extent of

discrimination in the legal system, alongside any bias in favor of sons and exposure to discriminatory norms. Security is measured at three levels – family, community, and society. In total, these three dimensions are crucial for women's well-being.

Major innovative features of the WPS Index set it apart from existing gender indices and security indices. The WPS Index incorporates several indicators that have never been used in other prominent gender indices: Whether women's paid work is deemed acceptable by men in the society, women's perceptions of safety in the community, and the security threat faced by women in the household, in the neighborhood, and in wider society. The index also incorporates other indicators that have rarely been included in indices: financial inclusion, cellphone use and a bias for sons. The WPS Index thus adds value as a more complete measure of women's status in society than other indices in several key respects. Moreover, we focus on women's status and achievements in an absolute sense rather than relative to men. Instead of focusing on the gaps between women and men, countries are ranked based on their general performance in women's inclusion, justice and security. In this way, we avoid celebrating countries where, for example, education attainment is equally low for both boys and girls as having achieved gender equality.

## Main Findings and Highlights

Below, some of the main findings are presented. The ranking is based on numbers from 2015<sup>1</sup>, and the top ten and the bottom ten are presented in Figure 2.

Countries in the top dozen rankings on the WPS Index (with ties for some positions) include Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, Finland, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Singapore, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom. These countries share some important characteristics – each of these societies are generally peaceful and stable. However, even the top ten countries have potential for improvement. Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden record high rates of intimate partner violence, for example, and fewer than half of women in Belgium, Slovenia, and Spain are in paid work. Iceland, who currently tops the ranking, has a constitution that does not contain a clause on non-discrimination by gender.

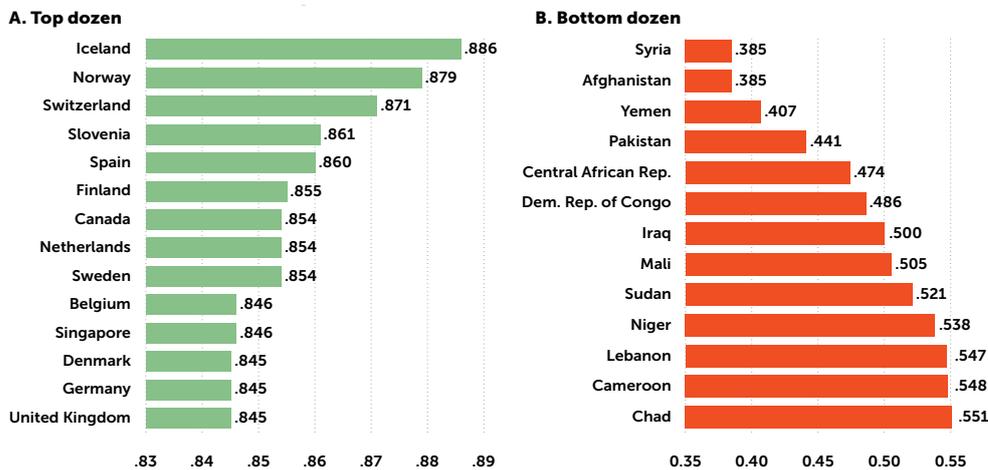


Figure 2: The best and worst performers on the index

The worst performing countries on the WPS Index are Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Sudan, Niger, Lebanon, Cameroon, and Chad. These countries all perform poorly on multiple fronts and especially poorly on organized violence. The bottom dozen rankings include the countries with the worst global scores on female employment (notably Syria, where only one in eight women are in paid work and with low rates predating the conflict) and discriminatory norms (most markedly Pakistan).

Further, looking at the global picture offers some insights. First, there are differences both across and within regions, as illustrated in Figure 3. The Middle East and North Africa region performs poorly on the index overall, which can be traced largely to high levels of organized violence, discriminatory laws that continue to disempower women, and low rates of inclusion. But while there are clear regional patterns in performance, there are also major differences within regions. Importantly, all regions have at least one country scoring above the global average, illustrating that improvements are feasible in order to reach the standards of neighbors.

Second, the index demonstrates that good things often go together. Around 30 countries score in the top third on all three dimensions, with achievements in each dimension reinforcing progress more broadly. However, such favorable synergies are not a given, as patterns of unbalanced achievement across dimensions are also common. For example, Latin America

generally does well on justice but performs unimpressively on inclusion – a dimension on which several other regions also perform poorly, most notably the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Third, the data reveals fronts where too many countries lag way behind global averages, such as women’s parliamentary representation. While Rwanda has the global high at 56 percent (for both houses of parliament), Qatar sets the global low at zero. The global average of female legislators is around 20 percent. Furthermore, there is extensive legal discrimination in all regions. These patterns underline major potential for improvement, addressing critical deficits for meeting the goals that all governments have signed up to. On the other hand, we see well-performing countries all around the world. For most indicators and most regions, there are countries that do much better than the global average. For example, the global average for women’s schooling is about seven years, and in all regions except South Asia, there are countries well above that level. Namibia and South Africa in Sub-Saharan Africa and Mongolia in East Asia are all at or above 10 years.

Fourth, too many governments are failing to ensure security for women at the family, community, and societal levels. Therefore, an important innovation with the WPS index is the inclusion of security at these three levels.

Women’s security in the family is measured by intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence

experienced by women globally, in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Around the world, about 30 percent of women who have been in a relationship have experienced violence from their intimate partner. It is well documented that intimate partner violence can lead to severe physical, reproductive, and mental health complications. In conflict and disaster settings, these repercussions can be exacerbated by lack of access to medical care and widespread infectious disease, stress, and malnutrition. Very high rates of intimate partner violence have been reported in a range of conflict settings.

At the communal level, women’s security is measured by the feeling of safety in the community. The feeling that one can walk alone at night anywhere near one’s home without fear is a basic indicator of security. Globally, about two of three adults feel safe walking alone at night. Fewer than one in three women feel safe in their community in several Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. Countries where women report a high sense of safety include Singapore, Somalia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Rwanda, and Bangladesh, as well as Norway and Spain, where perceptions of community safety are at least 80 percent.

Security at the societal level is captured using battle-death data for organized violence from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). Although these data do not include information on the gender of the fallen, organized violence creates insecurities for women living in conflict-affected areas. Indeed, independent of which gender is dying, women’s suffering likely increases with the number of battle-deaths. It is noteworthy that all countries in the bottom 16 of the index are undergoing some sort of organized violence, and that more than 60 percent of battle-related deaths in 2015 took place in the bottom three alone: Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen. However, even when excluding the security dimension, these countries continue to be at the very bottom of the index. This speaks to the fact that the challenges faced by women (as well as men) in these countries are not solely related to security factors, but rather stem from a broad set of issues.

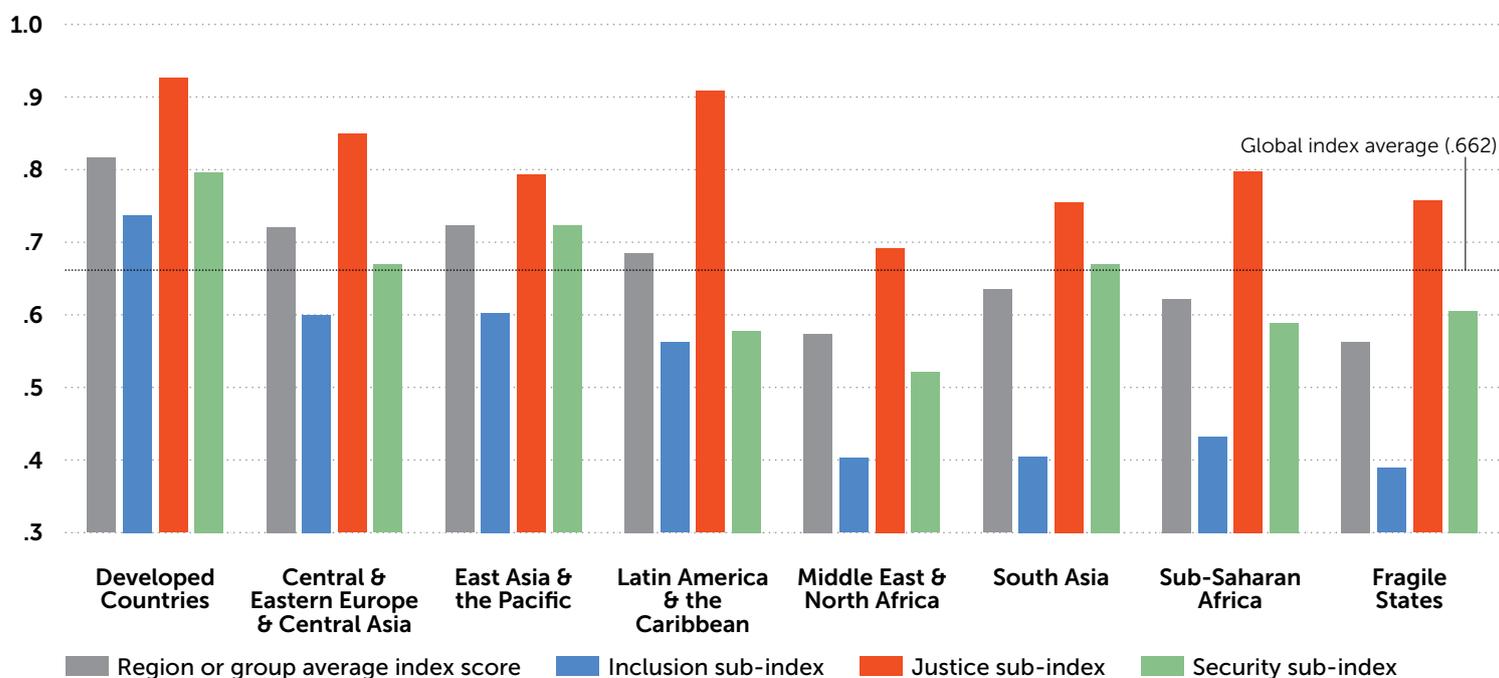


Figure 3: Good performance across dimensions of the index for some country groups and unbalanced for others, index and sub-index score

### The Way Forward

The WPS Index offers important insights into both progress and deficits in women's wellbeing globally. The results and analyses provide opportunities for stakeholders to come together to discuss challenges and identify major opportunities for transformative change. In the next years, the index will be updated every two years. Hopefully, this will accelerate progress on the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

The WPS Index and the findings it reveals are likely to be especially useful to several key stakeholder groups. Policy makers can draw on the results to set priorities for action to improve women's inclusion, justice, and/or security in countries that are performing

poorly overall, or where achievements are unbalanced across the three dimensions and the underlying indicators. The index uncovers the potential for improvements, as well as more generalized deficits that require attention. The international development community can see a comprehensive picture of achievements and gaps along a range of fronts, including areas needing greater focus and investment.

Furthermore, civil society can use the results to spotlight achievements as well as injustice and to hold decision-makers accountable, especially given the links to the Sustainable Development Goals to which all national governments have committed. In addition, businesses and investors can better analyze risks and assess the policy environment in countries based on rankings on inclusion, justice, and security. Lastly,

academics from a range of disciplines – peace and security studies, development economics, gender specialties – can exploit a wealth of possibilities for research from the WPS Index, which provides a major database for analysis as well as online tools to investigate the data. ■

### Notes

- Note that for some of the indicators, we have used numbers further back in time due to data availability.

### Further Reading

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo (2017) *Women, Peace, and Security Index 2017/18: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women*. Washington, DC: GIWPS and PRIO. Available at: [giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index](http://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index)

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### THE PROJECT

This Paper on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index is a collaboration between the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. The Government of Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Bank of America Charitable Foundation funded this project.

### PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.