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Sustainable Development Goal no. 5

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

“Women’s rights are human rights” – Hilary Rodham Clinton

SDG 5 aims to grant women and girls equal rights and opportunities to live free of violence and discrimination, including the workplace and to ensure women have the right to choose, whether the choice is regarding career, marriage, or reproductive decisions.

The fifth sustainability goal defined by the United Nations (UN) is about achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls. To achieve this goal, the UN defines nine targets, six of which are outcome targets, while the last three are means of implementation targets. To assess the progress on each of the targets, the UN has defined one or two indicators (United Nations, 2018). Each of the targets and indicators will be discussed below.

Some might wonder why there is a need for a specific goal of achieving gender equality. To answer this question, let us turn the question around and ask why there isn’t gender equality? The facts show that equality is lacking in regard to gender on most levels, whether it is in the labor market where women generally have lower wages than men; in the home, where women spend more time on unpaid care work than men; when it comes to finances, where women are less likely to own land and capital; and in the public sphere, where women are less likely to be in government, in parliament, and in managerial positions.

On the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2025) that measures the gender gap by economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health, and survival as well as political empowerment, no country has achieved gender equality. The Nordic countries rate high on this index, with Iceland in the lead. Iceland has ranked on top of the Global Gender Gap Index for over a decade. While the status of women in the Icelandic labor market has improved over the last decades, as a Gender Pay Standard was introduced, there is still a significant gender wage gap, as the contribution of women in the labor market is valued less than men’s contribution. Furthermore, women are more likely to take a break from the labor



market due to child-rearing; they also work shorter hours, and are less likely to serve on corporate boards, even though a law on gender quotas on corporate boards has been in place since 2010. Hence, while Iceland is considered at the forefront of gender equality in the world, there is still some way to go before gender equality is reached in the Icelandic labor market (Olafsdottir, 2018).

At the other end of the Global Gender Gap Index are Chad, Sudan, and Pakistan (WEF, 2025). Globally, 40% of women live in countries where gender-based discrimination is assessed as high or very high (EPRS, 2024).

Some things can be accomplished through the legal system. In many countries, laws have been put in place meant to ensure wage equality. In Iceland it has been illegal to pay women less than men for over half a century, but even today there is a measurable difference in the wages of men and women (Olafsdottir, 2018). Hence, more is needed to achieve gender equality and some of it is in our minds, and some of it can be attributed to social norms. Even if we are aware of gender inequality, it is hard to eradicate it as social norms are deep-rooted in every society. Women suffer from lack of access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. In many situations, they are denied access to basic education and health care and are victims of violence and discrimination (United Nations, n.d.). The latest challenge is the use of artificial intelligence. As the basis that AI uses is biased towards women, AI technology is biased against women as a consequence (Ranjan et al., 2024).

The impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. Women and girls endured most of the economic and social fallout of the pandemic because they were already unequally positioned within economies and societies. During the epidemic, gender inequality deepened when it came to violence against women and girls, women's economic insecurity and women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. Data showed that violence against women and girls intensified fast. Women between 18-49 years of age who had fewer economic resources to escape violent situations (unemployed women, students, or full-time caregivers) were particularly likely to report their own or another woman's experiences of violence (UN Women & UNDP, 2022).

Gender equality is an issue of human rights and justice. If we empower women and girls, they can get their voices heard and decide on their future in ways that meets their needs. But gender equality also benefits men and boys, societies, businesses, and economies as a whole. There is ample evidence that gender inequalities have a negative impact on development outcomes, hampering poverty alleviation and restricting the potential to increase wellbeing.



Achieving gender equality can therefore accelerate progress towards other development goals, such as food security, and create a virtual cycle for sustainable development (EPRS, 2024).

Below, each of the targets for SDG 5 are discussed along with their indicators (United Nations, 2018). First, we discuss the six outcome targets, which are numbered 1 through 6.

Target 5.1 End discrimination End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Gender discrimination exists in most spheres of life, and this target aims to eliminate all such discrimination. The first step in this direction is to eliminate all legal obstacles to gender equality. This is reflected in the main indicator for this target (Indicator 5.1.1) which is whether legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex, regarding violence against women, employment and economic benefits, and marriage and family (United Nations, 2018).

While it should be relatively easy to fulfill this requirement, no country had achieved a perfect score across all the four areas measured in 2024 (United Nations, 2025). Of the 131 countries for which data is available, 61 countries (47%) maintain at least one restriction preventing women from performing the same jobs as men. Only 38 countries (29%) establish 18 years as the minimum marriage age without exceptions, and just 63 countries (48%) have rape laws based on lack of consent. This means that over half of countries do not have laws that base the legal definition of rape on lack of freely given consent (United Nations, 2025). In at least 16 countries there were still laws in 2023 that required married women by law to obey their husbands (Our World in Data Team, 2023). In 18% of countries, women do not have equal rights to confer citizenship to their spouses and their children (UN Women, 2024a).

Some progress was made from 2019-2024 where 99 positive legal reforms focusing on removing discriminatory laws and establishing legal frameworks to advance equality were passed. Most of the reforms targeted employment and economic benefits as well as strengthening protections against domestic violence (United Nations, 2025). Even where legislation exists, policies to implement or enforce it are often lacking (EPRS, 2024).

Analysis shows that countries with domestic violence legislation report lower rates of intimate partner violence. The average intimate partner violence rates for countries with domestic violence legislation are 9.5% while those for countries with no domestic violence legislation are 16.1% (UN Women, 2025). Reports show that in countries where policies empower women economically, there is higher female labor force participation, lower



vulnerable employment, and greater representation of women in national parliaments. Enactment of childcare laws increases women's labor force participation by 2%, on average, with the research showing that the effect increases over time, reaching up to 4% five years after enactment (Anukriti et al., 2023).

Related to improving education for both genders, comprehensive social protection systems that take into account the needs of women and girls are essential. Social protection can help in poverty and inequality. However, wide coverage gaps remain. In 2023, just over half the world's population (52%) had at least one social protection benefit. However, an estimated 2 billion women and girls were unprotected. Investing in the care economy would simultaneously reduce women's time and income poverty, support their education, and labor force participation, and expand care-related employment, potentially creating almost 300 million jobs by 2035 (ILO, 2022a).

In 44% of countries, the law does not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value (UN Women, 2024b). Globally women earn 20% less than men, while the gender gap varies between countries (ILO, 2022b). Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment, with up to 80% of women's jobs being informal or unprotected in developing countries (ILO, 2023).

There is still a lot of work to be done to achieve this target by 2030 as not a single country fully fulfills this requirement yet (United Nations, 2025).

Target 5.2 Eliminate violence. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

For most of us, being safe in our own home is taken for granted. However, not everyone feels safe at home, and women are more at risk than men to be subject to violence not only in the home, but also in public spheres. Another, no less serious side to violence against women is trafficking and sexual exploitation. Women and girls accounted for 61% of detected victims of trafficking in 2022. Girls are primarily trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys are mainly trafficked for forced labor or forced criminality (United Nations, 2025).

The progress on this target is measured through the proportion of women and girls that have been subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological violence. The two indicators measured make a distinction between violence by a partner or by somebody who is not a partner. Indicator 5.2.1. measures the proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and



older that have been subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner. Indicator 5.2.2 measures the proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner.

The existing data provides a shocking picture of violence against women as one in every eight women and girls aged 15-49 was subjected to sexual or physical violence or both by an intimate partner during a twelve-month period (UN Women, 2025). Here, legislation is of some help as countries with legislation on domestic violence have lower rates of intimate partner violence (9.5%) than those without legislation (16.1%) (UN Women, 2025).

In 2018, in the 154 countries where data is available on physical and sexual violence from an intimate partner, the share of women that had experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner exceeded 20% in 19 countries. The share was between 10% and 20% in 45 of the countries. A total of 39 countries had a share between 5% and 10%, while 51 countries had a share below 5%. None of the countries showed a share below 1% (Our World in Data Team, 2023).

WHO estimates that across the world each year 245 million women and girls are victims of physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (EPRS, 2024). Women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable (Breiding & Armour, 2015).

All the data discussed above relates to violence on behalf of an intimate partner. Data on violence from persons other than a partner does not seem to exist, and data on psychological violence is not available. This begs the question, how are countries to meet this target if the data is not yet available?

Target 5.3 Eliminate forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

In many parts of the world, girls are forced into marriage, taking the choice away from them and subjecting them to intercourse without their consent, leading to serious mental distress. As a consequence, they can be subjected to early pregnancies that can have serious effects on both physical and psychological health of these girls.

Forced marriage is monitored through data on the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married or in a union before the age of 18 (Indicator 5.3.1). UNICEF estimates that in 2023 around 640 million women and girls had married before the age of 18 (EPRS, 2024). In 72% of countries the minimum age of marriage is below 18 years, for both men and women. In 2025, one in five young women between the ages of 20 and 24 years were first



married or in a union before the age of 18. This share is highest in sub-Saharan Africa, or 31% (United Nations, 2025). Poor countries and countries in conflict or crisis are particularly affected. For instance, the average incidence of child marriage in conflict-affected countries is 14.4 percentage points higher than in non-conflict countries. (UN Women, 2025).

Female genital mutilation is practiced in some countries of the world, most of them in Central-Africa. This practice has no practical reason, but harms women and makes intercourse difficult and painful. In many cases female genital mutilation leads to serious infections leading to infertility and other complications (Reisel & Creighton, 2015). The practice of female genital mutilation is monitored through the proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (Indicator 5.3.2). Around the world, over 230 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation. Africa accounts for over 144 million cases of female genital mutilation, followed by Asia with over 80 million women and girls being mutilated and the Middle East with 6 million women and girls. Every year, 4 million girls undergo female genital mutilation, half of them before the age of 5 (United Nations, 2025). Those mostly affected are marginalized groups of women. Hence, this is a group that is hard to reach and at the same time required facing social norms head-on (UN Women et al., 2024). Changes in the practice of female genital mutilation require education and changes in social norms. Outlawing this practice has not proved a solution as female genital mutilation has continued in some localities in a less public or disguised ways to avoid detection (UN Women et al., 2024).

Target 5.4 Value domestic work. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

This target is monitored through Indicator 5.4.1, which measures the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work. In 2023, women and girls were spending an average of 2.5 times more hours per day on domestic and care work than men. Women in Northern Africa and Western Asia spend over four times as many hours as men, while women in Oceania and Europe and Northern America spend approximately twice as many hours (UN Women, 2025). Even in the egalitarian Nordic countries, women spend more time on unpaid domestic and care work than men (Our World in Data Team, 2023). There is also an uneven sharing of



household tasks by income as in the poorest households, the burden on women is particularly pronounced (United Nations, 2025).

The household can be considered an economic entity and should ensure fair distribution of work between partners. With women consistently taking on more unpaid work, they have less opportunity to participate in the labor market or work fewer hours, with the consequence of having lower income and lower chances of promotions and future increases in income. It has proven hard to change this difference in time spent on domestic and care work as it is affected by social norms. Social norms tend to perpetuate the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men (OECD, 2023).

Target 5.5 Ensure leadership. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Most positions of political power are held by men. When it comes to the share of members of parliament or members of government, women are in the minority in most countries. It is very rare that women are in the majority in parliaments or government, even in countries that rate high in equality. This also holds for women on courts, i.e. female judges. While they have increased in numbers in recent years, and their share of women might exceed half overall, the share falls the higher the level of judicial hierarchy (OECD, 2017).

This target is monitored through Indicator 5.5.1, the proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments. In 2025, the share of parliamentary seats held by women was 27%, up from 22% in 2015. In local governments, the participation rate was higher, or 36%. Some optimism can be gained from looking at the share of women among younger members of parliament, as it tends to be higher than the average, with 43% for women under the age of 30 and 37% for under the age of 40 (United Nations, 2025). This gives hope for a more gender-balanced future as younger members advance into leadership positions. The introduction of quotas has boosted the share of women in parliaments. The share is 27% in countries with legislated quotas, while the share is 23% in countries without quotas (UN Women, 2025).

In the world of business and finance, men still hold the majority of positions of power. This target is monitored by Indicator 5.5.2, the proportion of women in managerial positions. In 2023, women held 30% of managerial position globally, despite women accounting for 40% of total employment (UN Women, 2025). The share of women in managerial positions varies



widely between countries. In Australia and New Zealand and sub-Saharan Africa there are over 40% of women in managerial roles, followed by Europe and Northern America, and Latin America and the Caribbean at around 39%. However, Central and Southern Asia lag far behind with a share of 12% in 2023. The share of women in managerial positions in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia has fallen, while in Northern Africa and Western Asia, less than one in five managerial roles are held by women despite an increase in recent years (United Nations, 2025). Since 2015, the representation of women in management has increased by only 2.4 percentage points, reaching 30% in 2023. With this sluggish progress, it will take almost one hundred years to reach gender parity in managerial roles.

Harmful social norms, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes continue to block progress towards women's participation and leadership in decision-making. Support systems can empower women to take on more decision-making roles at community, subnational and national levels (UN Women et al., 2024)

Target 5.6 Access to reproductive care. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

As women's rights are human rights, women should have the right to control their own body and access to sexual and reproductive health and decide on whether they are willing to bear children. The two indicators measuring progress on this target are: Indicator 5.6.1 on the proportion of women aged 15-49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care, and Indicator 5.6.2 which counts the number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education to women and men aged 15 years and older.

Despite these global commitments, only 56% of women who are married or in a union aged 15-49, have full power to make decisions over their sexual and reproductive health and rights, according to data from 78 countries. There is a big difference between regions, as only 37% of women in sub-Saharan Africa have this right while 87% of women in Europe have this right (Our World in Data Team, 2023). While 89% of women can decide on contraceptive use, only 75% are allowed to refuse sexual intercourse, and 75% can make their own healthcare decisions (United Nations, 2025). While countries in Eastern and Southern Africa have seen



progress, many countries in Western and Central Africa have experienced significant setbacks at the same time (United Nations, 2025). Women's rights to control their body does not only depend on where they live, it also depends on their level of education and whether they live in urban or rural areas (UN Women, 2025). In countries like the United States of America, the development is going backwards as strict limits on abortion rights have been put in place in many states in recent years (Davis, 2022).

Women are still at risk of dying while giving birth. Investing in reproductive health does not only reduce maternal mortality but also reduce childbirth injuries and health complications and promote well-being for both mothers and their babies. According to estimates, improving midwives' training might prevent over 40% of maternal fatalities, 39% of neonatal deaths, and 26% of stillbirths, saving 2.2 million lives annually by 2035 (UNFPA, 2025).

This highlights the need to abolish the legal frameworks refusing women their rights, as well as the need to expand access to services. Without sustained action, millions of women will continue to be denied agency over their bodies, compromising their rights, health, and well-being (UN Women, 2025). However, limited resources, both financial and human resources have been dedicated to this target, which has hampered the effective implementation of comprehensive programs. Political and cultural sensitivities surrounding sexual and reproductive health and rights topics, and related stigma and taboos related to them and sexuality education, have consistently emerged as the primary impediments to advancing the agenda on sexual and reproductive health and rights (UN Women et al., 2024).

We have now discussed the six outcome targets and now move to the three means of implementation targets, which are labelled (a) through (c).

Target 5.a Equal rights to economic resources Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

Men and women do not have equal rights to own land or other property or equal rights to inheritance. Indicator 5.a.1 that tracks progress on this target, measures the proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex, on the one hand, and the share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, on the other. In 80% of countries for which data are available, less than half of women have ownership of, or secure rights to, agricultural land. In almost half of these countries, the rate of



landownership among men is at least double the rate among women (United Nations, 2025). Women are less likely than men to own agricultural land in 40 out of 46 countries where data is available (UN Women, 2025).

The second indicator for this target (Indicator 5.a.2) measures the proportion of countries where the legal framework guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control. A global review of 84 countries shows that 58% lack adequate legal protection for women regarding land ownership. Many laws remain outdated, fragmented, and misaligned with constitutional and international standards (UN Women, 2025).

One of the keys to reaching economic gender equality is to ensure equal access to education in all part of the world. However, globally, 122 million girls remain out of school and 39% of young women fail to complete upper-secondary school (UNICEF et al., 2025). The social costs of not educating women staggering. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates that by 2030, the annual social costs of the global basic skills deficit will cross \$10 trillion, which is more than the GDP of France and Japan combined. Girls are at a significant disadvantage compared to boys in sub-Saharan Africa, and there the annual cost of girls leaving school early is \$210 billion, more than 10% of the region's combined GDP (Brunello, et al., 2025).

Hence, the value of increasing school attendance of girls and expanding their schooling would be enormously advantageous for these countries. However, it is not enough to make schooling mandatory as other factors need to follow suit, such as lowering schooling costs, providing cash transfers to households to support girls' education, creating safe environments for girls and taking measures to prevent gender-based violence. Other key issues to support the goals of SDG 5 through education are offering comprehensive sexuality education and ensuring a gender-balanced teacher workforce (UNESCO, 2017).

Target 5.b Enhance the use of technology. Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

Ownership of mobile phones is almost universal (over 95%) in countries like Europe and North America, along with Australia and New Zealand. Owning a mobile telephone means access to information and connectivity to the outside world. In 2024, four out of five people aged 10 and older globally owned a mobile phone (UN Women, 2025).



The main indicator assessing progress on this target is the proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex. It turns out that globally, 77% of women and 82% of men owned a mobile telephone in 2024. Women were about 7% less likely to own a mobile telephone than men, down from 9% in 2021. The gender gap in mobile phone ownership is particularly wide in Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Southern Asia. Among the population without mobile phones, there are nearly 800 million women compared to 600 million men (UN Women, 2025).

Operating technology requires energy, whether to operate mobile phones or other technology, as well as artificial intelligence. The energy sector has been traditionally male dominated, where women have been underrepresented in employment and leadership. Men generally hold high shares of technical and managerial posts in the energy sector, while women are more likely to be in clerical or administrative positions with limited decision-making power. In 2024, women held 12% of ministerial positions responsible for energy, natural resource, fuels, and mining, compared to 23% of ministerial position overall (UN Women, 2025).

Women and girls stand to gain significantly from an equitable and gender-responsive transition to sustainable energy. Stable infrastructure and connectivity in many parts of the world will support sustainable progress. When households are connected to electricity, women are 9 to 23 percentage points more likely to gain employment outside the home. Universal access to clean cooking and the replacement of polluting fuels could reduce illnesses and deaths and save households up to 40 hours a week otherwise spent on collecting fuel and preparing meals. (UN Women, 2025)

Digital technologies are advancing exponentially, offering significant opportunities and a powerful multiplier effect. They also pose risks, particularly for gender equality and women's empowerment. Increased digitization provides women and girls with greater educational, employment, and business prospects and more control over their incomes and health. At the same time, new and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, magnify risks such as technology-facilitated violence against women. If left unaddressed, the global gender gap in internet use could cost low- and middle-income countries an estimated \$500 billion over the next five years (UN Women, 2025).



Target 5.c Empowerment of women and girls. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

Changes in legislation can have different effects on men and women. For example, the effects of changes in income taxes can differ in that the distribution of income varies between men and women. Hence, systematically keeping an eye on how legislation can promote gender equality and empowerment is important.

The indicator monitoring progress on this target (Indicator 5.c.1) measures the proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment. Data from 105 countries for 2018-2021 show that only 26% of countries have comprehensive systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality, 59% have some features and 15% have no minimum elements (EPRS, 2024). It is relatively easy to implement this target, as it only requires changing the priorities in the budget process. However, prioritizing women has remained an obstacle.

Have we made progress?

The progress on gender equality, which was already slow, was compromised by Covid-19, which led to a surge in gender-based violence, including domestic violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation. It also disrupted access to contraception and sexual and reproductive healthcare. In addition, it widened the gender difference in unpaid care work and led to significant job losses among women (EPRS, 2024). Few governments adopted gender-based responses to the pandemic (UN Women & UNDP, 2022).

In recent years there has been a growing backlash against the rights of women and girls in many countries across the world, as diverse conservative and religious actors who are negative towards the accepting and promoting women's rights have used their power to work against the consensus set out in SDG 5. This has slowed the progress of international commitments on sexual and reproductive health and rights, and on education. This has also hindered progress on combating violence against women. Rhetoric against gender equality is fueling online misogyny and attacks on women's rights activists and women in politics in a number of countries, including EU member states (EPRS, 2024).

One barrier to improving the gender data gap is the low level of funding support from national budgets and international donors, particularly in the least developed countries. The UN



estimates that there is a US\$360 billion annual deficit in spending to achieve the gender equality targets by 2030. Only 4 % of total bilateral aid is dedicated to programs where gender equality is the principal objective. There is a particular need to invest more in gender-sensitive humanitarian and emergency responses and programming for adolescent girls (EPRS, 2024).

If we look at countries by income group, low-income countries face major challenges in achieving SDG 5 and the trend is stagnating. Lower-middle-income countries face significant challenges, and the trend there is also stagnating. Upper-middle-income countries and high-income countries face challenges in achieving SDG 5, and the trend is moderately increasing. The level and rate vary significantly across regions. Two-thirds of countries have made some progress, while a third of countries has shown no progress towards gender equality or even regressed (EPRS, 2024).

Besides finance, a big hurdle in moving towards gender equality is gender norms. Without tackling biased gender social norms head on, we will not achieve gender equality. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) publishes the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) that attempts to estimate to what extent the gender bias lies in social norms (UNDP, 2023). The index quantifies biases against women, by capturing people's attitudes on women's roles along four key dimensions: political, educational, economic, and physical integrity. The index, which covers 85% of the global population, reveals that close to 9 out of 10 both men and women hold biases against women. Nearly half the world's people believe that men make better political leaders than women do, and two of five people believe that men make better business executives than women do. These gender biases hold across all dimensions of gender social norms, political, educational, economic and physical integrity, and hold across regions, income levels and cultures. In general, men show more of a gender social norms bias than women, but the difference is not large. Comparing the period from 2010-2014 to the period 2017-2022, there is very small fall in the Gender Social Norms Index, in total from 87% of people who had at least one bias to 85%. (UNDP, 2023).

While the educational level for women has been rising during the last decades, this has not transferred into increased economic empowerment. There seems to be a broken link between women's access to education and achievements in economic empowerment. Now, average income gaps between women and men are more related to measures of gender social norms than with gender gaps in education. In countries with higher bias in gender social norms, women spend much more time than men on domestic chores and care work (UNDP, 2023).

Even though formal barriers to women holding political office have been removed in many countries, gender gaps in political representation remain high. On average, the share of



heads of state or government who are women has remained around 10% worldwide since 1995, and women hold just over a quarter of parliament seats globally. Women leaders are often judged more harshly than their male counterparts. When women become leaders, changes in social norms can go either towards greater acceptance of women's leadership or towards a stronger backlash against women (UNDP, 2023).

What can we do to improve? We need to include gender and issues related to gender in the design and development of legislation, policies, infrastructure projects, services, guidelines, protocols, and regulations. We need to consider the specific needs and impacts on women and men at every stage from planning to implementation. We need to track commitments to gender equality through budget allocations, expenditure, and gender audits to consistently monitor progress.

We need to make sure that health services, serve the needs of women and children, through maternity, infant health, and reproductive health; that social protection systems also serve the needs of women and children. We need to ensure that healthcare and education are designed and delivered to address the needs and realities of women and girls.

We also need to address the issue of social norms and engage men, religious leaders, cultural figures, and other influential leaders in gender equality initiatives. We need to integrate these elements into program strategies and establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess changes in beliefs and behaviors.

Room for improvement

So far none of the SDG 5 indicators has been achieved, while the year 2030 is within reach. Of the indicators for SDG 5, moderate progress has been made on 40%, while marginal progress has been made for 60%. Data for is unavailable for four targets (United Nations, 2025).

At the current rate:

- it will take 300 years to end child marriage;
- it will take 286 years to close gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws;
- it will take 140 years to achieve equal representation in leadership in the workplace;
- it will take 47 years to achieve equal representation in national parliaments (EPRS, 2024).

I don't know about you, but I don't have time for that.



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