



PRIO Centre on  
Gender, Peace  
and Security

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# Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/22

Accomplishing gender equality has been a prioritized goal of the international community for many years, and yet, in many places, women still face injustice, exclusion, and violence. To track progress on women's rights and female empowerment, quantitative and comparable global indices play a crucial role. This policy brief introduces the third edition of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index, created by researchers at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GI-WPS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). It measures women's wellbeing along three dimensions – inclusion, justice, and security. The index provides a significant tool to understand key achievements, as well as a guide to map remaining efforts to achieve gender equitable societies.

## Brief Points

- The WPS Index ranks 170 countries and covers 99% of the world's population.
- The 2021 WPS Index finds a slowdown in the pace of improvement in women's wellbeing and widening disparities across countries.
- The range of scores in the 2021 WPS Index is vast, with Norway at the top scoring more than three times higher than Afghanistan at the bottom.
- 90 countries have improved their score by at least 5% since the inaugural WPS Index in 2017, and six of the top ten score improvers are in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the opposite end we find Afghanistan, with a decline of 28%.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has triggered major reversals in rates of paid employment as well as augmented the risk of both first-time and ongoing intimate partner violence.

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## Introduction

Since the 1990s, improving women's participation and incorporating gender perspectives in peace and security efforts have been a key focus of several United Nations (UN) initiatives. The most important breakthrough for advancing this agenda was the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000, which recognizes that women's rights are vital to achieving peace and justice. UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions have become the normative framework under which new initiatives are developed. Scholars have found gender equality to correspond with a wide range of positive outcomes. 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. Gender equality is a focus of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), constituting both a goal in itself (#5) and a cross-cutting issue across the whole SDG agenda. 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 distil an array of complex information into a single number.

The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index is unique among gender indices because it incorporates a security dimension of women's wellbeing. This third edition of the global WPS Index provides important insights into patterns and progress on women's status and empowerment around the world. It reflects a shared vision that countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women are accorded full and equal rights and opportunities. In this most recent iteration of the WPS Index, we have also sought to capture insights about the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic for women's inclusion and security.

## The WPS Index

The WPS Index is the first gender index developed that builds a bridge between the peace and security pillar of the UN system and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN member states in September 2015. Further, by presenting gender-specific data, it provides important data for the "Sustaining Peace" agenda, which aims at strengthening the UN system's ability to prevent conflicts. The

third edition of the WPS Index ranks 170 countries and covers 99% of the world's population. The ranking is calculated based on 11 separate variables, all acquired through publicly available datasets. The three dimensions measured by the index – 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 measured through formal and informal indicators: the extent of discrimination in the legal system, alongside son bias (the preferences of male over female children) and exposure to discriminatory norms. Security is gauged at three levels – family, community, and society. In total, these three dimensions are crucial for women's well-being. The data for the third edition for the WPS index does not extend beyond 2020.

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 not been included in comparable indices: the share of men who believe it is unacceptable for women to have a paid job outside the home if they want one, the level of intimate partner violence, women's perceptions of safety in the community, and the presence of armed conflict. The Index also incorporates other indicators that have rarely been included in indices: financial inclusion, cellphone use and son bias. The WPS Index thus adds value as a more complete measure of women's status in society than other indices. 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

The 2021 Index Report, the third since the inaugural edition in 2017, finds a slowdown in the pace of improvement in the WPS Index and widening disparities across countries. The range of scores on the 2021 WPS Index is vast, with Norway at the top scoring more than three times higher than Afghanistan, which is at the bottom. The range of scores is much wider than in 2017, when the score of the top performer was about twice that of the lowest performer. This change is related to the worsening of the situation for women – and the whole society as such – in Afghanistan, due to an intensifying of organized violence, rather than improvements among women in Norway. This widening gap reflects rising inequality in the status of women across countries: countries at the top continue to improve, while those at the bottom get worse, mirroring global trends in wealth and income inequality.

The top dozen countries on the index are all in the Developed Country group. As displayed in Figure 2, the differences across these 12

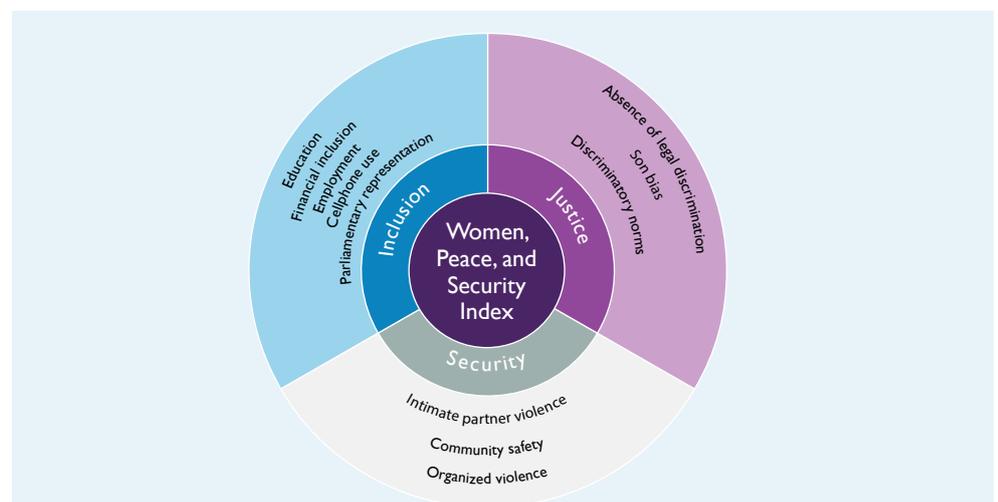


Figure 1: The WPS Index captures three dimensions of women's status across 11 indicators

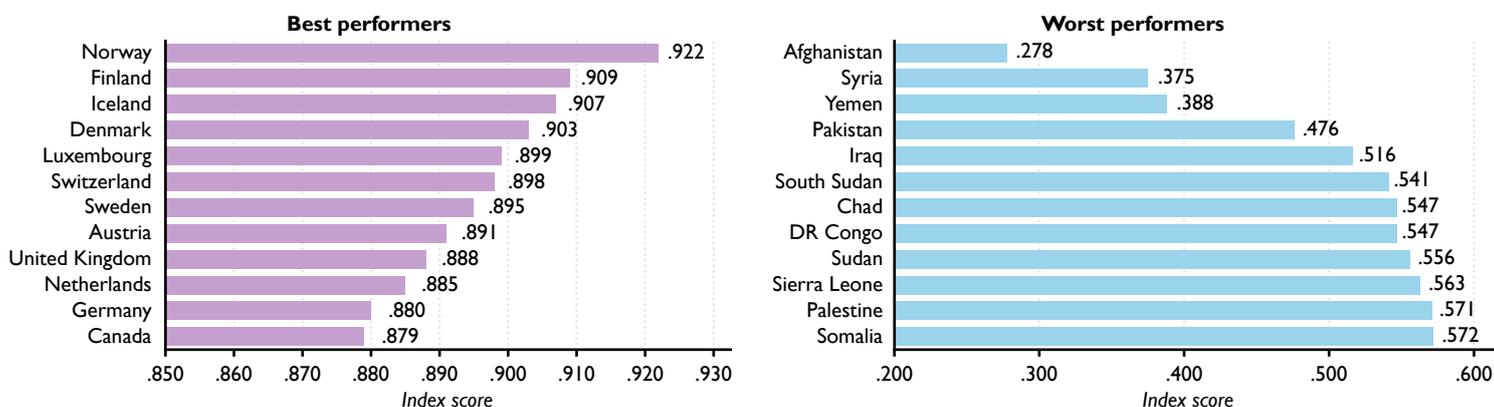


Figure 2: The dozen best and worst performers on the WPS Index 2021

countries are minimal, with a range from .879 (Canada, at number 12) to .922 (Norway, at the top). At the other end of the spectrum, there is a much wider range of performance, with Afghanistan at the bottom performing some 51% worse on the index than Somalia, ranked 12th from the bottom. Of the bottom 12 countries, 10 are classified by the World Bank as fragile states.

Since the inaugural 2017 WPS Index, 90 countries have improved their score by at least 5% – and in 31 countries, scores rose at least 9%, surpassing the global average improvement. Six of the top ten score improvers are in Sub-Saharan Africa: Central African Republic, Mali, Cameroon, Benin, Kenya, and Rwanda, in descending order of improvement. Trends analyses reveal that the pace of progress has slowed by more than half: the global average WPS Index rose about 7% between 2017 and 2019 but only about 3% between 2019 and 2021. The 2021 report indicates that index scores also worsened for several countries. Since 2017, Afghanistan’s score has deteriorated 28%, driven mostly by worsening rates of organized violence and perceptions of community safety. Scores also worsened in absolute terms for Haiti, Namibia, and Yemen, with especially marked declines in the security dimension.

The 2021 report indicates that the number of battle-related deaths from organized violence has declined despite a rising number of conflicts: there were 56 unique state-based conflicts in 2020 – the highest number since 1946 – alongside 72 nonstate conflicts. This points to the presence of many low-intensity conflicts and underlines that more people now live in conflict zones. This is a major concern given

accumulating evidence of the repercussions of conflict beyond the battlefield, especially for women and children, from increased food insecurity to higher risks of intimate partner violence. High rates of organized violence are strongly correlated not only with high rates of violence against women in the home, but also with poor performance on women’s inclusion, justice, and security more broadly. Two of the four countries with the worst levels of violence in 2020 – and indeed over the past decade – Afghanistan and Yemen, are also bottom ranked on the WPS Index.

### Country Focus: Afghanistan

The 2021 WPS Index also explores within country variation, presenting how the various variables perform among the 34 different provinces in Afghanistan. Provincial index scores ranged from .639 in Panjshir to .162 in Uruzgan (Figure 3), with the widest gaps for organized violence. Afghanistan’s lowest-ranking provinces are mainly in the south-eastern areas, where rates of organized violence and intimate partner violence were high. Acceptance of wife beating was widespread (between 67% and 97%), and levels of women’s participation in domestic decision making were very low (between 3% and 21%). High rates of violence in the home compounded the security threats facing women. Nationwide, 35% of Afghan women experienced intimate partner violence, and rates exceeded 84% in Ghor, Herat, and Wardak provinces – higher than those in any country in the global WPS Index.

Efforts to advance the position of Afghan women and girls received much attention after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, and opportunities

for education, employment, and political representation improved. For example, by 2018, 83% of Afghan girls had enrolled in primary school, and by 2019, more than 1,000 Afghan women had started their own businesses, two activities previously prohibited under the Taliban. However, mean schooling for Afghan women was still alarmingly low, at just two years. The collapse of the Afghan government and the rise of the Taliban in August 2021 jeopardize past progress for Afghan women and threaten reversals in access to rights, justice and political participation.<sup>1</sup> This, in combination with the withdrawal of international support and the freezing of state assets, has contributed to a collapse in the Afghan economy and to rapidly worsening the humanitarian situation. Increasing hunger and malnutrition, along with a collapsing health and educational system, are likely to severely impact the condition of Afghan women and men around the country.

### Covid-19

The pandemic has triggered multiple crises, and challenges for women have worsened on several fronts, not least in juggling paid jobs and unpaid care work, but also in growing threats to safety.

The pandemic has triggered major reversals in rates of paid employment, a key indicator of women’s inclusion. Estimated losses in paid employment for women in 2020 (5%) exceeded those for men (3.9%). In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, 17 million women exited paid work during the pandemic, compared with 14 million men. Worldwide, among people who lost their jobs, 9 in 10 women became economically inactive, most of them young, urban, and less educated, compared with 7 in 10 for

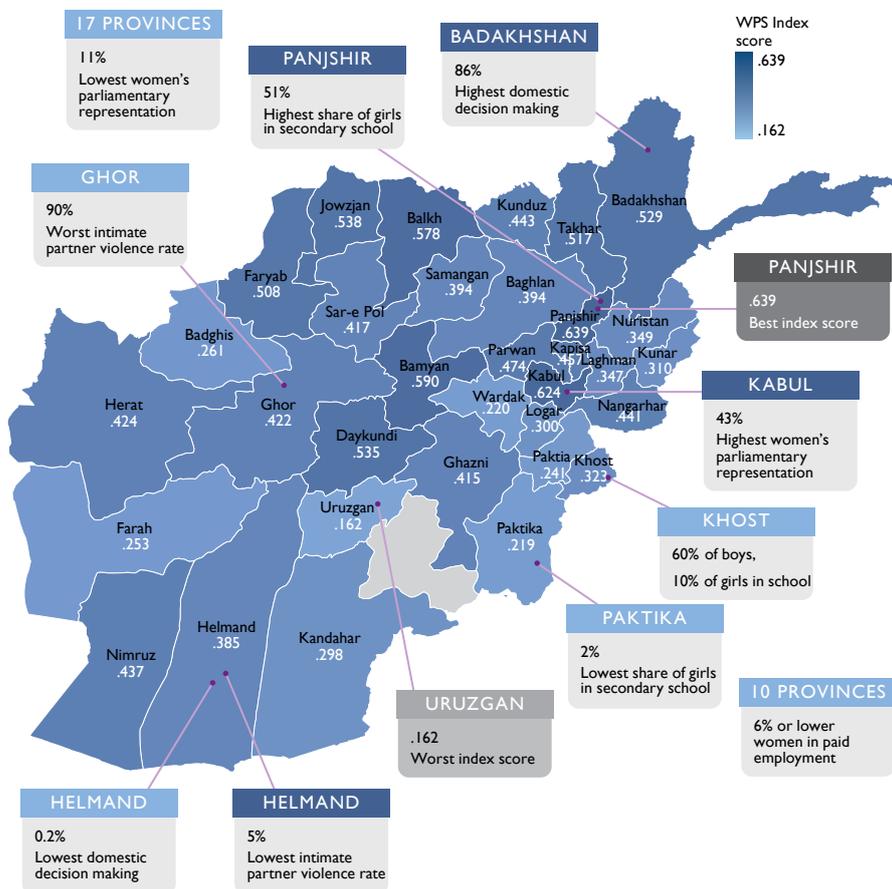


Figure 3: Provincial index scores in Afghanistan

men. This has extensive repercussions, especially for pensions and savings, amplifying wealth gaps that favour men. Long-term exits of women from paid work also reduce national output and prospects for future economic growth.

Women have faced increasing risks of intimate partner violence and greater difficulty leaving abusive relationships due to worsening economic conditions and national lockdowns. For example, survey data from more than 2,500 partnered women in Iran before the pandemic and

six months into the crisis revealed that prevalence rates of current intimate partner violence soared from 54% to 65% and that job losses for women or their partner dramatically increased the likelihood of intimate partner violence. The pandemic has augmented the risk of both first-time and ongoing intimate partner violence. In Iran, more than a quarter of women who had not previously experienced intimate partner violence were abused during the first six months of the pandemic. And during the first wave of lockdowns in Nigeria, women previously

experiencing intimate partner violence suffered more severe acts or new forms of violence.

### 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 WPS Index will be updated every two years. Hopefully, the data provided by the Index will accelerate progress on the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

The 2021 global rankings and novel WPS Index applications underline and illustrate the diverse obstacles and needs facing women around the world. The massive challenges created by the pandemic mean that intersectional analysis and policy making are more important than ever as communities and governments strive to build back better. ■

### Note

1. The background data for the third edition of the WPS index does not extend beyond 2020. Thus, the full implications of these developments for women's security and wellbeing in Afghanistan are not reflected in the report.

### Further Reading

Klugman, Jeni; Milorad Kovacevic; Michael Gottschalk; Elena Ortiz; Jimena Diaz; Varsha Thebo; Isha Raj-Silverman; Jiaqi Zhao; Siri Aas Rustad; Solomon Negash & Kaja Borchgrevink (2021) Women, Peace, and Security Index 2021/22: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women. Washington, D.C.: GIWPS and PRIO.

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### THE PROJECT

This policy brief 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 (GIWPS). 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.