

# UN Women's Gender Snapshot Report: The gender data gap and the progress toward equality

A Q&A with Rumbidzai Chisenga,  
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## UN Women recently published their SDG 5 tracker as part of the annual Gender Snapshot Report. How important are data and indicators in painting a clear picture of the local and global status of gender equality?

Data-driven approaches have proven useful in shaping effective strategies. When it comes to gender equality, contextual data remains scarce, making this area one of the most under-researched and under-reported.

This means that most of the work that aims at diagnosing and addressing gender disparities is done subjectively. Data is crucial for understanding the issues at hand and for formulating targeted solutions. Data doesn't only help us to accurately unpack the problem and hone the responses, it also helps us measure the effectiveness of those responses and assess the progress we are making towards closing the gender gap. In fact, one of the [Gender Snapshot Report's](#) poignant findings is that we have regressed in aspects of this fight. For instance, the report states that women remain chronically underrepresented in public leadership with only 14% of countries having a woman head of state or government and just 26.4% of global parliamentary seats occupied by women.

Without this objective understanding of the global status of gender equality, important adjustments to how we approach this issue cannot be made.

## How can access to data influence policy discussions and awareness of the extent of the global gender gap?

One of the findings that emerged from research conducted by the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Presidential Center for Women and Development (EJS Center) is that many African countries have adopted or ratified policies in favor of women's well-being, fair treatment, and advancement.

The main problem is that the policies are at best under-utilized and at worst, ignored. There are very low levels of compliance to gender quotas across the board as shown by our [Data Hub for Women's Leadership in Public Governance](#). In Benin, for instance, only 7 out of 83 seats are occupied by women (8.4%), whereas the quota stipulates that 22% (24 of 109 seats) are to be reserved for women. So, while there is reason to introduce new policies, we also need to invest in ensuring that compliance to these policies can be incentivized or enforced.

## How are innovative tools—such as the EJS Center Data Hub—helping to bridge the gender data gap and drive progress toward equality?

We are convinced that both the pace and scale of change required to bring us to gender parity cannot be achieved if only a few individuals or organizations are engaged in this work. Therefore, one of the main objectives of the Data Hub was to ensure that the public had free and reliable access to data on women's public leadership.



We also wanted to reduce complexity and ambiguity when it comes to interpreting such data. That's why our content is presented in a simple and straightforward manner. Creating tools such as the EJS Center Data Hub is vital for galvanizing broader participation in advancing gender equality.

### **What more can be done to improve the access to and awareness of data on gender equality as a fundamental tool in the battle for gender equality?**

When we talk about enhancing access to data or information, we certainly cannot ignore the importance of contextualization. If the aim is to have local ownership of the fight for gender equality, there is therefore a need to establish specific language, religious, socio-economic, and political contexts. As more equality champions join this work, I hope we will be able to diversify our delivery platforms to speak directly to the various contexts of our stakeholders.

### **How is the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the efforts to reduce the global gender gap?**

This remains to be seen. With reversals in school enrolment and access to maternal health, we emerged from COVID-19 on the back foot. There are estimates that, globally, over 11 million girls may never go back to school after the pandemic. These are repercussions that the world is grappling with despite the fact that the pandemic period produced some of the most compelling evidence for women's leadership—one particular study revealed that COVID outcomes were systematically better in countries led by women. What is clear is that women need to be

involved in the recovery efforts. Now is the time to employ women's ingenuity, skill, and leadership to help our communities and nations recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic.

### **In your opinion, why is the battle for gender equality more urgent than ever?**

By my own observation, the world is at a precarious tipping point in the fight for gender equality. Some of the greatest gains for gender equity have been realized in the last three years. For example, \$40 billion for concrete actions toward gender were pledged at the Generation Equality Forum last year. This level of financial investment in gender work is unprecedented. However, some of the historically significant milestones are being reversed, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic, the impacts of which have been disproportionately felt by women and girls. In Africa, the pandemic exacerbated existing gaps in the prevention of gender-based violence, and disrupted healthcare systems reversing gains in maternal and reproductive health services.

If the global community is to tip towards equity, we need to increase our commitment, investments, and efforts as a matter of urgency.

