

Women, Peace and Security Index

Insights from the Field: Colombia, South Sudan & Ukraine

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GNWP would like to thank its members and partners in Colombia, South Sudan, and Ukraine for their contributions and support in obtaining information for these case studies. We thank in particular Red Nacional de Mujeres and Red Departamental de Mujeres en Cauca in Colombia; EVE Organization and Hon. Elizabeth Ogwaro in South Sudan; and Democracy Development Center in Ukraine.

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) is a coalition of women's groups and other civil society organizations from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Eastern and Western Europe, and the Middle East and Arab World. GNWP is a recognized international civil society leader that not only influences global policies on WPS and related frameworks, but also ensures their effective implementation on the ground. This can be attributed to its worldwide membership, its unique local-global/global-local strategy, and its participatory and inclusive approaches in bringing local voices to official policy spaces. GNWP's Localization of UNSCR 1325 & Young Women for Peace and Leadership programs received global recognition, including being cited by UN secretary-general in his reports on WPS seven years in a row, as well as by the authors of the Global Study on 1325 as a key strategy for effective WPS implementation. GNWP is grateful to its members and partners from Colombia, South Sudan, and Ukraine for their generosity with their time, and the valuable information and insights provided through interviews conducted by GNWP staff.

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security seeks to promote a more stable, peaceful, and just world by focusing on the important role women play in preventing conflict and building peace, growing economies, and addressing global threats like climate change and violent extremism. We engage in rigorous research, host global convenings, advance strategic partnerships, and nurture the next generation of leaders. Housed within the Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown, the Institute is headed by the former U.S. Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, Melanne Verwee.



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Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
1. Introduction.....	5
2. Overall Insights	6
Peace and Security	6
Inclusion	7
Justice.....	7
3. The Case of Colombia	8
Peace and Security	8
Inclusion	10
Justice.....	11
4. The Case of South Sudan.....	12
Peace and Security	12
Inclusion	13
Justice.....	14
5. The Case of Ukraine	15
Peace and Security	15
Inclusion	17
Justice.....	18
Annex 1: GIWPS Women, Peace and Security Index Indicators.....	20
Notes	21

Executive Summary

The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) conducted qualitative analyses to contextualize the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index,¹ to illustrate what peace looks like for the people affected, and to provide a voice to women peacebuilders. In this paper, we look at how women fare across the three dimensions of justice, inclusion, and security in Colombia, South Sudan, and Ukraine. The analysis draws on GNWP's experiences in working with local women's rights organizations in the three countries, as well as in-depth interviews with local women leaders and other qualitative research and mapping produced by GNWP, its partners, and other stakeholders.

Across the three countries, we see a varied picture of what life looks like for women. Looking at the WPS Index and rankings on the 11 indicators used to measure the status of women's well-being in a country, we see some positive results. In Ukraine, for example, women have high scores on financial inclusion and cellphone use and have completed more years of school than women in Colombia or South Sudan. Colombia and Ukraine have similarly low levels of formal legal discrimination of women. Discriminatory norms (not accepting women working outside the home) are measured at only six percent in Colombia, compared to 11 and 25 percent in Ukraine and South Sudan. In South Sudan, there is an interesting mix of highs and lows for

women: the country has the highest rates of female employment and parliamentary representation, but also the highest rates of intimate partner violence (IPV), organized violence, discriminatory work norms, and legal discrimination.

This paper finds that women's inclusion in peace and security processes remains limited across countries. Where it occurs, it is hard-won and requires sustained advocacy from women activists and civil society. Another commonality is that women in all three countries have similarly low perceptions of community safety.

What makes women safe in a country depends on many factors across multiple areas of their lives. Women need to be safe in their homes and their communities. Access to education, jobs, financial resources, and technology can help or hinder women's ability to feel safe and to know their rights in a country with restrictive gender norms and laws. The experiences and lessons from groups like GNWP add flavor to the quantitative data captured by the WPS Index.

Introduction

Peace to women is much more than the absence of war. GNWP's recent global research shows that women have a holistic understanding of peace and security, which encompasses access to basic services, economic independence, good governance, and the ability to influence decisions in the household, community, and country.² This paper looks at three dimensions of the WPS Index developed by the GIWPS and PRIO: peace and security, inclusion, and justice.

In order to provide a holistic view of what peace and security means to women in countries around the world experiencing different stages of conflict—namely, Colombia, South Sudan, and Ukraine—GNWP used semi-structured interviews with women activists in each country, as well as reviews of existing literature and GNWP's internal documentation from its work in the three countries—including reports from its activities and mapping of

peacebuilding needs and initiatives. The case studies are supplemented with findings from GNWP's global research on perceptions of local women and civil society groups about sustaining peace, a study that reached over 1,500 women and men in 60 countries through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and a multilingual survey, including 58 respondents from Colombia, 114 from South Sudan, and 137 from Ukraine.

This paper is structured as follows: chapter 2 compares key findings and overall trends from the cases of Colombia, South Sudan, and Ukraine. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 dive deeper into the cases of each country, examining women's role in conflict and contextualizing analysis within the peace and security, inclusion, and justice dimensions of the WPS Index. Annex 1 provides definitions of the WPS Index indicators.

Overall Insights

The level of security, justice, and inclusion varies within each country: for example, between rural and urban areas, or depending on the proximity to the front line. It also varies across different groups of women: indigenous, veterans, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and widows were found to be particularly exposed to violence and exclusion in all three countries. This emphasizes the need for strongly contextualized and localized responses and an intersectional analysis of women's needs.

The qualitative analysis underlines the strong connections among the three dimensions. For example, women's security is often linked to their inclusion in political and economic life, as well as their access to justice.

The analysis also reveals some positive developments, particularly legislative and policy reforms: for example, the new policies promoting women's financial inclusion in Colombia, or the 35 percent quota for women's participation in all elected and nominated positions in the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. However, the study also shows that, across all three contexts, discriminatory norms and violence against women hamper women's ability to benefit from progressive policies and legislation.

Peace and Security

The intimate partner violence and community safety indicators of the WPS Index show the universal importance of women's security, whether or not the country has recently experienced armed conflict. This reaffirms the relevance of the WPS agenda to all countries, regardless of whether they are directly affected by conflict.

Qualitative analysis also shows that the security situation of women varies greatly across geographical areas and socioeconomic groups. For example, Ukraine's organized violence is limited to certain parts of the country. Outside of the conflict areas, women in Ukraine enjoy the same—if not higher—levels of security as women in other countries in the region, according to the interviews conducted by GNWP.

Similarly, Colombia's community safety score—which is high in regional terms, albeit significantly below the global average—does not necessarily reflect the reality of women

living in rural areas, who continue to face high levels of insecurity, despite the signing of the peace agreement in 2016.

Women human rights defenders were consistently mentioned as a group facing high levels of insecurity in all three countries. In Colombia, attacks on women human rights defenders have been increasing and are perceived as an important obstacle to the full implementation of the peace agreement.³ While the issue of human rights defenders was not raised as a priority concern in South Sudan and Ukraine, GNWP is aware that women activists and political candidates also face threats in those two countries, as demonstrated by the murder of [Ukrainian activist Katerina Gandzyuk](#) in July 2018.⁴

The qualitative analysis emphasizes the links between the different forms of violence and insecurity faced by women, in particular how organized violence and armed conflict may exacerbate other forms of violence and increase rates of IPV, as noted in the WPS Index report.⁵ For example, in Ukraine, high rates of domestic violence and IPV have been linked to untreated (or inadequately treated) post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the armed conflict.⁶ Armed conflict has also exacerbated poverty and marginalization of women, especially internally displaced women, rural women, or (in Colombia) indigenous and Afro-Colombian women, making them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, survival sex, and human trafficking. In South Sudan, it is estimated that 70 percent of women living in IDP camps have experienced sexual violence.⁷

Armed conflict also exacerbates preexisting discrimination, insecurity, and poverty. For example, South Sudan has the highest IPV rate (47 percent) in the world, according to the Index. GNWP's partners in the country noted that the high levels of sexual violence and general insecurity contributed to women's economic problems, because they felt unsafe going out to collect wood and therefore had to buy wood at the market. In Ukraine, women who had been displaced due to conflict often found it difficult to secure housing and employment.⁸ This suggests that there is a two-way correlation between women's economic empowerment and women's security. In the same way, poverty and lack of financial independence make women more vulnerable to human trafficking. However, sexual exploitation and other

forms of violence and insecurity also reduce or negate women's financial independence.

Inclusion

While the GIWPS Index does not include an indicator of women's inclusion in decision-making at the local level, the qualitative analysis shows that women's participation and inclusion tend to be lower at the local than at the national level.

For example, in Colombia, women hold 19 percent of parliamentary seats but only 15 percent of mayorships. Similarly, in Ukraine, women occupy 12 percent of the seats in the parliament but only four percent of positions in the oblast (province) administrations.

While decentralization can provide an opportunity to strengthen women's inclusion and overall WPS implementation at the local level, this can also lead to women being pushed out from leadership positions, as was the case in Ukraine.⁹

Women's inclusion in peace and security processes remains limited. When it occurs, as was the case in the peace negotiations between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), it is hard-won and requires long-term, sustained advocacy from women activists and civil society. Due to this general pattern of exclusion, the needs and concerns of women who participated in a conflict are often neglected in the peace and security process. Even in Colombia, despite the fact that women made up around 40 percent of the FARC fighters,¹⁰ the demobilization process has failed to address the specific needs of women ex-combatants.¹¹ The same is true in Ukraine: women who participated in combat could not access the same support as their male counterparts when they returned from the front lines because they were not registered as combatants.¹²

In terms of economic inclusion, women's participation continues to be concentrated in small-scale businesses and traditionally "female" activities, such as education, health care, consumer-goods manufacturing, social services, beauty, and food processing. For example, in Ukraine, although 40 percent of business owners are female, most large businesses are headed by men and women generally run small, one-person businesses.¹³

Women's economic and financial exclusion tends to be

fueled by harmful gender stereotypes that posit men as the principal or sole decision-makers on financial matters. For example, in Colombia, although nondiscrimination in access to financial services is mandated by law, women are often not included in land titles and deeds, which effectively limits their financial independence.

Justice

The qualitative analysis shows that de facto legal discrimination and discriminatory norms are closely linked. In all three countries, even when progressive nondiscriminatory laws exist, their implementation is hampered by discriminatory norms.

Additionally, discriminatory norms coupled with conservative social movements can pose a threat to laws that protect women's rights and even lead to their dilution.

In Colombia, implementation of the peace agreement—and, in particular, its progressive gender focus—has been slow. As of June 2018, only 54 percent of the accord's ethnic chapter (*capítulo étnico*) and only 51 percent of the gender provisions had been initiated.¹⁴ In March 2019, the conservative government proposed changes to the special tribunal, or the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), that would exclude sexual violence crimes from its jurisdiction.¹⁵ While the proposed reform was not passed in parliament, it is emblematic of the government's lack of support for women's rights. Moreover, while the JEP has been advancing its work, including by holding hearings in different parts of Colombia, progress has been slow, delaying access to justice and reparations for most victims.¹⁶

Similarly, in Ukraine, the advent and proliferation of an "anti-gender" movement, supported by the influential Council of Churches, has limited the ability of the government to fully address gender-based violence and gender inequality. The anti-gender groups have campaigned to remove the term "gender" from national legislation, objecting to the definition, which stipulates that roles and attributes appropriate for men and women are constructed socially.¹⁷



The Case of Colombia

Colombia’s rank on the WPS Index fell between 2017 and 2019, although its record on organized violence improved, as did the overall score. The ranking worsened because some other countries improved faster and overtook Colombia. For example, in 2017, Armenia was ranked four places behind Colombia, but in 2019 jumped 18 places due to improvements of 26 and 14 percentage points in financial inclusion and female parliamentary representation, respectively.

Colombia ranks 104th with 0.691 on the 2019/20 WPS Index (compared to 96th place in 2017), placing it in the lower-middle tercile of the Index and slightly below the regional average (0.728).

As shown in figure 1, Colombia scored better than the regional average on women’s employment, mean years of schooling, cellphone use, and community safety. However, it scored far worse than the regional average on women’s parliamentary representation and on IPV.

We now examine each of the three dimensions of the WPS Index in detail, giving context by adding qualitative data to the numbers we see reflected in the Index’s 11 data points.

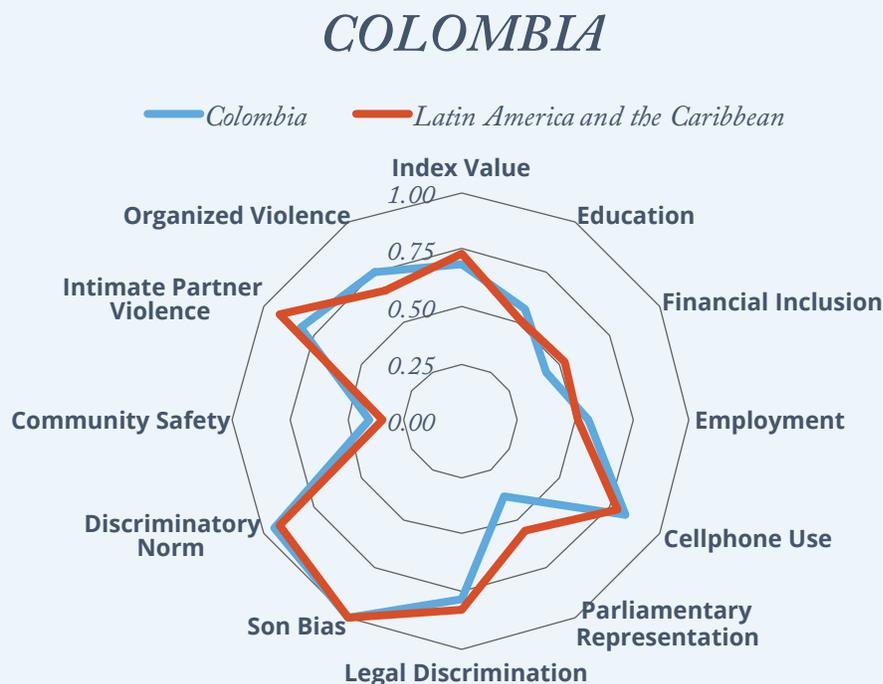
Peace and Security

The peace agreement between the government and the FARC, ratified on November 30, 2016, brought an end to a half-century-long civil conflict, which has left as many as 220,000 dead, 25,000 disappeared, and 5.7 million displaced. Women’s groups were actively involved in the advocacy and negotiations that led to the agreement. This resulted in strong gender and women’s rights provisions in the final peace deal. Women are now also at the forefront of advocacy and work toward effective implementation of the peace agreement. While Colombia does not have a national action plan (NAP) on women, peace, and security, WPS resolutions have been an important component of the advocacy for peace and the implementation of the peace agreement.¹⁸

However, nearly three years after signing, implementation of the peace agreement is slow and has faced numerous obstacles, including the sluggish pace of FARC demobilization;¹⁹ continued violence from criminal and paramilitary groups, including FARC fighters who refuse to demobilize;²⁰ disagreements around the peace accord within the congress; and the polarization of Colombia’s political scene. As a result, much of the conflict’s impact remains

Figure 1: How Colombia Performs on the WPS Index

Source: Data from the 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index.¹¹⁸ See also the country page for Colombia on GIWPS's website for more information (<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/colombia/>).



unaddressed, with serious consequences for women's security, inclusion, and access to justice.

Nevertheless, organized violence began to decrease following the peace agreement, and Colombia is now better than the regional average on this front. This trend is promising, particularly given concerns over implementation and the collapse of the negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN).²¹

Impact of armed conflict on women. Women and other marginalized groups—such as indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, native islander *raizales*, *palenquero* descendants of runaway slaves, and Roma populations—were disproportionately affected by the armed conflict. For example, according to the national victims' registry, women constituted 51 percent of the victims of forced displacement in Colombia in 2017.²² Women also made up almost 40 percent of the FARC fighters.²³ However, the demobilization process has faced challenges in meeting the specific needs of women ex-combatants.²⁴

The armed conflict in Colombia also exacerbated preexisting social, economic, and political discrimination against women and other historically marginalized groups, making them vulnerable to sexual violence, murders, kidnappings, and other attacks.

Conflict-related sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse.

The JEP tribunal has documented around 2,000 cases of sexual violence. However, this number represents only the tip of the iceberg. According to the National Center of Historical Memory, 15,076 people were victims of sexual violence during the armed conflict between 1985 and 2016, with the perpetrators receiving widespread impunity.²⁵

Women and girls, as well as LGBTQI persons, continue to be targeted and suffer sexual violence, according to the 2018 report of the UN Secretary-General on WPS. The Colombian national victims unit registered 97,916 victims of armed conflict in 2018, of whom 254 were victims of sexual violence. Among those were 232 female victims, including 18 girls (from zero to 17 years of age) and 214 women (209 from 18 to 60 years of age and five from 61 to 100 years of age); 14 men; and three LGBTQI persons.²⁶

General perceptions of security and community safety. In 2019, the percentage of Colombian women who reported feeling safe in their communities was higher than the regional average (40 versus 34 percent).

However, this is still only a minority of women and a much worse score than the global average. Rural women in particular continue to face high levels of insecurity in their communities. The signing of the peace agreement left territories previously controlled by the FARC with a leadership void, creating a space for other criminal and



armed groups to take control.²⁷ Rural populations are experiencing an increase in drug trafficking and illegal mining, which has led to targeted killings and extortion. GNWP’s and its partners’ work with local populations has shown an increase in insecurity, fear, and even femicide reported by local women. As Francy Jaramillo, a women’s rights activist based in the Cauca department—one of the areas that had been most affected by FARC violence—and a member of Red Nacional de Mujeres, put it, “In some ways, people preferred it when the FARC was here.”²⁸

Women activists and human rights defenders are another group that is particularly exposed to violence. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported 163 killings of social leaders and human rights defenders in 2018, many of them women.²⁹ The number of attacks on human rights defenders is growing, despite the overall downward trend in homicide in Colombia. In the words of Michel Forst, the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, “Human rights defenders in Colombia are operating in a coercive and unsafe environment.”³⁰ The surge in attacks on women human right defenders, including the killing of five

indigenous leaders in Cauca in October 2019,³¹ was one of the triggers that led to the mass protests across the country in November 2019.³²

Intimate partner violence. Colombia performs significantly worse than other countries in the region on this front, with an alarming 18 percent of Colombian women reporting having experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner in the past year, compared to a regional average of only eight percent. Colombia has the third-highest rate of annually reported IPV in the region, after Bolivia and Barbados, both of which are at about 27 percent. While the government has enacted several laws to prevent and punish violence against women (such as the 2008 Law 1257),³³ IPV remains prevalent.

Interviews with local women indicate that even this rate—which is calculated from population-based surveys, not crime reporting—is likely to be an underestimation. It was also noted that in many local communities there are no mechanisms for reporting sexual violence, including IPV. A general lack of trust in the judicial system also discourages women from reporting such crimes.³⁴

Colombia’s civil war undoubtedly exacerbated gender-based

violence. In a context where, for decades, violence against women was a central and often unpunished part of war, it is perhaps not surprising that these practices spread beyond the front lines and into intimate relationships.

At the same time, traditional strong cultural norms are also an important factor. In Colombia, violence against women is normalized, and women's testimonies are not considered legitimate. In many indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, women are taught to "endure" violence committed against them and are not aware of their rights. As Jaramillo put it, "A man is more likely to go on trial for stealing a chicken than raping a girl."³⁵

The prevalence of other forms of gender-based violence is also high. For example, in some areas, rates of child marriage (especially among poor, rural, Afro-Colombian households) are close to 50 percent, compared to less than 10 percent among the wealthiest urban households.³⁶ This is in part due to laws that allow girls as young as 14 to be married with their parents' consent, despite the minimum age for marriage in the national constitution being 18. Changes to such legislation have met opposition from local communities, which consider child marriage part of their culture. In some poor communities, girls are thought to be an economic burden and frequently drop out of primary school, leading to higher rates of prostitution among girls as young as ten to 12 years old.³⁷

Inclusion

Women in politics and decision-making. The percentage of women in Colombia's parliament is much lower than the regional average (19 versus 28 percent). The representation is even lower at the local level, where only 15 percent of mayors are women.³⁸

Law 1475, passed in 2011, requires political parties to have candidate lists that are at least 30 percent women. However, such quotas have not translated to greater female representation at the national level.

Women face multiple barriers to their participation in politics. They often lack resources to finance their electoral campaigns and are unable to stop working while campaigning because they have to provide for their families. Women also face social barriers: female politicians are expected to "speak like men" and overcome the public's perception of "weak stereotypes."³⁹

There have been some promising trends in women's role in Colombian politics. President Ivan Duque has expressed a strong commitment to increasing women's political

participation, appointing Colombia's first female vice president, Marta Lucia Ramirez. Duque also established a cabinet with equal gender representation.⁴⁰

One area in which women have meaningful representation is the judiciary. Women make up 40 percent of the Colombian constitutional court,⁴¹ and 53 percent of the judges selected to preside over war tribunals.⁴² However, women continue to face persistent challenges to representation at lower levels of the judiciary, especially at the local level.⁴³

Women in peace and security processes. As noted above, women played an important role in the Colombian peace process and approval of the peace agreement, ensuring an inclusive and gender-sensitive peace negotiation in Havana. Notably, thanks to women activists' efforts, the government appointed two women, Nigieria Renteria and Maria Paulina Riveros, as official negotiators and created a gender subcommission in the negotiations process. Women also organized discussions in local communities, participated in the women's summit, and met with the peace negotiators in Havana. Women's participation led to an agreement with provisions that deal extensively with gender, victims' rights, and reparations.⁴⁴

Women remain vocal in calling for the implementation of the peace agreement, particularly its gender provisions and the territorial development plans (PDETs). The PDETs are a mechanism for the implementation of the peace agreement in prioritized territories. They are a crucial tool, as they provide a policy framework, as well as budgetary allocations, for peace agreement implementation at the local level. Women activists—including indigenous women, Afro-Colombian women, and rural women—have also called for resumption of the peace process with the ELN.⁴⁵ However, women face many obstacles to sustained participation, including time-consuming responsibilities as caretakers and breadwinners of their households.⁴⁶

Women in the economy. The positive trend in women's financial inclusion (from 33 percent in 2017 to 41 percent in 2019) may be traced to recent financial and employment services and initiatives. For example, the popular program Familias en Acción provides financial support to ensure children are able to access health and education, and has contributed to an improved financial situation in many households.⁴⁷ Professional training and development programs to enable women to start their own businesses and enter the formal work sector have also been organized, especially in rural areas.⁴⁸

Additionally, new initiatives have promoted the ownership of credit cards and bank accounts.⁴⁹ This can boost rural women's financial independence, as they are able to show their credit history and request formal loans. Prior to this, women would need to submit their requests in groups in order to receive a loan.⁵⁰

However, despite the progress in financial inclusion and the fact that the majority of land is cultivated by women, they continue to be particularly affected by their exclusion from land titles and deeds.⁵¹

On the positive side, although there are still strong gender divisions in some sectors and industries, women who are the primary breadwinners in their families are increasingly joining activities that are traditionally male dominated, such as the construction of roads.⁵²

Justice

Legal discrimination. Colombia has a strong legal framework for nondiscrimination, including laws prohibiting any form of discrimination in the labor market, laws against harassment, and the right of equal treatment and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, national origin, language, religion, or ideology in the constitution.⁵³ Colombia's abortion law is also more liberal than other countries in the region, and the constitutional court has a strong record of defending the right to abortion.⁵⁴

The peace agreement includes a strong gender focus and includes provisions guaranteeing the rights of women,

including indigenous and Afro-Colombian women. However, as noted above, implementation of the peace agreement, and particularly the gender provisions, has been slow.

Discriminatory norms. Women continue to face deep-rooted discriminatory social norms, gender bias, and stigma throughout Colombia's political and economic systems. For example, despite the country's sophisticated legal traditions within the constitutional court, which has developed mechanisms for accountability and reparations in transitional justice,⁵⁵ women who experience sexual violence continue to face major barriers in accessing justice because their testimonies come with a strong risk of backlash.

Women, especially in disadvantaged communities, often lack fundamental knowledge about their rights and the resources needed to meaningfully participate politically and economically in their communities. There remains much to be done to level the playing field in socioeconomic conditions, access to education and skills training, employment, and other livelihood sources.

The Case of South Sudan

South Sudan was a new country included in the WPS Index in 2019, so although we cannot track its performance over time, it is possible to compare it globally and to regional averages.

South Sudan ranks in 163rd place on the 2019/20 WPS Index, the fifth-lowest country score of the 167 countries included and 26 percent below the regional average for Sub-Saharan Africa.

As shown in figure 2, South Sudan scored better than the regional average on women in parliament. However, it scored far worse on IPV, financial inclusion, cellphone use, legal discrimination, and discriminatory norms.

We now examine each of the three dimensions of the WPS Index in detail, adding qualitative insights to the data points reported.

South Sudan has experienced armed conflict, violence, and insecurity since its independence in 2011. On the security subindex, it is above Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan and behind only Somalia and the Central African Republic on the intensity of organized violence.

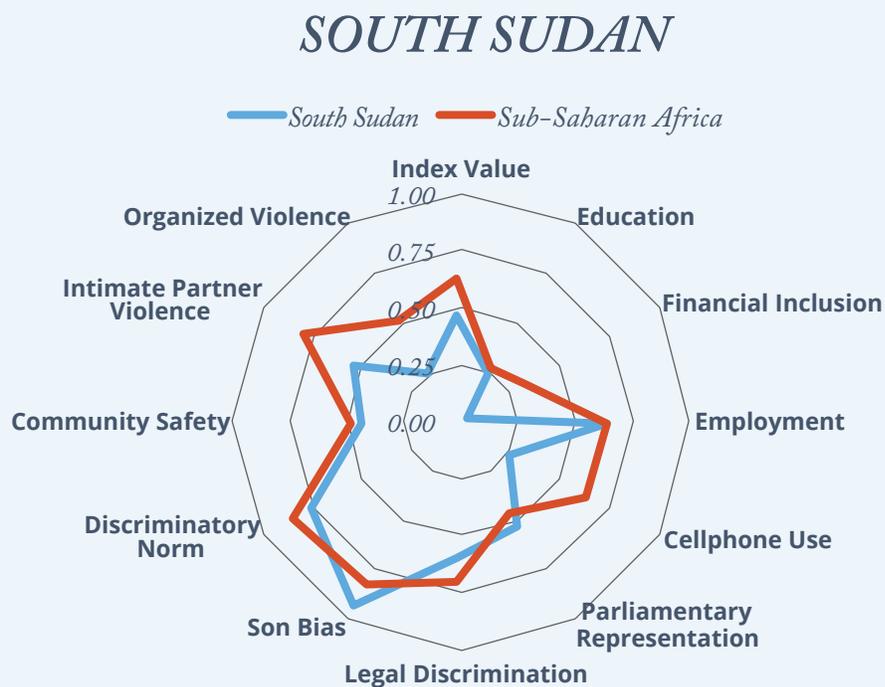
The civil war in South Sudan erupted between the presidential guard of President Salva Kiir and the army forces loyal to the former vice president Riek Machar in the capital city of Juba in 2013. South Sudanese women have been badly affected by the armed conflict, which has exacerbated harmful cultural practices and norms. Despite a peace agreement in 2015, violence and insecurity has escalated and continued. In 2018, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCISS) was reached. Women have played a crucial role in the negotiation and adoption of the R-ARCISS and are at the forefront of its implementation.

Peace and Security

Impact of armed conflict on women. The violence in South Sudan has caused over 2.2 million women and men to flee to neighboring countries—including Uganda, which is host to over 1 million South Sudanese refugees, 82 percent of whom are women and children.⁵⁶ There are also 1.9 million IDPs in South Sudan, 52 percent of whom are women and girls.

Figure 2: How South Sudan Performs on the WPS Index

Source: Data from the 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index.¹¹⁹ See also the country page for South Sudan on GIWPS's website for more information (<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/south-sudan/>).



The conflict has put an additional economic burden on women, as they have become primary breadwinners for their families.⁵⁷ Honorable Elizabeth (Betty) Ogwaro, a member of the South Sudanese parliament (currently the National Transitional Legislative Assembly) and one of the leaders of the National Dialogue Steering Committee, has emphasized that the conflict has created a grave situation of vulnerability and insecurity for women and girls. It has been reported that the weakening of the economy caused by conflict has forced some women into prostitution and led to an increase in child beggars.⁵⁸ Increased poverty has also led families to ease destitution with patriarchal customs such as dowry payments (or bride prices), relying heavily on forced and child marriage.⁵⁹

Conflict-related sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse.

Sexual violence is one of the major forms of violence experienced by South Sudanese women. Rape has been used as a weapon of war and instrument of terror,⁶⁰ and violence against women and girls is pervasive in conflict zones, with up to 65 percent of women and girls experiencing physical and/or sexual violence.⁶¹ However, it is important to distinguish between sexual violence by organized violent groups and intimate partner violence. The rates of IPV and domestic violence also remain very high in South Sudan, with over half of women interviewed by the International Rescue Committee and George Washington University in 2017 reporting that they experienced domestic violence.⁶² A civil society representative from South Sudan also noted that women in the country face a “cycle of violence” perpetrated by parties to conflict as well as their families. She pointed to the case of a young woman who was “auctioned off” by her family to an older man.⁶³

Women in IDP camps are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. The UN estimates that 70 percent of women living in these camps have experienced sexual violence.⁶⁴ Hon. Ogwaro reinforced this point, highlighting that women in South Sudan, especially those in IDP camps, are “being abused because of the situation they are in.”⁶⁵

General perceptions of security and community safety.

South Sudan’s score for community safety is five percentage points below the regional average. “No woman feels safe in South Sudan,” emphasized Hon. Ogwaro.⁶⁶

Several interviewees emphasized that levels of violence and insecurity vary greatly across the country. For example, rural and urban women face different types and sources of

insecurity. In general, women who have remained at home are relatively safe, but women who were forced to flee to IDP camps face greater vulnerability and insecurity.⁶⁷

The lack of community security is fueled in part by the proliferation of small weapons. The 2017 Small Arms Survey report prepared for the UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimated that civilians hold between 232,000 and 601,000 firearms in South Sudan.⁶⁸

The general insecurity has also contributed to increasing women’s financial needs. Due to the proliferation of small weapons and prevalence of sexual violence, women are afraid to go out to collect wood and have to buy firewood in the market, which adds to their financial needs.⁶⁹

Inclusion

Women in politics and decision-making. The R-ARCISS has allocated 35 percent of all elected and appointed positions to women, a provision that will be included in the country’s new constitution. However, there are no mechanisms or processes in place to implement this quota, creating concerns that it will not be put into practice. South Sudanese women hold 26.6 percent of the parliamentary seats. However, when women are included in the executive and judiciary branches, it is often at the deputy level, which limits their ability to influence and make decisions.⁷⁰

Women in peace and security processes. Women have been included in the High Revitalization Forum, which led to the adoption of the R-ARCISS. However, their participation was limited and hard-won. As Hon. Ogwaro explained, “Women fought their way into the process. There were no institutions where women were adequately represented, or effective platforms for their inclusion.”⁷¹ During the peace talks, only four women were included in the negotiations, making up less than 20 percent of negotiators. Other women were invited to sit in the room but not at the table, which did not give them the same opportunity to influence the outcome.

In a similar vein, participants in GNWP’s global research on sustaining peace, conducted in 2018, emphasized that “women are not at the high table to make the same decisions like men.... Agreements are signed without their full participation at all levels.” Although women have established a parliamentarian caucus group to influence the peace process, “their contribution was hardly heard of.”⁷²

Women in the economy. South Sudan is ahead of the

regional average in women's employment but significantly behind on women's financial inclusion, and women remain economically marginalized. While most women are employed, their employment is largely in agriculture and the informal economy.⁷³ Women face many barriers to accessing loans and other financial services due to patriarchal norms and discrimination.⁷⁴

The displacement has also negatively impacted women's economic inclusion, as women living in IDP camps are unable to work, run their businesses, or cultivate fields. A civil society representative working closely on advocacy for the implementation of the R-ARCISS noted that women are particularly affected by the delays in implementation,⁷⁵ which put them at risk and restrict their mobility—and therefore their access to economic opportunities.

Justice

Legal discrimination. South Sudan does not have a permanent constitution, but multiple articles in the 2011 transitional constitution, the bill of rights, the penal code, and the R-ARCISS lay out that women and men are equal, that they should be accorded full and equal rights, and that they should have the right to equal pay and property.⁷⁶ Despite some progressive articles in the transitional constitution and R-ARCISS, there are no explicit laws against domestic violence or harassment in education or the workplace.⁷⁷ This leaves women and girls vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, and violence. As a civil society representative from South Sudan noted, lack of accountability for the violations of women's rights is also a key issue, leading to de facto discrimination against women.⁷⁸

Discriminatory norms. The implementation of the laws protecting women's rights is often weak due to discriminatory norms. Child marriage is a prime example. The Child Act of

2008 includes the “right to protection from marriage and other negative and harmful cultural and social practices.” While it does not specify the minimum age for marriage, South Sudan acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 2015, which sets a minimum age of 18.

Many families marry their daughters off before the age of 18. According to the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), 52 percent of girls in South Sudan are married before their 18th birthday and nine percent are married before the age of 15.⁷⁹ Poverty is a strong contributor to child marriage, with families marrying off their daughters at a young age in exchange for a dowry.



The Case of Ukraine

Ukraine's overall position in the WPS Index has remained similar, dropping two ranks between 2017 and 2019 and remaining below the regional average. At the same time, several indicators show recent improvements, namely in financial inclusion, legal discrimination, and organized violence.

As shown in figure 3, Ukraine scores better than the regional average on women's education but worse on women's parliamentary representation, financial inclusion, employment, community safety, and organized violence.

Women were at the forefront of Ukraine's "revolution of dignity" in 2014, the public protests against corruption and human rights violations by the government, which began at the Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in Kyiv on October 21, 2013, and led to the ousting of then-president Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014. The newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko, and Ukraine's parliament responded to the people's demands by initiating a comprehensive reform package, including decentralization and changes to the judicial system, health care, education, pension system, and law enforcement. Ukraine also adopted an NAP on women, peace, and security. Women, in particular

women members of civil society, have been vocal in calling for the effective implementation of the reforms.

During the same period, Ukraine has faced security challenges caused by the unrecognized annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, as well as from the ongoing conflict between the government and separatist groups reportedly backed by Russia in the Donbass region,⁸⁰ in particular in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Many of the consequences of the conflict and the annexation—such as the increased prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence, food shortages in the occupied territories, economic instability, political unrest, and insecurity—have disproportionately affected women (including rural women, women veterans, Roma women, and other minorities).

Peace and Security

The GIWPS security subindex reflects the high levels of insecurity in Ukraine, due to organized violence and armed conflict in the occupied territories and gray zones. Gray zones are areas where the government does not have de facto control. Largely cut off from the rest of the country, gray zones suffer

from decreased economic activity, weak rule of law, and heavy militarization. The contact line between the occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk and the territories formally held by Ukraine is the third most mine-contaminated stretch of land in the world.⁸¹

Impact of armed conflict on women. The armed conflict in the eastern part of the country has impacted over 4.4 million people,⁸² resulting in humanitarian and protection needs and major migratory outflows. Women are disproportionately affected by the conflict. For example, over 63 percent of the 1.7 million IDPs in Ukraine are women.⁸³ Moreover, the conflict has resulted in the emergence of new groups of women, such as women veterans and widows of war. According to Ukraine’s Ministry of Defence, there are over 10,000 female veterans in Ukraine.⁸⁴ However, their specific needs are not adequately addressed, and the majority of support and reintegration services provided by the government are aimed at male veterans.⁸⁵

Conflict-related sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. While official reports on the rates of sexual exploitation and abuse, survival sex, and human trafficking are often not available, interviews with local activists and data collected by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and international agencies suggests that these phenomena have increased due to conflict. For example, the OHCHR found that there have been cases of the use of sexual violence in detention and at military checkpoints.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Organization for

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) noted that in 2015 there had been an increase in reports of trafficking of women for purposes of sexual exploitation, “a reverse trend from previous years in which the majority of victims were men trafficked for labor exploitation.”⁸⁷

IDP women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation, because they often do not have access to employment. This may be due to prejudice against the IDPs or their personal situations,⁸⁸ such as women fleeing alone with their children who are unable to leave them to go to work.⁸⁹ This vulnerability is even more pronounced for Roma women who, due to prejudice, face even greater challenges in finding housing and employment.⁹⁰ Similarly, widows of war are particularly vulnerable, given the economic burdens of becoming the only breadwinner for their families while facing bureaucratic obstacles in accessing social benefits.⁹¹ In this context, sexual exploitation, especially in the conflict-affected parts of the country, has become commonplace.

General perceptions of security and community safety. While the situation described above supports the ranking of Ukraine among countries with high levels of insecurity for women, it is important to emphasize that the security situation varies greatly across the country. Maria Dmytriyeva, a women’s rights activist working at the Democracy Development Center, emphasized that, in general, women feel safe in Ukraine. She highlighted that the level of street harassment is lower in Ukraine than in other countries in the region. “Like

Figure 3: How Ukraine Performs on the WPS Index

Source: Data from the 2019 Women, Peace and Security Index.¹²⁰ See also the country page for Ukraine on GIWPS’s website for more information (<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/ukraine/>).



everywhere, we are told to look over our shoulder and carry our keys in our hands. But we feel safe traveling alone.”⁹²

However, women activists and human rights defenders face an increasing threat in Ukraine, as demonstrated by the July 2018 murder of Ukrainian activist Katerina Gandzyuk, who exposed corruption in Kherson oblast.⁹³

Additionally, intensifying cyberattacks against Ukraine have contributed to an overall feeling of insecurity.⁹⁴

Intimate partner violence. Approximately eight percent of Ukrainian women have experienced IPV in the past year. This rate is far better than the global average of around 13 percent, and only slightly worse than the regional average, which stands at seven percent. IPV in Ukraine has been increasing in what has been described as an “unintended consequence of war.”⁹⁵ Domestic violence also remains grossly underreported in the country, due to low awareness of what constitutes it. As Dmytriyeva pointed out, “People’s understanding of intimate partner violence does not include psychological and verbal abuse. If data was collected on this aspect of domestic violence, the number of women who experience this would increase to every other woman in Ukraine.”⁹⁶

Toxic masculinity, discriminatory societal norms, and post-traumatic stress disorder caused by the armed conflict have been cited as the main causes of the increase in IPV in Ukraine.⁹⁷ During a workshop on localization of UNSCR 1325 conducted by GNWP in Lviv in west Ukraine in June 2018, several of the participants provided anecdotal evidence of the increased rates of domestic violence due to the return of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and a lack of adequate psychosocial support for them. Nonetheless, norms and values remain a key cause of IPV in Ukraine. A study commissioned by the UN Population Fund showed that the majority of men in Ukraine still hold strong patriarchal views on gender norms. For example, 69 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, “A woman’s most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family.” Thirty-eight percent agreed that “a good woman never questions her husband’s opinions and decisions even if she disagrees with him,” and 13 percent said that beating one’s wife can be “justified in some situations.”⁹⁸ As Dmytriyeva put it, “The key reason for intimate partner violence in Ukraine is the idea that women deserve it.”⁹⁹

Inclusion

While Ukraine scores slightly better than the regional average

on inclusion indicators such as parliamentary seats held by women and employment, Ukrainian women and other marginalized groups have not been adequately represented in political decision-making, peace processes, and the economy.

Women in politics and decision-making. In 2018, women occupied only 12 percent of the seats in parliament and 16 percent of senior positions in public service.¹⁰⁰ Even when they are included in the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of the government, women tend to occupy roles with limited authority at lower decision-making levels. This can be attributed to patriarchal norms, a lack of political will, and insufficient institutional mechanisms for gender equality.¹⁰¹ Inclusion is even lower at the local level. Women constitute only four percent of oblast state administrations across the 24 oblasts and 12 percent of oblast councils and local councils of oblast significance.¹⁰²

There is a risk that women’s representation in decision-making will deteriorate with the new decentralization process, which introduced a new entity: local administrative units. Because the local units will have more financial independence, civil society and women activists are concerned that women will be further excluded from decision-making in these new bodies.¹⁰³

Women in peace and security processes. The official peace talks with Russia have provided limited opportunities for women’s participation. Women members of parliament—including Iryna Gerashchenko, the deputy speaker of the Ukrainian parliament—have actively participated, and the Ministry of Defence has appointed gender advisors, but overall the peace process remains heavily dominated by men.¹⁰⁴

Adopted in 2016, the Ukrainian NAP on UNSCR 1325 addresses this exclusion. While the NAP development process was relatively inclusive, it did not include certain groups that emerged as a result of the armed conflict—such as the widows, mothers, and families of those killed or missing in action; women that survived captivity and torture; and women combatants and veterans and did not fully reflect these groups’ needs and concerns. The NAP also disregards the needs of other groups, such as women from ethnic minorities, specifically Roma, and older women in rural areas who face the problems of poverty, violence from men, and negligence from social services. These shortcomings were partially addressed in the 2018 revision of the NAP, although the needs and concerns of these special groups are still not fully recognized and addressed.¹⁰⁵

Women in the security sector. According to the data from

the Ministry of Defence, women constitute only 10.6 percent of armed forces personnel and only five percent of officers.¹⁰⁶ However, according to a mapping conducted by the Democracy Development Center with support from GNWP and the Austrian Development Agency, the number of women joining Ukrainian armed forces as “volunteers” increased after 2016, leading to a surge in the number of women combatants and veterans. However, many women veterans did not receive combatant status due to legislation that, before 2016, prohibited women from taking combat positions.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, even women who participated in combat could not access the same support as their male counterparts when they returned from the front lines, because they were not registered as combatants. Moreover, women veterans have faced prejudice and stigmatization upon returning to their hometowns. State authorities and NGOs have also aimed their activities mostly at male veterans, which leaves many women who participated in the armed conflict outside of their scope of activities and without reintegration into the society.¹⁰⁸

Women in the economy. Ukraine outperforms many neighboring countries in women’s employment, financial inclusion, access to education, and literacy. Approximately 45 percent of women are employed;¹⁰⁹ 40 percent of business leaders are female; and 99 percent of Ukrainians are literate.¹¹⁰ Despite these impressive statistics and a strong legal framework for nondiscrimination, it should be noted that Ukraine does not have a law mandating equal pay for men and women, and Ukrainian women are paid 25 to 30 percent less in the public sector.¹¹¹ In addition, the significant majority of large businesses are headed by men in Ukraine. Women business leaders generally run small, one-person businesses, and women are predominantly employed in stereotypical sectors such as education, health care, consumer-goods manufacturing, social services, beauty, and food processing.¹¹²

Justice

Ukraine has scores worse than the regional average on both legal discrimination and discriminatory norms, reflecting the fact that “Ukrainian women experience broad discrimination in almost every aspect of their life, but they rarely realize or acknowledge it.”¹¹³

Legal discrimination. Overall, Ukrainian legislation is gender sensitive and progressive. Women have sexual and reproductive health rights guaranteed and they have the rights to own and inherit land and property, take out loans, and participate in political and economic life. However, the implementation of the laws is often weak, and the recent emergence of the anti-gender movement undermines political support for the strong legal and policy framework.

Supported by the influential Council of Churches, the anti-gender movement in Ukraine has limited the ability of the government to fully address gender-based violence and gender inequality in all its dimensions. These groups have campaigned to remove the term “gender” from Ukrainian legislation, rejecting its definition as “the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.”¹¹⁴ The emergence of conservative religious forces attempting to prevent the adoption of progressive legislation and advocating for the preservation of traditional Ukrainian family and religious values is of great concern to Ukrainian women and gender equality.

The implementation of the progressive laws and policies is further hampered by the widespread corruption and perception of corruption. As Dmytriyeva pointed out, women often do not seek redress when their rights are violated, because they do not believe that the system will be on their side.¹¹⁵ A study commissioned by the UNDP found that women are twice as likely as men to face corruption or be asked for a bribe when initiating legal action in civil cases or claiming social benefits.¹¹⁶

Discriminatory norms. Discriminatory norms and misogyny are deeply ingrained in Ukrainian society. Women are expected to shoulder domestic responsibilities and tend to the needs of family members while working full-time. “There is this perception of women as second-class citizens. Boys and men can be loud and insistent. But girls are expected to be nice,” said Dmytriyeva.¹¹⁷ This makes it more difficult for women to demand their legally guaranteed rights. Roma, IDPs, and rural women face even greater discrimination and harassment based on their clothing and low socioeconomic status.



Conclusions

It is clear that numbers and rankings tell only part of the story when we ask “What is the status of women in a given country?” This paper has explored the stories behind the numbers in three countries and highlighted how legal and political reforms—or lack thereof—affect women’s ability to move, access resources, and seek justice against perpetrators of intimate partner violence, among other important aspects of well-being.

However, even when progressive laws and policies are in place, discriminatory norms and contextual factors—such as whether a woman lives in a rural or minority household, her level of education and social economic status, and gender norms in her community—all impact a woman’s ability to be fully included in society and achieve a level of personal security that allows her to participate and thrive in her community. Such factors also affect her ability, where necessary, to seek justice for wrongdoing.

We see that women’s groups and their continued activism and calls for justice and equality are critical to the ongoing progress in societies toward equal rights and protection for all women. The qualitative analysis strongly points to the need for better support and protection of women activists, including women human rights defenders and peacebuilders.

Annex 1:

GIWPS Women, Peace and Security Index Indicators

Dimension and indicator	Definition	Rationale
Inclusion		
Education	Average number of years of education of women ages 25 and older	Education is critical to women's agency, opportunities, freedom from violence, and health. Average years of education is a more precise measure than, for example, secondary school completion.
Employment	Percentage of women ages 25 and older who are employed	This indicator captures women's economic opportunities, which are central to realizing women's capabilities. It is preferred to labor force participation because it excludes unemployment.
Cellphone use	Percentage of women ages 15 and older who report having a mobile phone that they use to make and receive personal calls	Having a cellphone is increasingly recognized as core to people's opportunities to participate in the economy, society, and politics.
Financial inclusion	Percentage of women ages 15 and older who report having an individual or joint account at a bank or other financial institution or who report using a mobile money service	Being financially included allows individuals to smooth consumption, manage risk, be more resilient, invest in education and health, and start and expand a business.
Parliamentary representation	Percentage of seats held by women in lower and upper houses of national parliament	Political participation is a critical aspect of people's capabilities and is most widely measured by representation in parliament.
Justice		
Legal discrimination	Aggregate score for laws and regulations that limit women's ability to participate in society or the economy or that differentiate between men and women	Discriminatory laws have adverse repercussions, making it harder for women to own property, open bank accounts, start a business, or take a job and enter careers restricted to men.
Son bias	Extent to which the ratio of the number of boys born to the number of girls born exceeds the natural demographic rate of 1.05	An excess number of births of boys over girls relative to demographic norms reflects serious discrimination against girls and women.
Discriminatory norms	Percentage of men ages 15 years and older who disagreed with the proposition: "It is perfectly acceptable for any woman in your family to have a paid job outside the home if she wants one"	An important manifestation of gender discrimination is lack of male support for women engaging in paid work.
Security		
Intimate partner violence	Percentage of women who experienced physical or sexual violence committed by their intimate partner in the previous 12 months	The Sustainable Development Goals commit to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.
Community safety	Percentage of women ages 15 and older who report that they "feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live"	Security and safety in the community affect women's mobility and opportunities outside the home.
Organized violence	The annual average number of battle deaths from state-based, nonstate, and one-sided conflicts per 100,000 people between 2016 and 2018	Captures the extent of insecurity in society due to various types of armed conflict.

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