

## Women's progress index shows big gaps among and inside nations

[Thomson Reuters Foundation](#)

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Iceland and Norway are the best countries for women, and Syria and Afghanistan the worst, according to an index to be released on Thursday that measures a host of global gains and failures.

Measuring and improving women's lives is key to peace and security of nations as a whole, said the designers of the new index, the Peace Research Institute Oslo and the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS).

The Women Peace and Security Index ranked 153 countries, which account for more than 98 percent of the world's population. Measuring everything from violence to cellphone use, it found big gaps both within and among the various nations.

"The condition of women and the denial of their rights is certainly an early indicator of future instability and conflict in a country," Melanne Verveer, GIWPS executive director, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in an interview.

"If women are beat down, if their security situation is grim and deteriorating, if they are enormously marginalised, that is not a situation that is going to bode well for the country," she said.

As is often the case in ranking women's progress, the Middle East and North Africa scored at the bottom and Scandinavian countries dominated the top of the index, a copy of which was obtained by the Foundation ahead of its official release.

But in many countries, progress has been dramatically uneven, it showed.

In South Africa, women have made strides in education and political representation, but fewer than three in 10 feel safe walking at night and a quarter report violence at the hands of an intimate partner, it said.

"I've heard South African girls say to me, 'I'm not safe in my home and I'm not safe walking to school and I'm not safe in the classroom,'" said Verveer, who was the first U.S. ambassador at large for global women's issues.

The index said that in Iran, most women have access to financial accounts and have more education than other women in the region.

Yet Iranian laws restrict married women from applying for passports, give husbands power to prevent their wives from working and do not protect women from domestic violence.

The index measured inclusion, such as education and employment; justice in terms of laws and discrimination; and security in terms of family and community violence.

One measure of inclusion was cellphone use, seen as critical for women in developing countries. Access to cellphones provides autonomy, self-confidence, safety and access to markets and job opportunities, it said.

Overall, the top countries for women were Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Slovenia, Spain, Finland, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Singapore, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The United States ranked No. 22, in part due to having no legal mandate for equal pay nor legally guaranteed paid maternity leave, it said.

Also, women in the United States face a "unique crisis of lethal violence" due to domestic abuse and the widespread availability of guns, it said. The risk of homicide for women facing domestic violence increases fivefold when a gun is present, it said.

At the bottom of the list were Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Sudan, Niger, Lebanon, Cameroon and Chad.

One purpose of the index is to promote the Sustainable Development Goals, an agenda approved by the United Nations two years ago to be achieved by 2030, its designers said.

The global goals include universal education and an end to discrimination, conflict and poverty.

The index is to be updated every two years.