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# Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update


**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**




# Acknowledgments



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# Executive Summary

Good data are needed to make good decisions. Regularly-collected, high quality data on women and girls can inform smarter decisions for policies and programs, and track whether those decisions improve lives and gender equality more widely. Intersectional data that is simultaneously disaggregated by multiple dimensions is even more powerful for capturing differences based on income, age, race, ethnicity, location (urban/rural), indigenous status, migration status, disability, or other characteristics. Under the Sustainable Development Goals' Agenda to Leave No One Behind, this type of nuanced information is crucial to ensure that the world delivers on its commitments to everyone.

However, despite the best efforts of those striving toward gender data equality, gaps in data remain, new ones have emerged, and there is still much to be done to make women's and girls' lives visible in data systems. This includes the dearth of data on women over reproductive age; our poor understanding of whether education is preparing girls with the digital literacy skills necessary for the future of work; our partial picture of women's political engagement; and the nascent field studying the interplay of environmental issues and gender.


Data2X believes that we cannot solve a problem that we cannot name. Since our inception, we have worked to uncover gender data gaps and devise solutions to close them. Our starting point in 2014 was [a mapping exercise of key gender data gaps](#) across different domains (health, education, economic opportunities, political participation, and human security). This mapping exercise provided a roadmap for all actors working to address the challenge of missing and incomplete data on women and girls and outlined where to focus our time, resources, and investment.

Since then, our efforts to fill these gender data gaps have ranged from direct support of


methodological research and data production, to creating networks among data producers, and investing in innovation. We have also generated independent knowledge that aims to shine a light on strategic areas requiring attention to advance the field of gender data. For example, 2018 saw the launch of our [Bridging the Gap](#) project in partnership with [Open Data Watch](#), which provides an in-depth assessment of gender data sources and gaps in 15 African countries, with other regions to follow. Equally important to our technical efforts has been Data2X's emphasis on communication to socialize what gender data is, why it's important to policymaking, and ensure that it attracts greater attention on the global development agenda.

Given the significant changes in the gender data landscape since 2014, Data2X decided to update the mapping exercise. In this time, the global development agenda has shifted from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has brought with it a renewed focus and commitment to tracking data across different areas of development. Simultaneously, technological innovation has created innumerable sources of big data that have the potential to improve our understanding of women's and girls' lives, even in the most remote and isolated places.

There are numerous reasons for persistent gender data gaps. These include low prioritization, low resources or capacity driving a low country coverage in gender data collection efforts; poorly developed or non-existent international standards for data used to construct indicators; and challenges brought by the complexity of monitoring systems needed to capture desired gender data and indicators. In fact, UN Women estimates that just 13% of countries worldwide have a dedicated budget for collecting and analyzing gender statistics and only 22% of the 54 gender-specific indicators in the Sustainable




Development Goals are produced with regularity worldwide<sup>1</sup>.




Given this changing landscape and the continuing data gaps, this updated mapping project aims to answer several critical questions:

- Where have we made progress in closing gender data gaps since 2014?
- What new gender data gaps have emerged as new issues have risen to prominence?
- Which are the key agencies and organizations working to close gender data gaps, by setting standards, advocating for gender data, directly collecting data, or aggregating and analyzing the available data?
- Which are the key sources of gender data for each domain and where can we find the data that does exist?
- What are the most promising approaches to closing gender data gaps in each domain and what are the key barriers that need to be overcome to do so?



This updated mapping exercise focuses on six key domains: (1) health, (2) education, (3) economic opportunities, (4) public participation, (5) human security, and, for the first time, (6) environment.




Standing on the cusp of the Decade of Delivery for the SDGs, the global data system continues to make progress but struggles to answer the more nuanced questions it faces. Custodian agencies and expert groups are continuously working to move as many SDG indicators as possible to Tier 1 (with internationally agreed methodology and regular data collection)<sup>2</sup> and to encourage sex-disaggregation. Global advocacy and efforts to mainstream gender across the SDG framework have also increased the demand for gender data. These efforts, however, reveal new gender data

gaps that require improved data collection efforts, systems, and standards in order to be filled.<sup>3</sup>

This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a watershed moment for gender equality that recognizes the importance of accurate and inclusive data systems. The platform celebrates the gathering of a diverse array of women and girls to address the common issues that mediate and shape their lives. Data systems need to be similarly strategically designed to capture the common experiences of women and girls, while being nuanced enough to reflect their diversity as more than half of the global population.



## METHODOLOGY



The methodology for this exercise included a review of relevant research, scholarship, and other online materials produced since 2014 to identify what progress has been made in the past five years to close gender data gaps. We also interviewed experts working across civil society, academia, research institutes, think tanks, UN agencies, and SDG custodian agencies to identify the most pressing gender data gaps and the key actors and initiatives working to resolve them. Some of the individuals that we interviewed participated in Data2X's 2014 mapping exercise while others were identified for their expertise on a specific topic or through recommendations provided by other organizations and experts. The resulting list of gender data gaps is not exhaustive. Rather, it represents the views of those working and advocating in this field on the most pressing gender data gaps as of 2019, particularly in relation to the SDG monitoring framework.

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1. UN Women. (2018). Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UN Women, New York.

2. For a full description of the IAGE's tier classification for SDG indicators, visit: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/>

3. See, for example, the list of supplemental gender-specific SDG indicators proposed by UN Women in 2018, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018>

## KEY PLAYERS

- **Standard setters and custodian agencies** such as the UN System remain key in setting standards and supporting data collection and reporting, with the UN Statistics Division and UN Women playing instrumental roles in relation to gender data efforts.
- **Academic institutions and think tanks** also play a role in supporting methodological testing and analysis of gender data for insight.
- **National statistics offices** are crucial partners for improving efforts to collect and disseminate nationally representative gender data.
- While **governments and the multilateral system** remain the majority funders of the data system, **non-traditional donors** such as foundations have also begun supporting gender data systems.
- **Civil society organizations** also connect countries to technical and financial resources and advocate for more and better gender data.
- **Private sector data producers** have also risen in importance in recent years as the use of big data to investigate gender-relevant research questions has gained prominence.

This report is intended as a resource for all actors working to address gender data gaps and towards more inclusive data systems. This includes custodian agencies, government actors, donors, researchers, and civil society actors.

## KEY FINDINGS







Across the domains, we observed a number of key trends:

- The shift from the MDG to the SDG era has brought with it an increased demand for disaggregated and nuanced data. Basic sex-disaggregation remains an issue, while the need for multiple disaggregations to also account for differences based on income, age, race, ethnicity, location (urban/rural), indigenous status, migration status, and disability has not yet been met.

- Disaggregation remains a key challenge across sectors as most data are collected at household rather than individual level.
- Across domains, sex-disaggregation is not explicitly called for in the monitoring of many gender-relevant SDG indicators.
- Where data are being disaggregated by sex, in-depth gender analysis of that data are not always undertaken.
- The source and nature of gender data gaps across domains varies. In some areas, such as environment, appropriate measures are still being conceptualized. In others where the approach to collecting gender data is agreed and established, gaps can arise because of a lack of prioritization, resources, or capacity for gender data collection.
- Restricted sampling means that we know most about women of reproductive age (15-49) but little about children, younger adolescents, or older women.
- Reliance on repeated cross-sectional surveys means that longitudinal dynamics are rarely captured; for example, the long-term psychological effects of violence and harassment.
- The SDG framework, like the MDGs, compartmentalizes gender within specific goals and targets, often ignoring linkages across goals – for example, how environmental degradation impacts women’s economic opportunities. This has spillover effects for the way gender equality research and programming is conceptualized and funded.
- The uptake and use of gender data for designing policies and programs is challenged in the translation and communication of statistics to less technical audiences.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Investment must be made across all parts of the data collection system. Data systems are complex and there is no one data source which can provide insight into every facet of gendered experience. For instance, censuses



and sample surveys provide crucial snapshots of population wellbeing and progress, while quality administrative data contributes essential sub-national and dynamic information on basic topics such as births and deaths, school enrollment, and immunization. Big data sources are also beginning to be used to provide granular information.

- Investment in gender data should target national statistics offices to demonstrate the value of collecting gender data and improve their capacity to communicate information to program and policy decision-makers in a timely manner. The ultimate value of gender data is not in its production, but rather in its use.
- To help fulfill the SDG commitment to “leave no one behind,” standard setting and data collection and aggregation agencies should require (not just recommend) that all gender-relevant SDG indicators be disaggregated by sex, and where relevant, simultaneously disaggregated by income, age, race, ethnicity, location, indigenous status, migration status, disability, and other relevant characteristics.
- Administrative data systems are an important source of gender data and investment outside of the education and health systems would be a strategic future target to yield gender data across domains.
- Greater investment should be geared to supporting well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, which are a key source of sex-disaggregated demographic data throughout the life-course.
- Big data generated from cell phones, laptops, remote sensors, and more can add nuance to our understanding of women’s and girls’ lives by providing information that is highly granular in both space and time, and difficult to capture or quantify with standard types of data collection. These sources should be more fully utilized.

- Existing international databases often have data that could be disaggregated by sex or analyzed to address gender data gaps. These sources should be mined before investing in new data collection efforts.
- Existing household or enterprise surveys should be revised where possible to include additional questions and to expand to a greater number of countries in support of eliminating gender data gaps.
- Increased focus on panel surveys and the production of longitudinal data would also be valuable across domains to trace gender dynamics over time. Surveys tend to be representative at the national level, requiring a strong system with a mix of survey, census, and administrative data to provide sub-national and individual level estimates.
- More methodological work is needed to identify robust and internationally standardized measures for capturing women’s and girls’ subjective experiences, aspirations, and perceptions.

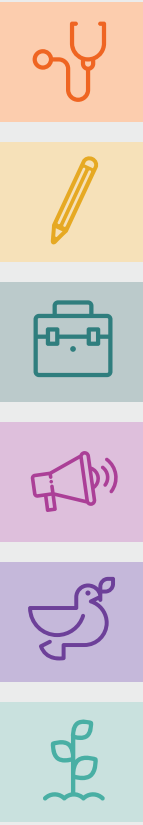
*This Executive Summary is part of “Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update.” The full report can be accessed here: [data2x.org/MappingGenderDataGaps](https://data2x.org/MappingGenderDataGaps).*

## ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DALY	Disability-Adjusted Life Year
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
EDGE	Evidence on Data and Gender Equality
EGI	Environment and Gender Information platform (IUCN)
EGRIS	Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced People Statistics
EMERGE	Evidence-based Measures of Empowerment for Research on Gender Equality
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBD	Global Burden of Disease study
GIRL	Girl Innovation, Research, and Learning
GIWPS	Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IAEG	Inter-Agency Expert Group
ICATUS	International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
ICSE	International Classification of Status in Employment
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IPUMS	Integrated Public Use Microdata Series
ISA	Integrated Surveys on Agriculture
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature

	iKNOW	International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
	LGBTQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Allied
	LSMS	Living Standards Measurement Survey
	MDG	Millennium Development Goal(s)
	MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
	NDI	National Democratic Institute
	NGO	Non-government organizational
	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
	OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
	OPHI	Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
	RHS	Reproductive Health Surveys
	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
	SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
	SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD)
	SMS	Short Message Service
	STEP	Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement
	TUS	Time Use Surveys
	UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
	UN	United Nations
	UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
	UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
	UNDP	United Nations Development Program
	UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
	UNECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
	UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime





UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WIDE	World Inequality Database on Education
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
WPPRI	Women's Political Participation Risk Index
WPS	Women, Peace and Security Program (International Peace Institute)
WWAP	World Water Assessment Programme (UNESCO)