



Peace is predicated on effective, accountable and inclusive institutions and respect for rule of law. Justice institutions are critical for gender equality and sustainable development by enabling women's access to justice and other essential public services, yet these institutions continue to fail women, while tolerance and impunity for crimes against them remain widespread. Violent conflict is on the rise and high levels of interpersonal violence, particularly violence against women, is often an early warning sign. Once conflict breaks out, violence against women and girls is often exacerbated. Opportunities for women's leadership and meaningful participation are not sufficiently harnessed despite the pivotal role of women in conflict prevention, building and sustaining peace being increasingly recognized.

Facts and Figures

- The global female homicide rate stands at 2.3 per 100,000, with wide variations within and between regions, and highest rates observed in Central America and Sub-Saharan Africa. One in two female homicide victims in 2012 died at the hands of a partner or family member.¹
- In 2017, more than one billion women lacked legal protection from sexual violence by an intimate partner or family member. Even where legislation exists, enforcement is often weak.²
- In countries where women fare poorly in terms of inclusion, justice and security, 60 per cent of women express legal needs mostly in areas related to marriage, family and property rights.³
- Women are under-represented in transitional justice and rule of law institutions in conflict-affected contexts and comprise only 30 per cent of commissioners on UN-supported truth commissions.⁴
- In low-income countries, over 45 per cent of women lack a legal identity, compared to 30 per cent of men.⁵

Policy messages

1. By protecting and promoting women's human rights and ending gender-based violence, peaceful and inclusive societies can be within reach.

In 2018, more countries experienced some form of violent conflict than at any time in the previous 30 years.⁶ High levels of interpersonal violence, especially violence against women, can be a warning sign that violence in societies may degenerate into conflict. Higher levels of violence against women are evidently correlated to lower compliance with international legal obligations.⁷ In addition, countries with low human rights standards, including related to gender equality, are more likely to have militarized and violent inter-State disputes. Once violent conflict breaks out, violence against women and girls may be exacerbated. Although the vast majority of global homicide victims are men, more than half of all women victims of intentional homicide in 2017 died at the hands of an intimate partner or family member.⁸ Political violence against women is rife, ranging from war-time sexual violence and attacks on female politicians and peacebuilders, to active repression of women engaged in political processes. While both men and women can be affected by political violence, women in politics are often targeted because of their gender. With registered acts of political violence against women reaching a record high in 2019,⁹ enhanced efforts to prevent and mitigate such violence are urgently needed.

2. Women play a vital role in preventing conflict, peacebuilding and sustaining peace, yet their work is not backed by adequate political and financial support.

United Nations Security Council resolutions on women and peace and security¹⁰ and the twin 'sustaining peace' resolutions¹¹ of the General Assembly and Security Council underscore the central need for women's leadership and meaningful participation at every stage of conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Institutionalized power structures, lack of access to justice, education and resources, poverty and restricted mobility remain stumbling blocks to women's participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Moreover, conflict prevention remains both poorly resourced and understood,¹² with gender-responsive conflict and peace analysis often absent from planning and resourcing of initiatives.

Recognition of the contributions of women-led civil society organizations in implementing home-grown prevention and peacebuilding initiatives is increasing. Women-led conflict prevention initiatives have been found to not only be cost-effective, but also more sustainable than ‘traditional’ interventions.¹³ Yet, predictable and flexible funding to provide an enabling environment for and sustain such work remain sorely lacking.

3. To ensure women can access justice and exercise their rights, structural discrimination and inequality must be addressed and judicial systems made effective and responsive.

Over 2.5 billion women and girls globally are affected by discriminatory laws and the lack of legal protections, often in multiple ways.¹⁴ Legal discrimination spans different standards for women and men in applying for a passport, choosing employment, transferring nationality to a child or foreign spouse, participating in court proceedings, receiving inheritance and deciding when and whom to marry.¹⁵ Legal identity is a necessary condition for accessing services, yet gender-based discrimination in nationality laws can prevent women and their families from accessing legal identity.¹⁶ Legal systems frequently fail to provide justice to women in cases of gender-based violence, with barriers exacerbated for women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Ineffective legislation and procedures, lack of legal aid provision and of women in legal institutions, as well as socio-economic challenges, limited education and inadequate financing cause legal frameworks to be inaccessible. Evidence shows that women’s professional participation in the justice system – as judges, lawyers, prosecutors, jurors and law enforcement officials – improves gender-sensitivity; yet women continue to be underrepresented.

4. Civic space is being curtailed in many parts of the world, while authoritarian and intolerant tendencies are on the rise.

The decline of democratic principles now affects one third of the world’s population, or some 2.5 billion people¹⁷ and undermines progress towards inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making. Freedom of expression is being threatened as the rights and safety of journalists, human rights defenders, peacebuilders and others who report and gather information to inform the public are being undermined. Women human rights defenders and peacebuilders, including Indigenous women and women working on land and environment rights, are particularly at risk of being targeted, and continue to face violence, discrimination and even assassinations because of their work. Such human rights violations undermine the ability of women’s organizations to effectively advocate for positive change or prevent the reversal of hard-won gender equality gains. States have a responsibility to protect women human rights defenders and ensure a safe and enabling environment for their work.

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

² Paula Tavares and Quentin Wodon, 2018. *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls: Global and Regional Trends in Women’s Legal Protection Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment*, World Bank.

³ UN Women, IDLO, World Bank, 2019, *Justice for Women, High-level Group Report*.

⁴ [Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security \(S/2018/900\)](#)

⁵ World Bank: <http://id4d.worldbank.org/global-dataset>

⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* (Geneva, 2018).

⁷ United Nations; World Bank. 2018. “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict.” Washington, DC: World Bank.

⁸ UNODC, 2018. *Global Study on Homicide 2018*. Vienna.

⁹ Roudabeh Kishi et al, 2019. *Terribly and terrifyingly normal: political violence targeting women*

<https://www.acleddata.com/2019/05/29/terribly-and-terrifyingly-normal-political-violence-targeting-women/>

¹⁰ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/global-norms-and-standards>

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 70/262 and Security Council resolution 2282 (2016)

¹² UN Women, 2018. *Women’s meaningful participation in negotiating peace and the implementation of peace agreements: Report of the Expert Group Meeting*.

¹³ United Nations, World Bank, 2018. *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*.

¹⁴ McKinsey Global Institute, 2015. *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth*. McKinsey & Company, p. 75.

¹⁵ UN Women, 2019. *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030*.

¹⁶ *Justice for Women, High-level Group Report*

¹⁷ V-DEM, 2018. *Democracy for All? V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2018*. University of Gothenburg.