



Institute of
Economic Affairs



**KENYATTA UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT HUB AND
THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**



Authors: Darmi Jattani & Fiona Okadia

Exploring the Global Gender Gap Index 2021: Kenya's Policy Choices

1.0 Introduction

The World Economic Forum has been publishing the 'Global Gender Gap Report' on an annual basis from the year 2006. The data collected is helpful in tracking the progress on the relative gaps that are there between women and men particularly in respect to parameters such as health, education, economy, and politics. The intention is to find out how equitably are the wealth and opportunities distributed between women and men regardless of how an economy is performing. This year, 2021, the Global Gender Gap index benchmarks 156 countries in comparison to last year's 149 countries. The additional countries include Guyana, Afghanistan, and Niger.

1.1 Methodology

The Global Gender Gap Index is a tool that measures the progress of global countries in achieving gender parity by looking at four indicators. These are political empowerment, educational attainment, health and survival, and economic participation and opportunity as shown below;

Measure	About
Political empowerment	This parameter seeks to address the number of women involved in the political arena globally in parliament and ministerial positions. The report also examines the number of years with a female or male head. Universally, political empowerment remains the category with the greatest gender disparity.
Economic participation and opportunity	This dimension examines the representation of both genders in the labor market, professional and technical workers, and income gaps.

Education Attainment	Looks at factors such as literacy levels and school enrolment in different levels of education i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary. Factors such as gender-based discrimination, child marriage, and the burden of fulfilling domestic chores have some influence in preventing girls globally from going to school.
Health and Survival	This factor considers life expectancy, the number of missing women in a country, and the ratio of female and male births.

The index measures the indicators on a score of 0 to 1, with 0 being the lowest inequality while 1 being the highest equality. Meaning that a country with a 0.8 score is performing much better than the one with a 0.3 score. The overall score is an aggregate of scores across the four indices mentioned above.

Gender equality matters and the information gathered concerning its progress whether at the global or national level is fundamental to ensure that limited resources are channeled to areas where progress has been harder to achieve. There must be discussions around it as gender inequality is very costly. First, there is unrealized potential of the impact of women on their families and the economy at large. A report by World Bank, “Unrealized Potential: The High Cost of Gender Inequality in Earnings’ finds that if women had the same lifetime earnings as men, global wealth would increase by \$23,620 per person, on average, in the 141 countries studied, for a total of \$160 trillion. Furthermore, there are also costs that governments incur in terms of the provision of social services for domestic abuse victims which costs governments billions of dollars. Therefore, by coming up with policies using data around gender inequality and achieving gender parity, the world can eliminate such costs and in turn, it will lead to an improvement of their economies.

1.2 Global Performance

Globally, the average distance completed to gender parity in 2021 is 68%, which in comparison to 2020 is a decline of 0.6% as in 2020 it stood at 68.6%. This goes to show that currently, the global gender gap is 32% depicting that the world still has a long way to go before gender equality can be fully achieved. According to the same report, it will take 135.6 years at the same rate to achieve the full parity which has no gaps between men and women. This rate needs to fasten up as 135 years is a long time.

Table 1: Global Gender Gap Index 2021 Rankings

Rank	Country	Closed Gender Gap to Date
1	Iceland	89.2%
2	Finland	86.1%

3	Norway	84.9%
4	New Zealand	84.0%
5	Sweden	82.3%
95	Kenya	69.2%
152	Syria	56.8%
153	Pakistan	55.6%
154	Iraq	53.5%
155	Yemen	49.2%
156	Afghanistan	44.4%
Source: The Global Gender Gap Index 2021		

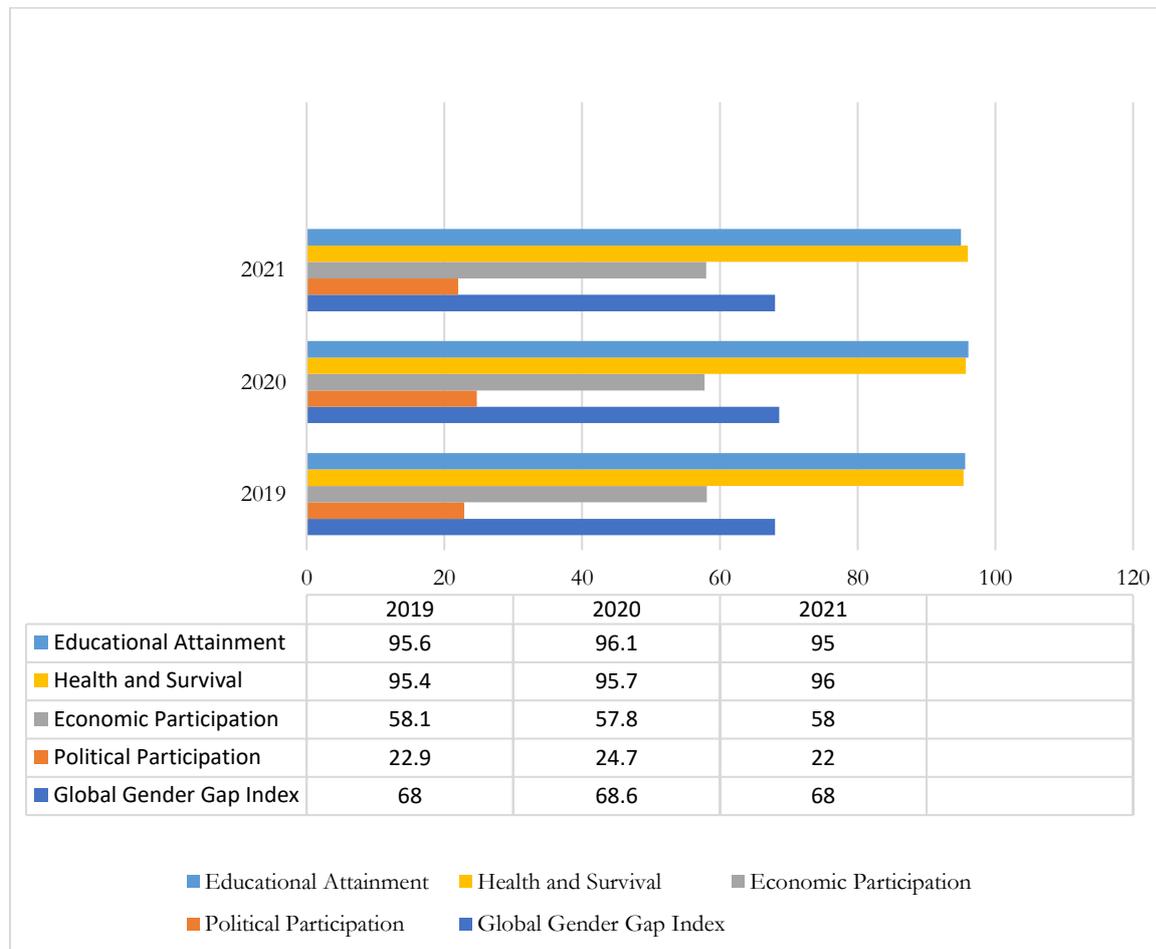
Out of the 156 countries covered in the report, Iceland comes at the top and Afghanistan at the bottom. Iceland has closed 89.2% of its gender gap while Afghanistan has closed about 45%. The Nordic countries appear to be performing very well year after year with most of them being in the top 5. An important distinguishing factor is a fact that Iceland is one of the few countries where women have been in the highest institutional positions in the country for almost as long as men in the past 50 years.

Out of the BRICs countries, Russia comes up at the top at number 81 while India is coming up at the very bottom of the ranks at 140 having closed only 62.5% of the gap. Kenya ranks in the second half at number 95 with a gender gap of 69.2%. For some countries, the improvements are driven by an increment in the number of women leaders in the political sphere, a decrease in the wage gap, or even policies that are promoting the education of girls and women.

Of the 153 countries and economies covered both this year and in 2020, 98 have improved their score while 55 have regressed or stalled. The countries which have made the most improvements are Lithuania, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Togo, and the United Arab Emirates having improved their scores by about 4.4%. Regionally, Western Europe is leading with 77.6% followed by North America with 76.4%. The bottom two are South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa with 62.7% and 61.6% respectively.

Global Performance in Regards to the Dimensions

Chart 1: The State of Gender Gaps at the Global Level, By Sub index in Percentages



Source: Global gap index 2021

Political Empowerment

The gap in this index has only been closed by 22% meaning that there are still not enough women occupying political seats on the global scale. This is a 2.7% decline in performance from 2020 when the gap that had been closed stood at 24.7%.

Equal representation in government is important as it allows both genders to have a say in matters of governance. Women make up around 26.1% of some 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide. In 81 countries, there has never been a woman head of state. It is estimated that it will take another 145 years at this rate to achieve gender parity.

Economic Participation and Opportunity

The economic and labor market gender index gap has only been closed by 58% which is a slight increase from the previous year's. On average, women represented [38.8%](#) of all participants in the global labor force, and their presence in higher-yielding positions like managerial positions is even lower at [27%](#). In comparison to men, women are underrepresented in the labor market. There is

however a slow pace increase in the share of women in skilled professions and wage equality. Therefore, addressing normative and legal barriers for women to work and advance remains a priority area for policymakers and businesses in all countries.

Education Attainment

While progress has been made, there is still room for improvement. More young girls and women are attending primary and secondary school in some countries but there is a lower transition rate when it comes to the tertiary levels of education. Today, according to this report at least 37 countries have closed the education gender gap though it varies across education levels.

Globally, the education gender gap is almost closed as it stands at 95% which is a decline from 2020's gap of 96.1%. It has remained above the average overall global score by 27%. This can be attributed to the fact that schools were closed in many parts of the world last year due to the pandemic. In as much as it affected both boys and girls, women were disproportionately more affected than men as the burden of domestic chores fell on them, teenage pregnancies were on the rise. This means that a large percentage of these girls affected were not able to go back to school even when the schools ended up being opened later.

Health and survival

Although the global gender gap for health care and survival has been closed by 96%, millions of women across the world still do not have equal access to health care, especially reproductive health care. Life expectancy is increasing in most countries, despite the health care disparity. Conversely, there are thousands of women who are still forced to undergo female genital mutilation and do not have access to sanitary towels. These barriers can then inhibit women from participating in the aforementioned dimensions such as education, labor force, and political spaces.

1.4 Impact of COVID-19 On Gender Gaps in The Sub Indexes

Governments around the world shut down learning institutions in a bid to curb the spread of the COVID-19 disease. It is once again contributing to increasing inequality as it has prevented children, especially from poor families from receiving a quality education. Their counterparts had the privilege of continuing with the school via online measures while in their case due to lack of the necessary resources were not able to achieve this. There are governments such as Kenya's that provided learning through television, radio, and online but still not everyone has the gadgets at home to realize this. The girl child has further been exposed to sexual violence, child marriage, and teenage pregnancies. Schools have always played a role in reducing their exposure to such activities.

Conversely, the pandemic was a disruption to the health care systems. Patients who need treatment for diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes have not been receiving the health services and medicines they need since the COVID-19 pandemic began in most parts of the world. This is because hospitals are overwhelmed in taking care of COVID 19 patients. Staff such as doctors and nurses have also been reassigned from their previous working stations to assist in combating the disease. Similarly, countries especially the less developed lack the necessary facilities such as oxygen masks, PPEs, and ICU beds to be able to contain the pandemic and those hospitals that have the facilities are overwhelmed by patients beyond their normal capacity.

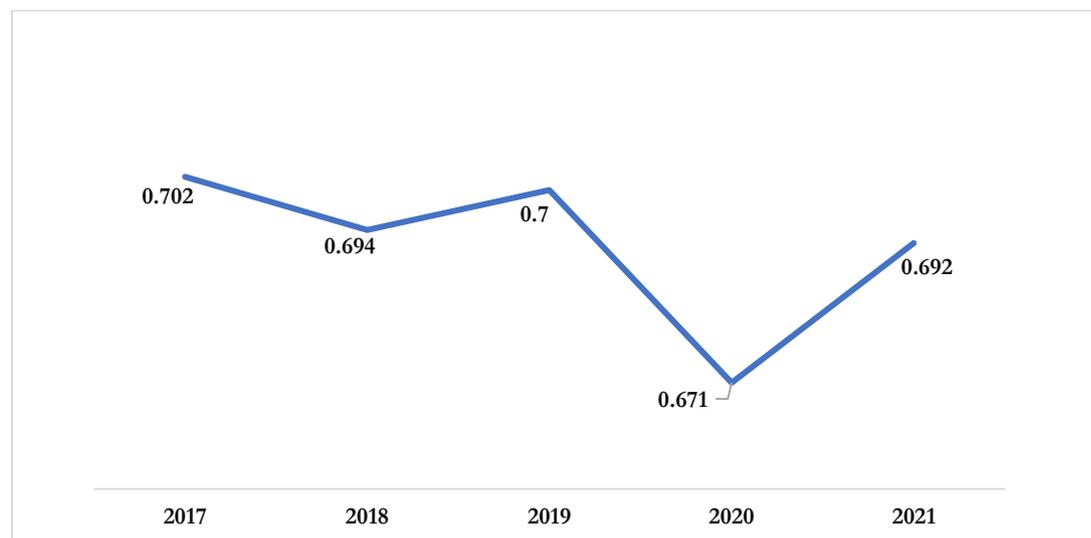
The COVID-19 pandemic also generated an economic crisis. There have been significant reductions in income, a rise in unemployment, and disruptions in the transportation, service, and manufacturing industries as consequences of the disease. The sectors that were most affected by job losses are the tourism sector and trade disruption. The informal sector which is mostly an employer of women has experienced a huge hit with business closures and will have a role to play in widening the gap between men and women in terms of employment.

Politically, because of the hopelessness that global citizens have experienced because of job loss, lack of proper health care, they expect that the governments they elected will do something to better their position. Therefore, depending on how satisfied or dissatisfied they are, a pandemic such as this may have some influence on elections. This will affect who registers to vote and how they vote. In the end, influencing the number of women or men elected.

2.0 Kenya's performance

In 2021, Kenya ranked 95 out of 156 countries in the report with an overall score of 0.692, this is an increase from a 0.671 score in 2020 at position 109 out of 149 countries. At this rate, it will take Kenya 137.9 years to achieve gender parity. With 69.2% of the gender closed, an improvement of 2.1% from 2020, Kenya has a gap of 30.8% to close before achieving gender equality. The increase in score in 2021 could be attributed to the improvement in scores of the economic participation and political empowerment sub-indices. Gender equality is not only a human right but also good for the economy and the longer it takes for Kenya to achieve gender parity, the more the Country misses out on the benefits of a balanced economic participation by all genders.

Chart 2: Trend of Kenya's overall score 2017-2021



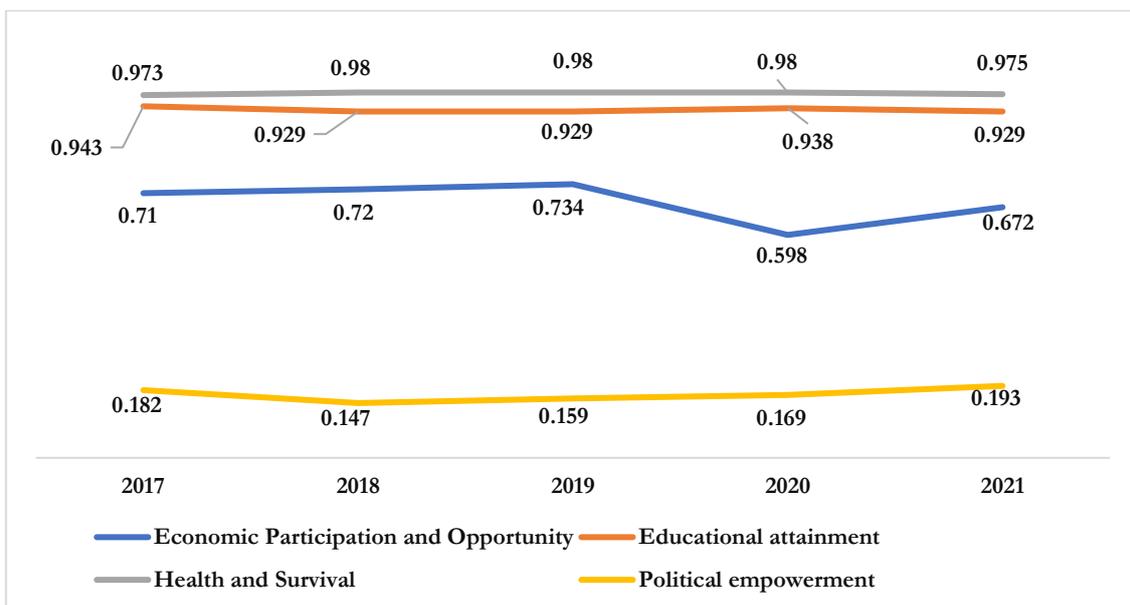
Source: Global gender gap report- different publications

In 2017, 70.2% of Kenya's gender gap was closed which is the highest score in the last five years under review. The score decreased by less than 1% in 2018 but increased to 70% in 2019. However, Kenya's progress towards gender parity is not certain as the score dropped to 67.1% in 2020. The report does not specify reasons for the drop in score in 2020 but the drop coincides with challenges in the economy. In 2019, Kenya's economy grew at an average of [5.4%](#), a drop from [6.3%](#) in 2018. The decrease in economic growth is worsened by the effects of Covid-19 with an economic growth

of 1.4%. Growth in the private sector also decreased, with commercial banks withholding credit, as a result of the interest rate cap enacted, in favor of less risky government securities. These factors could have attributed to the drop in score in 2020.

The Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey 2015/16 estimated women’s contribution to Kenya’s Gross Domestic Product(GDP) through the formal sector at 34.88% (Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS), 2015/16). In a scenario where women had equal economic opportunities as men and earned equal wages as men, the contribution of women to GDP would be 41.1%. The opportunity lost in contribution to GDP when women do not earn equivalent amounts as men in the formal sector is Ksh. 603.86 billion¹

Chart 3: Kenya’s performance across the sub-indices in 2021



Source: Global gender gap report- different publications

Kenya registered high scores in education attainment and health and survival indices across the last five years. In 2021, Kenya scored 0.929, closing 92.9% of the gender gap that existed in education attainment. This was a decrease from 0.938 in 2020. Among the four indicators used to measure education attainment, Kenya scored 1 in enrolment in primary education. This can be attributed to Kenya’s free primary education program launched in the year 2003 to make primary education accessible to all at no cost. However, the score drops to 0.896 in the enrolment in secondary education and further drops to 0.737 for the enrolment in tertiary education indicator.

An analysis of the Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey 2015/16 shows that an additional year of schooling increases an individual’s income as shown in Table 2 below. This supports the need for an increase in several students transitioning to the higher levels of education as income increases with each additional year in school. The mean income for an individual with postgraduate qualifications is 16 times that of an individual who has zero years of schooling. The mean wage progressively increases from Ksh. 4,553 with zero years of schooling to Ksh. 74,711 for the postgraduate level of education. Education also reduces infant mortality as reported by UNICEF.

¹ Women and the economy report 2020 by CRAWN Trust

In the study done in India, the infant mortality rate of babies whose mothers have received primary education is half that of children whose mothers are illiterate².

Table 2: Economic Returns to Education

Level of Education	Mean Wage (Ksh)	Years of schooling
Postgraduate	74711.039	18
Degree	45695.657	16
Diploma	26754.329	14
Certificate	13633.487	13
Secondary	10768.759	12
Primary	6194.367	8
None	4553.382	0

Source: Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS) 2015/16

The gender gap index uses two indicators to score a country's health and survival index i.e. sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy. This could be attributed to the unavailability of medical data across countries. Despite using only two indicators, Kenya's performance of 0.975 highlights the milestone achieved in closing the gaps within the indicators. Kenya had closed 98% of the gender gap in health and survival in three consecutive years, 2020, 2019, and 2018. The sustained performance slightly drops to 97.5% in 2021. As the economy recovers from the effects of Covid-19, the performance is expected to improve.

Various initiatives have been taken in Kenya to improve the health sector and this could explain Kenya's high scores in health and survival. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) program was launched in four counties in Kenya (Machakos, Nyeri, Isiolo, Kisumu) and is planned for national rollout as stated in the [Budget Policy Statement 2021](#). The health program has four objectives and this might propel Kenya's score to 1 in subsequent years after the implementation of the program. Quality maternal healthcare can also provide an important entry point for information and services that empower mothers as informed decision-makers concerning their health and the health of their children.

Kenya's score in economic participation increased to 0.672 in 2021 from 0.598 in 2020. The scores were higher in the three previous years with 73.4% of the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity closed in 2018. The indicators used to measure economic participation encompass key areas that directly contribute to the growth of the economy. 94.3% of the gender gap in the labor force participation rate was closed in 2021 but only 67.3% of the gender gap in wage equality for similar work was closed. As the number of women increases in the labor force, it is not accompanied by equal pay as men for the same work hence the diversion in scores.

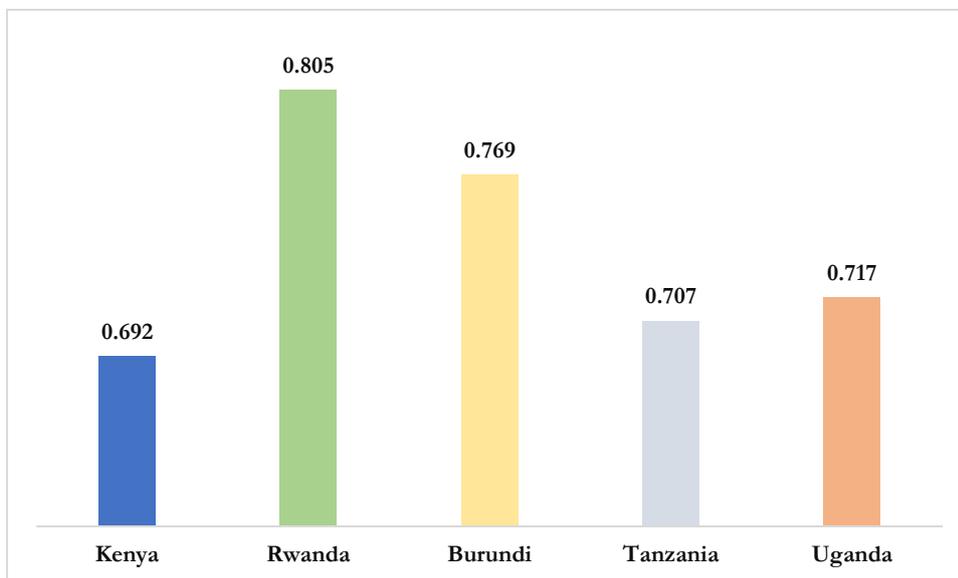
The number of women in Kenya in the position of legislators, senior officials, and managers are still low with a gender gap of 67.1%. In 2021, Kenya closed 32.9% of the gender gap in the position of legislators, senior officials, and managers. The number of women in professional and technical workers' positions is slightly higher with a score of 0.558, closing 55.8% of the gender gap. Since the score for economic participation is an aggregate of all the indicators including several women

² (UNICEF, 2021) Girl's Education: A lifeline to development

in the position of legislators, senior officials, and managers, low scores across some indicators could explain the score of 0.672 in 2021.

Kenya scored the lowest in the political empowerment sub-index, not only in 2021 but in the previous four years. In 2021, Kenya closed 19.3% of the gender gap in political empowerment, an increase from 16.9% and 15.9% in 2020 and 2019 respectively. The score has been increasing steadily from 2019 after a decrease in the gender gap closed in 2018 to 14.7% from 18.2% in 2017. The political empowerment sub-index has three indicators that contribute to the overall score. The first indicator is the number of women in parliament where Kenya scored 0.276, with a gender gap of 72.4% yet to be closed by 2021. As Kenya approaches the election year 2022, the scores are likely to change either upwards or downwards depending on the number of women elected. The second indicator is the number of women in ministerial positions with a score of 0.437 in 2021. The gender gap closed in the number of women in ministerial positions is higher than the number of women in parliament but there is still a 56.3% gap to be closed to achieve gender equality.

Chart 4: Kenya’s performance against other East African Countries in 2021



Source: Global gender gap report- different publications

Among the East Africa countries, in terms of the overall score, Kenya closed the least gender gap that exists across all the four sub-indices with an overall score of 0.692. Rwanda ranks first in East Africa and 7th globally, closing a gender gap of 80.5% in 2021. Rwanda has closed 72.6% of the gender gap in economic participation with women participating in the labor force more than men and wage equality progressing at a fast pace (80.9% gap closed).

Over the last five years, the share of women in senior and managerial roles in Rwanda has doubled from 14.1% to 28.6%. As of 2020, over 40% of professional and technical positions are currently held by women, and this increase signals greater competence and skill improvement of Rwanda’s women. Rwanda has already achieved gender parity in health and survival and ranked 6th globally in terms of political empowerment, with 56.3% of the gender gap closed. Uganda also achieved gender parity in the health and survival sub-index in 2021 with an overall score of 0.717.

Burundi closed a gender gap of 76.9% ranking 3rd globally in economic participation having closed 85.5% of the gender gap. In terms of labor force participation, Burundi has closed a gender gap of 78.2%. generally, income levels are low in Burundi but the country has closed 97% of the gender gap that exists in estimated earned income. In 2021, Tanzania closed 70.7% of the gender gap, having achieved gender parity in enrolment in primary and secondary education.

The World Bank reports that Kenya's economy throughout 2015-2019 grew at an average rate of 5.7%, making it one of the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa³. Kenya has development challenges including inequality, poverty, and vulnerability of the economy to internal and external shocks. Kenya's 2-year post-Covid-19 Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) in the Budget Policy Statement of 2021 has a fundamental pillar that aims to address gender inequality and strengthen social protection systems. This strategy to build back better an all-inclusive economy could promote gender parity in Kenya.

Recommendations

These indicators provided in the Global Gender Report as a whole should be used as a foundation that both private and public stakeholders should put in more work to ensure that Kenya achieves gender parity faster. The ministry of gender and public service should use the findings to track areas of progress in achieving gender parity and the existing gaps that require resources to be addressed. The Kenyan parliament has the responsibility of channeling funds to programs and initiatives that address the barriers to the achievement of gender parity. The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) and Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) should use the findings from the gender report to coordinate and facilitate mainstreaming of issues of gender in national development.

The private sector also has a role to play and can use this report in helping to bridge the gap in specific areas. One of the ways is by providing expert training to women in business. In most cases access to capital is a big hindrance to women participating in economic activities, therefore more private organizations like JOYWO (Joyous Women Organization) that carry out capacity building, livelihood projects, and table banking around the country may help curb this.

The 2021 global gender gap report provides unique data and new measures to track gender gaps using data from LinkedIn and Ipsos. High-frequency data for selected economies from LinkedIn and Ipsos was used to offer a timely analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender gaps in economic participation. Early projections from LinkedIn data show a marked decline of women's hiring into leadership roles, creating a reversal of 1 to 2 years of progress across multiple industries. This provides an opportunity for innovative ways of sourcing and using data to understand the different effects of the pandemic on all gender.

Globally, the gender gap closed reduced from 68.6% in 2020 to 68% in 2021. The reports acknowledge the drop in the gender gap closed to the effects of Covid-19. It is evident from the data that pandemics increase and make gender inequality salient. Countries can put in place cushions to protect the economy from future shocks to ensure that gender equality exists in all economic conditions.

³ (The World Bank, 2020) Overview of Kenya's performance

Political empowerment

One of the most paramount developments in Kenya has been the promulgation of the 2010 Kenyan constitution. With it came the acknowledgment of the 2/3 gender rule in all public positions. The political measurement is the worst performing in Kenya as the number of women involved in the political arena both in parliament and ministerial positions are low. This provides an opportunity for the Ministry of Gender, Human Rights Commission, and the National Gender Commission to monitor and constantly provide a solution to ensure that this is implemented.

Education Attainment

Kenya has achieved gender parity in enrolment in primary education. This could be attributed to Kenya's free primary education program that was launched in 2003 to increase enrolment in primary schools. The gender gap closed reduces enrolment in secondary education and enrolment at the tertiary level. Therefore, efforts should be focused to ensure the retention of women in the higher levels of education to achieve gender parity. The National Gender and Equality Commission should analyze the existing barriers to the progression of girls from primary school to secondary and tertiary levels of education and advise the national government on initiatives to eradicate the barriers. The female genital mutilation board aims to eradicate the practice by the year 2030, with the target of increasing the number of girls in school among communities that practice FGM.

Economic Participation and Opportunity

In Kenya, women are disproportionately in the informal sector compared to men, exposing them to the lack of security that characterizes the sector. The 2016 [Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises \(MSME\) Survey](#) show that women's ownership is mainly among the micro-enterprises that are dominantly informal. Kenya has made great strides in closing the gender gap that exists in participation in the labor market, gaps still exist inequality of wages for similar work. To achieve gender parity, all discrimination in wages must be eliminated as women join the labor market. Iceland ranked first globally in the gender gap report acknowledges spending a high share of GDP on childcare as an important driver of the high presence of women in the workplace. A budget is a tool that government can use to drive its policies. Kenya's low score in economic participation reduces the overall score. Therefore, resources should be focused on closing the gender gap that still exists in economic participation to achieve gender parity.

The strict implementation of the 2/3 gender rule could be a useful tool to increasing the number of women in the public sector, in parliament, and in ministerial positions. In the private sector, the federation of Kenyan employers (FKE) actively engages with the government on matters related to labor markets and economic policy. This provides an opportunity for the government to contribute to shaping public policy within the sector and implement reforms that enhance the interest of both employees and employers.

Health and Survival

The report uses only two indicators to score countries under the health and survival sub-index. More specific parameters like budget lines for activities on gender equality or women's health initiatives should be included in future reports.

Kenya's initiative towards maternal health care such as the Linda Mama initiative, whose goal is to achieve universal access to maternal and child health services and fasten the country's progress towards universal health coverage has contributed towards the achievement of gender parity in sex ratio at birth. Since gender parity in sex ratio at birth has been achieved, the quality of services within health facilities should be improved to ensure all Kenyans benefit from the best medical care.

Shortcomings of the Report

- The 2021 gender gap index ranks countries according to their proximity to gender equality rather than to women's empowerment to focus on whether the gap between women and men in the chosen indicators has declined, rather than whether women are winning the so-called "battle of the sexes". The goal is to achieve gender parity across all Countries and policy language used in advocating for gender equality should be clear.
- The political empowerment index, however, fails to adequately measure the legal rights of women and girls in comparison to those of men. This may involve coming with a matrix that allows the index to measure how many laws are in place that discriminates against women and the progress that these countries are making to repeal them. Electing more women to political leadership positions would allow more opportunities to pass laws that ultimately expand women's rights. Also, it captures national parliamentary, ministerial and presidential representation but excludes participation at the local government level and elsewhere in the community and public life which is an important aspect when it comes to women's representation in the public sector.
- The health and survival index should include specific parameters like budget lines for activities on gender equality or women's health initiatives in future reports.

Conclusion

In conclusion, for countries to achieve gender parity there must be reforms that enhance equality across all the sub-indices. There should be an increase in the number of women in leadership positions both in the public and private sector, ensure that education is accessible to all women and girls, create free or affordable child care so that more women can participate in the labor market, and provide access to safe reproductive health care.

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