

VULNERABLE AND HIDDEN POPULATIONS

The analysis in the previous section indicates that although characteristics of marginalization are country-specific, the phenomenon of exclusion and deprivation of minority and non-dominant groups is pervasive across countries. The interaction that is most relevant in a given context will depend on the most prevalent and entrenched forms of discrimination, which are often the legacy of structural power inequalities.

In addition to widespread spatial and class inequalities, forms of discrimination based on gender identity, migratory status and disability also transcend national borders and have been the topic of landmark human rights treaties and Human Rights Council resolutions. However, data about these population groups are largely missing and, even when available, are not systematically updated, posing a significant challenge for establishing baselines and measuring progress.

While household surveys are one of the primary sources of data for tracking progress towards achieving the SDGs, they do not adequately capture the socio-demographic characteristics of as many as 350 million people worldwide, including, for example, the homeless, people in institutions, nomadic populations, migrants and people living in areas hard to reach because of conflict or natural disaster.⁶¹ In many countries, little or no information is collected on persons with disabilities, on racial, ethnic and religious minorities⁶² or on gender identity. Even when these subgroups are included in surveys, the sampling might not be stratified and therefore is often unsuitable for capturing information about them and makes it challenging to draw robust conclusions on their characteristics.

Fulfilling the principle of leave no one behind will require expanding information on these and other vulnerable groups that have traditionally been invisible in official statistics. This section showcases current initiatives to develop methodologies and expand data coverage on three groups: women and girls with disabilities, migrant, refugee and internally displaced women, and women and girls discriminated against based on their gender identity.

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

Monitoring the situation of women and girls with disabilities requires collecting data disaggregated by sex, disability status and other factors that intersect with gender-based and disability-based discrimination. Surveys and censuses have often been used to collect disability data, but asking meaningful and comparable questions across countries is challenging due to the lack of an international standard for defining and measuring disabilities.

Since 2001, the Washington Group (WG) on Disability Statistics has developed a set of questions to add to surveys and censuses to fill this gap and, if fully endorsed by countries, to serve as the international standard. The WG recommended that the following short set of questions be incorporated in national censuses:⁶³

1. Do you have difficulty seeing even if wearing glasses?

2. Do you have difficulty hearing even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
5. Do you have difficulty with (self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating (for example, understanding or being understood by others)?

These questions identify functional difficulty in six domains: seeing, hearing, walking, concentrating/remembering, self-care and communicating (with the response categories: No difficulty; Some difficulty; A lot of difficulty; Cannot do at all). They are currently the most robust way to collect internationally comparable data on disability and, in recent years, have been adopted by statistical offices in over 65 countries for their household surveys and censuses.

However, many countries still use questions on impairments that only capture extremely severe disabilities or that use the term 'disability' without defining it.⁸⁴ Given the mix of questions about disability used in some countries and the total lack of disability data in others, it is impossible to compile a global profile of the situation of women and girls with disabilities that can be used to monitor the SDGs. More surveys and censuses need to adopt the WG questions.

Despite data limitations, some patterns have emerged. Two international studies using comparable data and consistent disability measures across countries have shown disability prevalence for adults is higher among women than men.⁸⁵ In 54 countries, the average disability prevalence has been estimated at 12 per cent among women compared to 8 per cent among men.⁸⁶ In 27 European countries,

disability prevalence is also systematically higher for women than men, with an increasing gender gap in older age groups.⁸⁷ However, the higher prevalence among women was not systematically found in another study of 33 countries using a variety of disability measures.⁸⁸ More research is needed using improved and fully comparable data to assess the gender gap in disability prevalence and identify the reasons for it. Several factors may make women more prone to disability, including lack of maternity care or access to health care, domestic violence, HIV and accumulated deprivation due to unequal intra-household resource distribution (e.g., of food, medical attention, time for leisure and rest, and so forth).⁸⁹

Women with disabilities are more deprived than women without disabilities in a variety of dimensions of well-being. There is also growing evidence that socio-economic disadvantage contributes to disabilities, with higher disability rates found among older women from lower socio-economic groups than among those from higher groups (see Chapter 6).

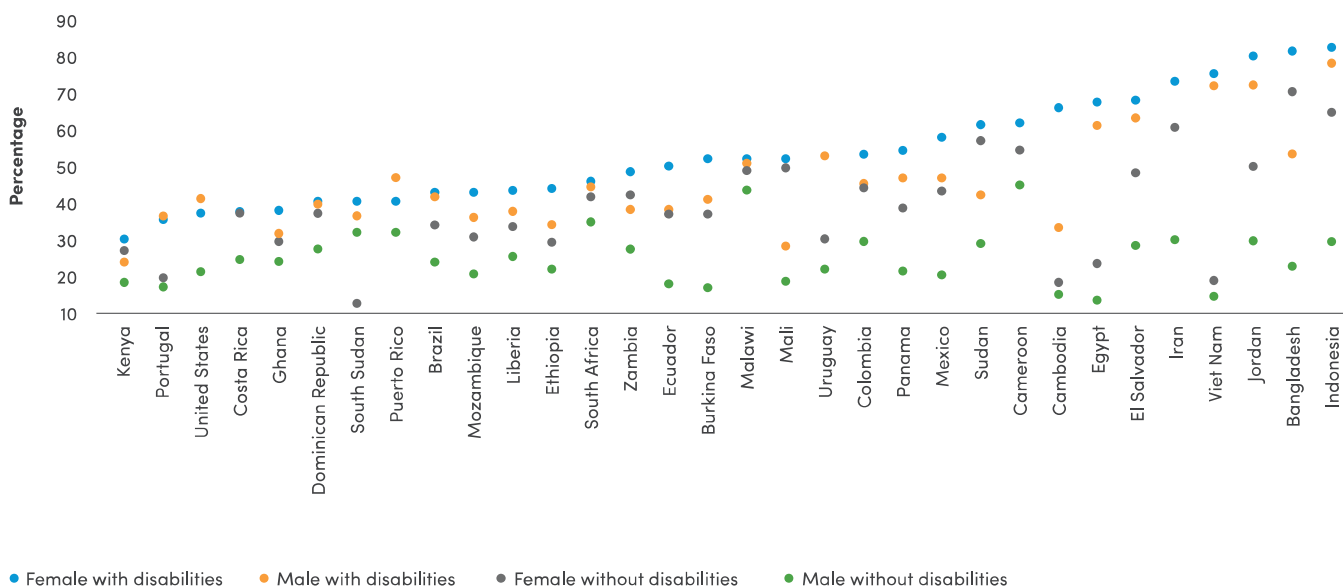
Women with disabilities are more likely to suffer from violence and sexual assault, including unique manifestations of violence, than women without disabilities. Available data show that women with disabilities also tend to have lower educational attainment, higher inactivity rates and a higher headcount of multidimensional poverty than women without disabilities.⁹⁰

As disability and gender are both associated with disadvantage, the disadvantages faced by women with disabilities are compounded. Additional factors such as age and race/ethnicity may put certain subgroups of women and girls with disabilities further at risk. This compounded disadvantage is illustrated by the not in education or employment (NEET) rates for female youth (see Figure 4.29), where women with disabilities tend to have the highest rates of being excluded.⁹¹

These results underscore the importance of considering and addressing (1) gender differences

FIGURE 4.29

PROPORTION OF POPULATION AGED 15–24 NOT IN EDUCATION OR EMPLOYMENT, 2005–2015



Source: UN Women calculations based on census data from IPUMS 2017.

Note: Latest available data was used for each of the countries where available censuses dated from 2005 or later. In the case of India, the 2004 Census is used. Most country samples explicitly state that only permanent conditions were considered disabilities. When multiple possible disabling conditions were reported, these were aggregated into a single summary variable indicating whether the person was disabled or not. Where samples provide several degrees of difficulty, disability status was assigned to those marked as "significant" or "severe" difficulty.

in disability prevention and inclusion strategies and (2) disadvantages due to disability when developing and implementing gender equality and women’s empowerment strategies. They also show the need for more census and survey data to be collected on an ongoing basis using internationally comparable disability measures, particularly the WG-recommended questions.⁹² Internationally comparable data will play a critical role in monitoring the SDGs for women and girls with disabilities and should guide the development of disability-inclusive and gender-inclusive policies and programmes and ongoing assessments of their impacts.

MIGRANTS, REFUGEES AND DISPLACED POPULATIONS

In 2015, 244 million people were living outside their country of origin, making up to 3.3 per cent of the world’s population. Estimates show that women represent almost half (48 per cent) of the total number of international migrants.⁹³ However, beyond these basic statistics, little data are available about the characteristics of the global migrant population and the multiplicity of deprivations they face. Literature indicates that many migrants move

illegally in search of safer lives and better jobs.⁹⁴ Once in the host country, they may be forced to put up with unsafe and unfair working conditions.⁹⁵ Available statistics, unfortunately, fail to capture this.

Challenges in compiling data on refugees, a hidden population in itself within migrants, are even greater. Estimates show that in 2016, 65.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, 22.5 million of whom were refugees who were forced to leave their countries because of persecution, war or violence.⁹⁶ An estimated 50 per cent of all refugees, internally displaced or stateless people are women, but the characteristics of these women remain largely unknown.⁹⁷ Data on IDPs are also difficult to compile. In most situations, no registration system exists for IDP populations; where it does, it tends to be largely incomplete. However, in some cases surveys collect proxy information that can help identify IDP populations (see the In Focus section in the Colombia case study).

Traditionally, migration data have been collected using national population censuses and administrative data, such as registries of foreign workers and of foreigners living in the country, and admission/border statistics that capture people entering and leaving countries. Census data are often preferable to registry statistics because they allow for further analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants. However, the limited set of migration questions included in censuses (e.g., country and date of birth) provides only lifetime migration stocks, which are of limited interest for SDG analysis.⁹⁸ Recent improvements in census data, such as the inclusion of questions pertaining to place of residence in the last five years, along with the flexibility that censuses provide to disaggregate data according to sex and other factors simultaneously without sampling concerns, makes censuses more useful for producing migration statistics. However, the relatively low frequency of census data collection and the generally low response rates of immigrants with irregular status remain drawbacks.⁹⁹

An alternative way to assess the diverse forms of discrimination and subsequent deprivation that migrant populations, including IDPs, face is to

include migration modules in existing household surveys. However, to ensure survey data analysis produces robust conclusions for a phenomenon such as migration with a relatively rare statistical incidence, sample sizes and sampling approaches in these surveys will need to be adjusted. Labour Force Surveys, DHS, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and Living Standard Measurement Surveys are all suitable candidates for the addition of these modules, with subsequent adjustment of sampling, as they could provide important social, economic and demographic insights on migrant women and men.

Given the fluidity of many refugee situations, traditional data collection instruments, including household surveys, might be inadequate for capturing the well-being of refugees. Refugees might move in and out of camps and between urban and rural areas and change their family status as families split apart and regroup. Thus, refugee data that go beyond total numbers and simple disaggregation are prone to become quickly outdated. Some receiving countries and international organizations implement periodic refugee surveys to assess some of the challenges faced by an incoming refugee population. These surveys provide insights on important areas such as reasons for displacement and specific needs but are by no means representative of the total refugee population.¹⁰⁰ Due to the fast-changing characteristics of refugee populations, refugee surveys should, to the extent possible, be repeated every six months.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DIVERSE GENDER IDENTITY

A person's gender identity may or may not correspond with their biological sex. The Human Rights Council defines gender identity as a deeply felt and experienced sense of one's own gender, whether female or male or something other.¹⁰¹ Among the Māori in New Zealand and the native populations in other Pacific nations, gender identity outside the traditional binary identities of female/male have been used throughout history.¹⁰² But in

many countries, those with diverse gender identities are exposed to egregious human rights violations, including violence and systemic discrimination. Official statistics on the inequalities experienced by this group of people are often lacking.

For comprehensive and effective monitoring of the SDGs, data on gender identity are needed and should be produced using sound concepts, definitions and statistical standards. These will provide the foundation for exchanging statistical data between countries and improving their

accessibility, interpretability and comparability. Currently, no international standard for collecting and measuring gender identity data exists, meaning there is a consequent lack of data about those who are vulnerable to inequality and discrimination because they associate or identify beyond the binary female/male. A number of countries, however, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States are currently developing and testing different approaches. The example of New Zealand is instructive (see Box 4.5).

BOX 4.5

DEVELOPING STANDARDS FOR THE MEASUREMENT OF GENDER IDENTITY

Statistics New Zealand has sought to remedy the information gap in the area of gender identity through the creation of a new statistical standard. This will assist in producing data on the specific health and social needs of gender-diverse individuals and on related human rights issues such as workplace discrimination, victimization and gender stereotyping. The standard is intended to provide a basis for the future development of an international statistical standard, which would facilitate information being collected and presented in a consistent way across countries. Considerable effort is being invested in identifying and defining the many and varied gender identity terms currently in use and to ensure inclusive language is utilized for the collection and analysis of gender identity data.

Some of the challenges associated with the development of a standard on gender identity include: making a clear distinction between gender identity and biological sex; noting that a person's gender identity may change over time and can be expressed in several ways and forms; and being mindful that not all people fit into one mutually exclusive category when describing their gender identity. Often, individuals will express different gender identities in different situations. In addition, data must be kept confidential.

The importance of having a statistical standard for gender identity, however, is clear: It assists in ensuring that policies and public services are responding to the diversity of the community and in identifying the specific needs of those who are gender-diverse.

CONCLUSION

The 2030 Agenda calls for the universal achievement of the SDGs whereby the well-being of everyone in society is assured, most especially that of the furthest behind. From a monitoring perspective, this means accounting for the progress of everyone without exception. Doing so will require going beyond national averages to assess the outcomes of different groups of women and girls who, because of entrenched forms of discrimination, are often the most disadvantaged in society.

As the case studies show, intersecting inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, geography and wealth result in a form of disadvantage that is acute and uniquely felt by women who stand at these intersections. The experience of these women will be different from that of other women and different from men who face similar group-based discrimination but not gender-based discrimination. Multi-level disaggregation of data brings out these inequalities and is hence critical for identifying the furthest behind.

At the same time, it is vital that strategies to 'leave no one behind', including those related to measurement, do not contribute to further social fragmentation, stigmatization and/or other forms of harm or abuse of vulnerable groups. From a statistical perspective, this means data are collected and used ethically, in accordance with international statistical and human rights

standards related to voluntary participation and self-identification, as well as protection of privacy, accountability and adherence to the principle of 'do no harm' (see Box 2.7 in Chapter 2).

The analytical procedures used in this chapter show that it is possible to surface the effect of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and identify groups of women and girls who experience clustered forms of deprivation. Doing so represents an important first step that combined with other sources of information, meaningful social dialogue and concerted policy action, has the potential to move the promise to leave no one behind from rhetoric to reality. From a statistical perspective, this will require significant investments in collecting, disaggregating and analysing data for groups of women and girls who may face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. From a policy point of view, such data can inform context-specific development strategies that are inclusive of all. As Chapter 1 has argued, such strategies should aim at increasing access for groups that have been historically excluded while building universal systems that create a sense of solidarity through risk-sharing, redistribution and universal service provision. Chapters 5 and 6 provide concrete examples of such strategies in two critical areas: eliminating violence against all women and girls and recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1/

Develop a national strategy that meets the data requirements for the globally defined SDG indicators and goes beyond the basic disaggregation categories to capture the characteristics of all relevant population groups

Leaving no one behind means addressing the needs of the most marginalized: those who are disadvantaged socially, politically, environmentally and/or economically. The minimum list of characteristics spelled out in the 2030 Agenda—sex, age, income, race, migratory status, disability and geographic location—are often vectors of discrimination, but other characteristics are also relevant and can be country-specific. An iterative, participatory and interactive process involving diverse groups of stakeholders is needed to identify what other forms of discrimination exist and should be monitored as part of a given country's leave no one behind strategy.

2/

Move beyond unidimensional disaggregation

As the case studies show, single level disaggregation analysis fails to adequately reflect the characteristics of those who are deprived across multiple dimensions. Identifying these population groups will require multidimensional data

disaggregation and targeted analysis. Descriptive statistics for each of the sub-groups should be accompanied by qualitative work to understand root causes and the 'why' for the inequalities observed. Only after assessing the full effects of multiple discrimination and clustered deprivation can policies be tailored to meet the needs of the target population.

3/

Identify data gaps, recognize data limitations and seize the opportunities that strengthened collaboration can bring

Data collection instruments used for official statistics are often designed to derive reliable estimates at the national and sub-national levels. For this reason, commonly used sampling techniques may be inadequate to assess the wellbeing of small groups (e.g., small ethnic groups) or for carrying out multi-level disaggregations. As a result, data for particularly at-risk population groups are often unavailable. Addressing the needs of the furthest behind will require identifying and resolving these data gaps and strengthening the capacity of data producers, both within the national statistical system and among others, including civil society (see Chapter 2).

4/

Invest in and support the technical capacity of national statistical systems

A necessary part of the call for a data revolution is a call for greater political, technical and financial support to producers of official statistics (see Chapter 2). Access to new techniques and methodologies is essential for expanding the capacity of countries to produce disaggregated statistics. Modernizing and integrating existing data platforms allows for better use of existing data sources and greater capacity to use data to inform a more holistic approach to tackling clustered deprivations.

5/

Disseminate and report analytical studies focused on inequalities

Countries have committed to identifying marginalized populations and to reporting baseline and progress statistics on these groups. This will allow comparisons of national averages and data on the most disadvantaged groups in society. Doing so on a regular basis and disseminating these findings widely is essential for ensuring these data and findings are used by advocates and policymakers to inform political discourse and bring about necessary change.