Counting on Gender Data

Findings from Gender Statistics Assessments in Nine Countries

MAKING EVERY WOMAN AND GIRL COUNT: UN WOMEN’S GENDER DATA PROGRAMME
This report was prepared by the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21). The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of member countries.

About PARIS21
The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) promotes the better use and production of statistics throughout the developing world. Since its establishment in 1999, PARIS21 has successfully developed a worldwide network of statisticians, policy makers, analysts and development practitioners committed to evidence-based decision making. With the main objective to achieve national and international development goals and reduce poverty in low and middle-income countries, PARIS21 facilitates statistical capacity development, advocates for the integration of reliable data into decision making and co-ordinates donor support to statistics.

About Women Count
“Making Every Woman and Girl Count” (Women Count), is UN Women’s global gender statistics programme, launched in 2016. The programme is a multi-stakeholder global strategy that aims to create a radical shift in how gender statistics are used, produced and promoted to inform policy and advocacy on gender equality. Women Count Phase II benefits from the generous support from the Governments of Australia, France, Ireland, and Sweden, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

For more information visit: data.unwomen.org.

Please cite this publication as: PARIS21 (2023), Counting on Gender Data: Findings from Gender Statistics Assessments in Nine Countries
Available at: https://paris21.org/node/3565

Photo credits
Front cover: j.ennifer/Shutterstock
Foreword

Building on 20 years of experience working with low-income countries and middle-income countries to develop statistical capacity, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) entered into a collaboration with UN Women in 2018 to implement the first Making Every Women and Girl Count programme (hereafter Women Count I).

This collaboration became a catalyst for the development of a new portfolio on gender data and statistics within PARIS21. Through its Strategy 2021-25, PARIS21 took bold steps to mainstream gender equality across its capacity development initiatives, research and analysis, events, and guidance. Today, PARIS21 has institutionalised this work, engaging with countries across Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific regions and with a dynamic group of partners to enable national statistical systems to become more inclusive and gender responsive.

This report is a milestone in this larger effort and a testament to the sustained support, engagement and partnership of PARIS21 and UN Women. Drawing on insights from nine countries, it provides a snapshot of gender data gaps and an analysis of statistical capacities required to deliver more and better gender data.

Collaborating to make women count

The engagement of PARIS21 in Women Count I covered four distinct but complementary areas in gender data and statistics: 1) co-ordination and planning, 2) communication and dissemination, 3) data use, and 4) financing.

As a centrepiece of this work, PARIS21 and UN Women designed and piloted a new framework and implementation guidelines to assess gender statistics at the country level (PARIS21, 2019[1]). Over the course of the Women Count I collaboration, PARIS21 and UN Women engaged with national statistical offices (NSOs) and key stakeholders to pilot the new assessment framework in nine countries, which provided the basis for the findings in this report.

Since implementation of the Women Count pilots and with continuing support from UN Women, PARIS21 developed a new module for its Guidelines on National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS).¹ The module provides practical guidance for NSOs to implement the PARIS21-UN Women gender statistics assessment as part of the NSDS lifecycle and, more broadly, to encourage gender-responsive statistical development. Based on this work, PARIS21 and UN Women continue to mainstream gender in statistical planning initiatives across the globe, advocating for NSOs and the wider development data community to embrace gender as a core issue in statistical development.
How to use this report

The overall purpose of the report is to inform the ongoing efforts by PARIS21 and UN Women to encourage countries and partners to recognise gender as a core issue and to invest in more and better gender data. Its findings continue to guide the engagement of PARIS21 with countries to strengthen gender statistics, providing a foundation for the next phase of collaboration between PARIS21 and UN Women under Women Count II. In particular, while continuing to advance efforts to mainstream gender in statistical planning, PARIS21 will leverage insights from pilot countries to amplify engagement with gender data users, enrich the enabling legal and policy environment for gender data production, mobilise more and better financing for gender statistics, and facilitate collaboration among NSOs and the wider gender data ecosystem.

It is important to note that this report is not an exhaustive summary of all the findings from the PARIS21-UN Women collaboration in Women Count I. Rather, it highlights the trends and cross-cutting themes or patterns that emerged across countries, with the aim of enhancing global learning. To that end, lessons and insights presented in this report may also be useful to inform the activities of many stakeholders including:

- **UN Women regional and country offices.** Staff from UN Women offices played a dynamic role in implementation of the Women Count pilots by convening stakeholders and contextualising issues around gender data in the wider landscape of gender equality in each pilot country. The insights in this report can inform efforts to scale such engagements in new contexts and guide discussions with national stakeholders on how to strengthen gender data and statistics at the country level.

- **NSOs and national women’s machineries.** Findings in this report are especially pertinent for national statistical system (NSS) stakeholders. In particular, enhancing dialogue and collaboration between NSOs and national women’s machineries, including government offices, departments, commissions or ministries focused on efforts to achieve gender equality (OECD, 2007) requires special focus and attention in the process of developing gender statistics. Although gender data and capacity gaps vary across countries, the insights presented in this report are generalised to guide assessments and strategic planning in other contexts and provide useful examples to inform efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in official statistics.

- **Development co-operation providers.** Findings across all nine pilot countries reinforced the need for networks and partnerships to develop and strengthen gender statistics systems, particularly in delivering technical and financial assistance. Capacity constraints, in terms of both resources and expertise, constitute a critical barrier to delivering more and better gender data and statistics at the country level. Insights in this report can inform more effective and targeted forms of assistance in gender statistics that align with principles of country ownership and chart a path to more sustainable financing solutions for NSOs and other members of the NSS.

- **Civil society and gender equality advocates.** Putting gender data and statistics on national agendas is key to ensuring a robust supply of evidence to inform inclusive policy making and leave no one behind. Findings from the assessments underscore the need for increased engagement with gender equality advocates and civil society actors to amplify the call for more and better gender data at national, regional and global levels. Such engagement can help these stakeholders understand the barriers NSOs may face in prioritising gender statistics and thereby serve as a starting point to initiate or renew dialogue and engagement.
Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Lauren Harrison Desai (Team Lead, PARIS21), Paz Patiño (Junior Policy Analyst, PARIS21), Liliana Suchodolska (Junior Policy Analyst, PARIS21), and Laura Steinrock (Intern, PARIS21), under the direction of François Fonteneau (Deputy Head, PARIS21) and Johannes Jütting (Executive Head, PARIS21). The report was edited by Susan Sachs. Stacey Bradbury provided support on design, production and layout.

The authors would like to thank Papa Seck (Chief, Research and Data Section, UN Women), Jessamyn Encarnacion (Inter-regional Advisor for Gender Statistics, UN Women), Rea Jean Tabaco (Statistics Specialist, UN Women), and the Women Count team at UN Women for their collaboration and support. Without their generous partnership, this report and all the country work that underpins it would not have been possible.

The lessons captured in this report are a result of the collaboration and engagement of the PARIS21 global partnership. In this regard, the PARIS21 Secretariat would like to especially recognise the national statistical offices that agreed to pilot the PARIS21-UN Women assessment framework, including Cambodia’s National Institute of Statistics (NIS), the Dominican Republic’s Office of National Statistics (ONE), Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), El Salvador’s General Directorate of Statistics and Census (DIGESTYC), Kyrgyzstan’s National Statistical Committee (NSC), Lesotho’s Bureau of Statistics (BOS), the Maldives’ Bureau of Statistics (MBS), Paraguay’s National Institute of Statistics (INE), and Senegal’s National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD). We thank you for your energy and engagement with us throughout Women Count I and congratulate you on your work to make official statistics more inclusive and gender responsive.
Table of contents

Foreword 3

Collaborating to make Women Count 3
How to use this report 4

Abbreviations and acronyms 8

Executive summary 9

1. Introduction: Do women count? 11
   1.1. Assessing gender statistics at the country level 12
   1.2. Synthesising insights for global learning 12

2. What gender data gaps look like at the country level 14
   2.1. Exploring gender data gaps from a country perspective 15

3. What drives gender data gaps at the country level and how can the gaps be closed? 27
   3.1. Fostering systems for gender statistics 28
   3.2. Enabling organisations to deliver gender statistics 37
   3.3. Empowering individuals to engage with gender statistics 43

4. Ways forward: The road to more and better gender data 47
   4.1. Work with the grain of national priorities to advance gender data production and use 47
   4.2. Invest in gender focal points and mobilise champions among gender data producers and users 48
   4.3. Mobilise and co-ordinate investments in gender statistics to make funding go further 48
   4.4. Bring gender equality into the statistics arena and statistics into the gender equality arena 49

References 50

Annex A. Country indicator frameworks 53

FIGURES
Figure 2.1. On average, coverage of gender indicators is higher for national frameworks than for the Sustainable Development Goals 19
Figure 2.2. Coverage of gender indicators from national development plans is the most consistent among countries assessed 19
Figure 2.3. Coverage of indicators for gender equality policies is more mixed among the countries assessed

Figure 2.4. Coverage for Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators varies between global and localised frameworks

Figure 2.5. Sustainable Development Goal gender data coverage is concentrated in specific thematic goals and targets

Figure 2.6. Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators are not consistently disaggregated by sex even when this is required

Figure 2.7. Administrative data sources are key to closing Sustainable Development Goal gender data gaps

Figure 3.1. The national strategy for the development of statistics life cycle

TABLES

Table 2.1. Number of gender indicators assessed, by country
## Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAPT</td>
<td>Advanced Data Planning Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANSD</td>
<td>Senegal National Agency of Statistics and Demography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOS</td>
<td>Lesotho Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPMAS</td>
<td>Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGESTYC</td>
<td>El Salvador General Directorate of Statistics and Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEP</td>
<td>National gender equality policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSU</td>
<td>Gender statistics unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INE</td>
<td>Paraguay National Statistics Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIC</td>
<td>Low-income country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBS</td>
<td>Maldives Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEL</td>
<td>Monitoring, evaluation and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIC</td>
<td>Middle-income country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>National development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIS</td>
<td>Cambodia National Institute of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDS</td>
<td>National strategy for the development of statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSO</td>
<td>National statistical office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSS</td>
<td>National statistical system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official development assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNEEG</td>
<td>Senegal National Strategy for Gender Equity and Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence against women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Executive summary

Gender data are lacking, and progress is slow

Across the world, gender data are lacking: Just 30% of indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality) are expected to have adequate data for reporting. Not only are women and girls more likely to be affected by poverty and to be left behind, they are more vulnerable to the multiple crises the world is facing today, for example loss of livelihoods due to climate change. A lack of gender data leaves women and girls invisible to policy makers, who are in turn unable to make policies to improve the situations of women and girls.

Improving the quantity, quality and use of gender data is more than an issue of production. PARIS21 and UN Women worked together to study gender statistics in nine countries and found that across these countries, action is required at the system, organisation and individual level.

At the system level:

- **Strong legal, regulatory and policy frameworks are necessary to enable gender statistics systems but are presently insufficient to mobilise them.** Legal, regulatory and policy frameworks spanning gender equality, human rights, sustainable development and statistics hold implications for gender data. As a result, national stakeholders face obstacles to defining a coherent mandate to develop gender statistics. An NSDS is one tool to mitigate such obstacles.

- **Dedicated co-ordination mechanisms are rare but vital to empower gender statistics systems.** As a crosscutting area of official statistics, stakeholders engaged in gender data production are diffuse and often disconnected at the country level. Missing efforts toward co-ordination reduce awareness of gender data needs, heighten risks of duplication of effort, and inhibit opportunities for capacity development and exchange within the NSS and beyond.

- **Broken linkages with gender data users disrupt the development of cohesive, policy-relevant gender statistics systems.** Without evidence of gender data use, efforts to close gender data gaps will remain under-prioritised and subsequently, underfunded. Gender data users hold key insights not only on what gender data is needed, but also where it can drive change.

At the organisational level:

- **Ad hoc production and analysis of gender statistics underscore the importance of gender in national statistical office design and culture.** Limited integration of gender and inclusion in NSO organigrams and institutional culture create an environment where prioritisation and visibility of gender statistics remain low on the agenda. Making gender more visible in the institutional set-up of NSOs is a first step toward fostering gender-responsive statistical practices.

- **Financing shortfalls reinforce gender data gaps but highlight untapped potential for gender mainstreaming.** Resources remain one of the greatest challenges NSOs face in delivering more and better gender data. Mainstreaming gender in statistical planning is key to overcome this challenge, by providing a roadmap to address gaps in production and funding requirements.
At the individual level:

- **Gender focal points face limited incentives in their work but are important catalysts for gender data action.** Focal points remain the primary interlocutors for gender data and statistics in NSOs and across the NSS at the country level. Investing in their capacity development and clarifying their positioning is key to enable progress in gender statistics.

- **Individual leaders (and leadership skills) shape opportunities and partnerships to advance gender statistics.** In addition to strengthening technical capacity, NSOs need political momentum and leadership to bring gender and inclusion forward as priorities in official statistics. This calls for efforts to enhance focal points’ soft skills and amplify engagement with NSO heads.

### How to improve and increase gender data

- **Work with the grain of national priorities to advance gender data production and use.** Countries that own an agenda for gender statistics, leveraging linkages to national development planning, are better positioned to close gender data gaps and connect gender data to policy.

- **Invest in gender focal points and mobilise champions among gender data producers and users.** Individual change-makers still play a disproportionate role in raising the profile of gender statistics. Engaging and investing in these champions at technical and senior levels is an important strategy to improve production and use of gender data and statistics.

- **Mobilise and co-ordinate investments in gender statistics to make investments go further.** Both country governments and donors face challenges mobilising adequate resources to develop gender statistics. Making funding and budget choices more transparent and co-ordinated through the NSDS process is key to manage the shortfall.

- **Bring gender equality into the statistics arena and statistics into the gender equality arena.** Statistics are often missing from platforms for gender equality, and likewise gender often suffers from limited visibility in agendas for development data and statistics. Bridging this divide is vital to raise the profile of gender statistics and drive progress.
1. Introduction: Do women count?

The world is facing a critical juncture for gender equality. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian aggression in Ukraine, unstable economic conditions and the mounting effects of climate change threaten to erase gains in development and justice for women and girls worldwide. Now more than ever, high-quality gender data are vital to inform policy, counter exclusion and monitor progress towards sustainable development. Despite the urgency of these needs, most countries still grapple with systemic gaps in gender data and statistics.

The concept of the gender data gap – reflecting the invisibility of women, girls, and gender minorities in available data and evidence – has become widely accepted in development policy and practice. Through recent books such as *Invisible Women* (Criado Perez, 2019[3]) and *Data Feminism* (D’Ignazio and Klein, 2020[4]), the concept has made its way into mainstream public discourse. While this signals a sea change in awareness of gender data gaps and their adverse implications for society, gender-blind data and statistics remain pervasive.

Now more than ever, high-quality gender data are vital to inform policy, counter exclusion, and monitor progress. Despite the urgency, most countries still grapple with systemic gaps in gender data and statistics.

Gender data gaps affect countries of all income levels alike. For example, World Bank data show that progress in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) reporting is lowest on average across countries for SDG 5 (gender equality), with projected coverage of less than 30% by 2030 (Kitzmueller, Stacey and Gerszon Mahler, 2021[5]). However, with limited capacity and resources for statistical development, low-income countries (LICs) and middle-income countries (MICs) face unique barriers to “bridging the gap” (Open Data Watch, 2019[6]).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, national statistical offices (NSOs) across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, and the Caribbean faced a dual shock: Demand for data and statistics increased while data production became even more constrained, and the effects of this capacity squeeze were especially evident in gender data and statistics (Misra, Schmidt and Harrison, 2020[7]). Sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 case and death rates were still scarce one year into the global pandemic, especially in LICs and MICs (McDougal et al., 2021[8]). Meanwhile, secondary effects of the crisis, including a shadow pandemic of domestic violence and an increasing burden of unpaid care work, demonstrated the urgency of delivering more and better gender data to inform COVID-19 response and recovery (UN Women, 2020[9]).

Looking ahead, closing gender data gaps is a key part of the global effort to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis and increase resilience to future shocks. Mainstreaming gender in country-owned systems for official statistics is vital to this endeavour. However, patterns of gender data production across LICs and MICs are nascent, and solutions to improve them remain elusive. This report responds to this challenge, drawing on insights from the PARIS21 and UN Women collaboration to assess gender statistics in nine countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.
1.1. Assessing gender statistics at the country level

Counting on Gender Data distils findings from gender statistics assessment pilots conducted by PARIS21 and UN Women between 2019 and 2021 in nine countries: Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Maldives, Paraguay and Senegal. It sheds light on trends in gender data production and use in LICs and MICs, with a particular focus on NSOs as the leading producers of official statistics.

Since the implementation of these original nine Women Count pilots, PARIS21 and UN Women have continued their collaboration, expanding assessments to new countries and supporting NSOs in implementing gender statistics strategies. Leveraging a novel assessment framework, the Women Count assessment pilots included two main elements: an assessment of gender data gaps and an assessment of statistical capacity gaps.

The gender data gaps assessment explores the availability of official statistics produced by the national statistical system (NSS) in pilot countries to respond to gender indicators captured in national, regional, and international policy frameworks, including the SDGs. To complete the assessment, PARIS21 used its Advanced Data Planning Tool (ADAPT) to map current production of gender statistics at the country level. The set of indicator frameworks assessed for each pilot country varied based on national priorities (Table 2.1). However, all nine pilots mapped gender data gaps for the SDGs. A complete list of the indicator frameworks assessed for each country and further information on the ADAPT gender module are available in the annex.

The statistical capacity assessment examines “the process through which a country’s national statistical system, its organisations and individuals obtain, strengthen and maintain their abilities to collect, produce, analyse and disseminate high-quality [gender] data to meet users’ needs” (PARIS21, 2020). To identify and analyse capacity gaps related to gender statistics, PARIS21 worked with NSOs in each pilot country to field four questionnaires developed for the PARIS21-UN Women assessment framework aimed at gender focal points, the NSO, national statistical systems including national women’s machineries and gender statistics users. PARIS21 developed the questionnaires based on its Capacity Development 4.0 (CD4.0) model, which conceptualises statistical capacity as a multidimensional framework across three levels: systems, organisations and individuals (PARIS21, 2020).

With support from the Women Count team at UN Women headquarters as well as focal points in UN Women regional and country offices, the country pilots included in-person and virtual workshops to raise awareness around the assessment process and mobilise wider stakeholder engagement and participation. PARIS21 documented the results of each assessment in a country-specific assessment report that the NSO and other country stakeholders validated. Pilot countries leveraged findings from the assessments to develop dedicated gender statistics strategies as part of a new national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS) or as an independent exercise (Box 3.1).

1.2. Synthesising insights for global learning

As the capstone of the collaboration between PARIS21 and UN Women under the inaugural Women Count programme, the country assessment reports and strategies served as the primary source material for this report alongside direct consultations with NSOs, national women’s machineries and other gender statistics stakeholders engaged in the assessment process. Following the conclusion of the country work, PARIS21 mapped insights from each assessment back to the CD4.0 framework to identify patterns across the pilots and synthesise global findings.

This report has four chapters, including this introduction. Each is structured around key messages that highlight a particular challenge or opportunity pilot countries encounter in their efforts to close gender data gaps.
gaps. Chapter 2 examines what gender data gaps look like at country level, synthesising findings from the data gaps assessments to identify patterns and trends in gender data production across the nine pilot countries. Chapter 3 unpacks drivers of gender data gaps, identifying seven concrete areas of statistical capacity that shaped gender data production, dissemination and use in the pilot countries. Chapter 4 concludes with reflections on the way forward to develop stronger, more gender-responsive statistical systems in the future.

Unique insights from specific countries are featured throughout in “country spotlight” sections to contextualise or nuance findings where needed and to highlight best practices that might be helpful for stakeholders working in other contexts. Concepts, definitions and processes are introduced in boxes to ensure these are clear to gender equality practitioners and advocates who may be less familiar with gender statistics and statistical development more broadly.
Mapping the landscape of gender statistics – and associated gender data gaps – requires a shared understanding of what gender statistics are (Box 2.1) and where there is demand for them. For the purpose of the assessment pilots, PARIS21 simplified the concept of demand for gender data and statistics to include international and national policy agendas, using the indicator frameworks of these agendas as a point of reference. Such frameworks are a simple proxy for gender data demand for two reasons: 1) they are a visible and validated record of gender data needs and 2) they connect to immediate use cases related to monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL).

**Box 2.1. What are gender data and statistics?**

National statistical offices (NSOs) and other institutions leverage surveys, censuses and administrative systems to collect gender data required to compile gender statistics. According to the United Nations (UN), gender statistics encompass the sum of the following characteristics:

- data that are collected and presented by sex as a primary and overall classification
- data that reflect gender issues
- data that are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives
- data that are collected via methods that take into account stereotypes and social and/or cultural factors that may introduce gender bias (UNESCAP, 2016[12]).

The Women Count pilots functioned in line with this core definition to assess gender data gaps.

Notably, NSOs and stakeholders in pilot countries often simplified the concept of gender statistics to include only binary sex-disaggregated data. Operating under this narrower definition limits the scope of efforts to strengthen gender statistics and their inclusiveness, highlighting a need to invest not only in gender data production but also in gender data literacy.

Gender indicators serve to measure and compare the situation of women and men over time (PARIS21, 2019[1]). They may be qualitative or quantitative in nature, the latter drawn largely from gender statistics. Because indicators are used to monitor change, the PARIS21-UN Women assessment framework uses indicator availability as a means to assess gender data gaps.

Although indicator frameworks may not cover all areas of gender statistics (or indeed all stakeholder needs), such frameworks provide a basic mandate to produce them. The NSO and wider national statistical system (NSS) recognise indicators captured in national, regional, and international policies and strategies as drivers for statistical development. For this reason, indicator frameworks provide a solid basis to analyse patterns of gender data production and identify gaps.

2.1. Exploring gender data gaps from a country perspective

Working in consultation with the NSO and national women’s machineries, PARIS21 identified the primary indicator frameworks for the assessment in each pilot country, including one or more of the following:

- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- the UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators⁹ (hereafter, Minimum Set)
- the national development plan (NDP)
- the national gender equality policy (GEP) or its equivalent.

In some cases, additional policy frameworks were considered alongside these core instruments to ensure the analysis provided a relevant picture of national priorities for gender data production. The analysis of gender data gaps provided in this chapter represents a subset of the analysis in each country – i.e. a snapshot of a particular moment in time. Since the conclusion of the Women Count assessments, some pilot countries have launched new NDPs or GEPs that call for other gender indicators and alter demand for gender data and some have undertaken new initiatives in gender statistics to close data gaps.

2.1.1. As demand for gender statistics varies across countries context-sensitive strategies to identify and target gender data gaps are needed

Including gender indicators in the MEL frameworks for development policies and plans not only advances inclusive development, it also raises the profile of gender statistics, providing a springboard to improve gender data collection and enhance their use. Furthermore, by documenting the need for gender data and providing an explicit link to policy implementation, MEL frameworks provide a basis to mobilise resources for gender data production. Policy-driven gender data requirements support a mandate for the NSO and NSS to disaggregate the data they produce, adopt inclusive survey methods and instruments, and include gender-sensitive insights in their analysis and reporting.

Including gender indicators in development policies and plans raises the profile of gender statistics, providing a springboard to improve gender data collection and use.

Since each country has its own development policy frameworks and varying policy commitments in international and regional fora, the set of gender indicators assessed is unique to each pilot. Of the nine pilot countries, only Cambodia assessed coverage against all four primary frameworks. This variation tracks with national priorities, reflecting the principle of country ownership in gender equality and sustainable development, and provides a platform to crystallise demand and catalyse action around gender statistics (UNDP, 2017⁹). In addition to the core frameworks PARIS21 identified, including the SDGs, each pilot country included indicators for additional national policies or strategies for a more complete snapshot of national demand for gender data. Table 2.1 summarises the variation and spread of gender indicators across policy frameworks among the pilot countries.¹⁰
Table 2.1. Number of gender indicators assessed, by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>SDG gender indicators</th>
<th>UN Minimum Set</th>
<th>NDP</th>
<th>GEP</th>
<th>Other policy frameworks</th>
<th>Total gender indicators assessed*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>182</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The number of indicator frameworks was selected by each country depending on its policy priorities and commitments.

At the international level, all pilot countries had committed to deliver on Agenda 2030 and to monitor the SDGs. The SDG indicator framework has been a key driver of investment in innovation and capacity development for gender statistics in recent years and continues to play an important role in discussions around inclusive and intersectional data at country, regional and global levels (Seck, 2021[14]). At the time of the assessment pilots, the UN marked 53 SDG indicators as “gender-specific” (UN Women, 2020[15]). PARIS21 used this list throughout the assessment period across all nine pilot countries to allow for comparability across gender data gap assessments (Figure 2.1).

The SDG indicator framework has been a key driver of investment in innovation and capacity development for gender statistics.

Adoption of SDG indicators also varies across countries due to differences in the policy context and relevance of SDG goals and targets. For this reason, the number of SDG gender indicators assessed differs across pilot countries (Table 2.1). For example, the governments of the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Paraguay do not consider SDG indicator 5.3.2 on the “proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age” to be context-relevant and, therefore, it is not monitored. Due to limited capacity and resources for gender data production, the government of Lesotho, meanwhile, prioritised reporting on 42 of the 53 gender-specific SDG indicators. This process of identifying indicators for national SDG monitoring is an example of localising the SDGs, which is key to ensuring the global ambitions reflected in Agenda 2030 are recognised and owned locally (Box 2.2).
Box 2.2. What is Sustainable Development Goal localisation and how does it affect gender data production?

According to UN Women, the concept of localising the SDGs “refers to the process of designing (or adjusting) national and sub-national government development plans, strategies and/or policies to adapt the SDG targets to the local context and priorities” (Oluoch-Olunya, Butegwa and Onyisi Abebe, 2017[16]). Countries sometimes refer to this process as “domestication”, to reflect the idea of fitting the SDG agenda to the national context.

With a dedicated goal for gender equality (SDG 5), cross-cutting gender targets and indicators, and a broader ambition to leave no one behind, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an important impetus for delivering more and better gender data. The process of localising SDG indicators is itself an important step forward in this regard. SDG localisation provides an opportunity to register demand for gender statistics, mobilise resources for their production, and establish protocols for data sharing and reporting across various ministries, departments and agencies in the NSS.

Since 2016, NSOs have been working to localise SDG indicators with the aim of monitoring progress towards SDG implementation at the country level. Localising the SDGs promotes country ownership of the global agenda by engaging national and local stakeholders to identify and respond to context-specific data needs. On a more technical level, localisation also implicates the NSO and NSS in the process of identifying relevant SDG indicators, specifying data sources, and, if needed, outlining methodologies for data collection and indicator computation. Thus, SDG localisation serves to put gender data and statistics onto the NSO and NSS agenda.

The process of localising and aligning global gender indicators can also take place at the regional level. For example, the UN Statistical Commission introduced the global Minimum Set of Gender Indicators, establishing a common framework to facilitate national production and international compilation of gender statistics. Since 2015, various UN agencies have undertaken efforts to tailor this global framework to specific regional needs.

In 2019, the UN Economic Commission for Africa, UN Women and the African Development Bank introduced an initiative to develop a Minimum Set of Gender Indicators for Africa. Stakeholders designed Africa’s Minimum Set to reconcile gender data gaps related to the SDGs and the Africa Union Agenda 2063. More broadly, this regional framework also serves as a guide for harmonised production and compilation of gender statistics on the continent to support other initiatives such as the Africa Gender Barometer.

There is often some overlap in demand for gender data and statistics across national, regional and global frameworks. At the national level, demand for gender statistics comes primarily from NDPs and GEPs. A growing number of countries have developed and adopted GEPs (or something similar), which are cross-cutting instruments that address gender issues in social, economic and political spheres. Countries often design their NDP and GEP frameworks to align with the SDGs or other regional initiatives, such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063, to affirm their national commitment to deliver on priority development agendas. For this reason, duplication of gender indicators across frameworks is common and streamlines demand for gender statistics in the NSS.

Most pilot countries have an NDP that includes some provisions related to gender equality, albeit with varying emphasis and scope. In such cases, the accompanying MEL framework often includes a number of gender indicators. At the time of the assessment, some of these frameworks were under development or review (El Salvador, the Maldives and Paraguay). Of the nine pilot countries, five had NDP indicator frameworks available (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Lesotho and Senegal), and five had
a GEP with corresponding indicators (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador and Senegal). Two additional countries (Kyrgyzstan and the Maldives) were in the process of developing new GEPs at the time of the assessment.

National stakeholders often cited the anticipation of new gender indicators as an important motivation to design a gender statistics strategy.

In cases where an NDP or GEP was under review or in development, national stakeholders often cited the anticipation of new gender indicators for the MEL framework as an important motivation for the design of a gender statistics strategy. These discussions underscored the importance of national policy demand for catalysing action around gender statistics. Seeing gender indicators included in these national frameworks represents a positive step forward, in line with calls from the international community to connect statistical planning to development policy and programming.

However, despite the potential of MEL frameworks to drive progress in gender statistics at the country level, it is often challenging to put these to work in statistical production and analysis. For example, some gender indicators still lack coherent metadata, methods and specification (including standards for disaggregation) to standardise the production of gender statistics within and across countries. This was an issue in the early years of Agenda 2030 as well; the UN did not establish methodologies for all SDG gender indicators until 2020. Addressing such technical barriers is key to clarify demand for gender statistics at the country-level and accelerate their production in the future.

2.1.2. Gender data gaps are smaller for national frameworks than for the SDGs, reinforcing the role of national ownership

Whether due to limited capacity, low prioritisation or scarcity of resources, no pilot country produced all the gender data required to monitor its national and international policy commitments at the time of the assessment. However, gender indicators were more available for national frameworks than for the SDGs in pilot countries. Although not all pilots had indicator frameworks available for their NDPs or GEPs at the time of the assessment, the contrast is notable. On average, coverage stood at 98% for NDPs and 74% for GEPs compared to 56% for the SDGs (Figure 2.1). On the other hand, coverage for the Minimum Set was similar on average to coverage for GEPs, at 78% across the five countries assessed (Table 2.1).

No pilot country produced all the gender data required to monitor its national and international commitments.

This trend highlights the importance of national policies and plans in promoting gender data production (as discussed in Section 3.1, at the system level). NDPs and GEPs (and their indicator frameworks) represent the development priorities of governments and therefore mobilise substantial effort and resources to monitor their implementation. With greater national ownership and political momentum, national policies and plans provide a rich framework to develop gender statistics. Thus, ongoing efforts to mainstream gender in national development planning serve an important function – not only in advancing gender equality but also in mobilising gender data production. In the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Cambodia and Lesotho, for example, all gender-specific indicators included in their NDPs were available (Figure 2.2).
Figure 2.1. On average, coverage of gender indicators is higher for national frameworks than for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Note: Data present average availability for applicable indicators. Refer to Table 2.1 for countries included in calculations for each policy framework.
Source: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21.

While NDPs accounted for the highest share of available indicators across pilot countries, it is important to note that NDPs generally captured fewer gender-specific indicators than did either GEPs or the SDGs (Table 2.1). For three of the six pilot countries with NDP indicators in place, the number of gender indicators included in NDPs was less than half than the number of localised SDG indicators. In practice, fewer indicators make efforts to achieve full coverage more attainable. Furthermore, the choice to include fewer gender indicators in NDPs may also indicate the limits of political will for gender equality. The number of gender indicators in NDPs can be constrained due to competing development priorities and, in some cases, limited capacity for gender mainstreaming.

Figure 2.2. Coverage of gender indicators from national development plans is the most consistent among countries assessed.

Note: At the time of the Women Count assessment pilots, not all countries had an NDP indicator framework available for review.
Source: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21.
Gender data gaps can emerge from limits in gender data collection but efforts to package, analyse and present official statistics with a gender lens matter as well.

In light of these findings, timing in the national policy cycle is also an important factor to consider when assessing gender data gaps at the country level. Paraguay, for example, includes 67 gender-specific indicators in its new NDP – the largest number observed among the nine pilot countries (Table 2.1). However, at the time of the assessment, only 43% of these indicators were available as efforts to compile the required gender statistics were not yet underway. However, consultations with National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional Estadística, or INE), Paraguay’s NSO, revealed that most of the gender data required for these new indicators were already available but that current limitations in statistical analysis and computation led to gaps in coverage. This finding brings important nuance to discussions around gender data gaps at the country level. Gaps can emerge from limits in gender data collection but efforts to package, analyse and present official statistics with a gender lens matter as well.

**Figure 2.3. Coverage of indicators for gender equality policies is more mixed among the countries assessed**

![Graph showing coverage of indicators for gender equality policies]

Note: At the time of the Women Count assessment pilots, not all countries had a GEP indicator framework available for review.

Source: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21.

Broadly, the assessment pilots showed a similar pattern in coverage in NDPs and GEPs with one notable exception. In four of the five pilot countries with GEP indicator frameworks, the level of data availability ranged from 85% in Egypt to 100% in the Dominican Republic (Figure 2.3). Senegal was the outlier among the pilots, with no reported coverage for its GEP framework at the time of the Women Count assessment. This surprising finding illustrates that including gender indicators in national frameworks is not a silver bullet to advance gender data production. However, national frameworks do provide a strong platform to convene stakeholders around the need for gender statistics. The assessment pilot in Senegal was an opportunity for such engagement, leading to renewed efforts to mainstream gender as a core element of national statistical planning (Senegal country spotlight).

In contrast to the robust coverage for national frameworks, data availability for the full UN set of 53 gender-specific SDG indicators ranged from 45% coverage (24 indicators) in Paraguay to 68% coverage...
(36 indicators) in Lesotho. Six of nine pilot countries could report on more than half of the 53 SDG gender indicators, but significant gaps remained as they entered the Decade of Action (Figure 2.4.a).

The picture changes considerably when adjusting for the process of SDG localisation, although levels of coverage still varied across pilots. Assessing coverage based on localised SDG gender indicators is a better way of showing how each pilot country sets targets for gender data production for the SDGs. By this method (Figure 2.4.b), availability ranges from 46% (out of 52 localised indicators) in Paraguay to 90% (28 out of 31 localised indicators) in El Salvador. Notably, El Salvador and Lesotho, which reported the highest rates of coverage, are also the only pilot countries that adopted fewer than 50 SDG gender indicators. Only two pilot countries, the Maldives and Senegal, retained all 53 indicators after domestication – reporting 49% and 66% coverage, respectively.

**Figure 2.4. Coverage for Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators varies between global and localised frameworks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Global SDG Framework (UN list)</th>
<th>Localised SDG Framework (country lists)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>68% 11% 21%</td>
<td>86% 59% 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>66% 28% 6%</td>
<td>70% 66% 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>66% 40% 34%</td>
<td>66% 66% 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>57% 6% 44%</td>
<td>53% 53% 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>53% 6% 44%</td>
<td>53% 66% 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>53% 43% 47%</td>
<td>53% 66% 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>49% 47% 42%</td>
<td>49% 66% 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>49% 51% 4%</td>
<td>49% 66% 37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>45% 53% 2%</td>
<td>45% 66% 37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21.
Including gender indicators in national frameworks provides a strong platform to convene stakeholders around the need for gender statistics.

Any effort to identify and interpret patterns of gender data coverage should consider how alignment of national indicators and SDGs varies across countries. With limited resources to respond to international demand for SDG data, such efficiencies can make a difference in capacity to close data gaps at the country level, both for gender indicators and the SDGs more broadly. Some governments, for example, those of the Maldives and Senegal, have included SDG indicators as part of their NDP or GEP frameworks. Other pilot countries, for instance Cambodia, went further and augmented the SDGs with additional indicators as part of the SDG localisation process to establish stronger linkages to their unique national context. Such efforts to reconcile demand for SDG data have important implications for gender statistics. They not only provide a coherent narrative around national priorities for data production but also facilitate efforts towards co-ordination and accountability in the NSS.

Country spotlight: Resetting and renewing an agenda for gender statistics in Senegal

The Women Count assessment pilot came at a critical inflection point in strategic planning in Senegal as the National Agency of Statistics and Demography (Agence Nationale de Statistique et de la Démographie, or ANSD), the country’s NSO, was preparing for the design of a new NSDS. With support from PARIS21 and UN Women, the assessment pilot positioned the ANSD to assess both progress in gender statistics at the national level and its institutional role in closing gender data gaps.

The assessment took stock of all gender-specific indicators required to monitor priority policies in the country. Among these is the second National Strategy for Gender Equity and Equality (Stratégie Nationale pour l’Équité et l’Égalité du Genre, or SNEEG), which was set to be implemented in 2016-16 under the leadership of the Ministry of Women, Family, Gender and Child Protection. As the primary strategic instrument for addressing existing gender inequalities at the national level, the SNEEG includes a cross-cutting agenda to advance women’s empowerment in economic, social and political spheres. However, the gender data gaps assessment revealed that, three years after its adoption, national stakeholders had not yet collected data for any indicators associated with the strategy.

Data gaps for SNEEG were especially striking in light of overall strong coverage for gender indicators associated with Senegal’s NDP (Plan Sénégal Émergent). Furthermore, among its various goals and targets for implementation, the SNEEG included an explicit call to develop a dedicated gender database, signalling a clear linkage between national priorities for gender equality and improved availability of gender data and statistics.

Based on the assessment findings, the ANSD mobilised to adopt a proactive approach to address gender data gaps. In particular, the country’s new national strategy for the development of statistics, launched in 2020, includes gender data and statistics as its first strategic pillar, providing a framework to guide data production, partnerships and investment to close gender data gaps going forward.
2.1.3. Comprehensive gender mainstreaming is needed as gender data production is often piecemeal and issue driven

The SDGs as well as national frameworks play a central role in advancing production of gender statistics and, ultimately, monitoring progress towards gender equality. However, these data need to be sufficiently cross-cutting, granular and timely to support meaningful analysis of the situation of women and men in all areas of life. A deeper analysis of gender data gaps across the pilot countries revealed a trend towards specialised projects in gender statistics that stop short of more transformative, integrated solutions to promote gender mainstreaming as a standard operating procedure in the NSS.

Projects in gender statistics often stop short of more transformative, integrated solutions to promote gender mainstreaming as a standard operating procedure in national statistical systems.

First, patterns in gender data production in the pilot countries varied substantially across sectoral lines. Demand drives some of this variation. For example, the SDG framework concentrates the 53 gender-specific indicators in 11 of the 17 thematic goals (Figure 2.5). More than one-quarter, or 14 indicators, are under SDG 5. This pattern illustrates the potential (and the limitations) of current international frameworks to advance gender mainstreaming across national governments and guide efforts to strengthen gender statistics. Economic empowerment, social protection and health have received comparatively more attention in the past – and consequently more effort in gender data production – than have environment or transport sectors, where gender issues have not been as widely recognised or understood (OECD, 2017[17]; OECD DAC, 2016[18]).

Figure 2.5. Sustainable Development Goal gender data coverage is concentrated in specific thematic goals and targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG</th>
<th>Number of Indicators</th>
<th>Gender Data Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDG 1</td>
<td>6 indicators</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 2</td>
<td>1 indicator</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 3</td>
<td>6 indicators</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 4</td>
<td>8 indicators</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 5</td>
<td>14 indicators</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 6</td>
<td>6 indicators</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 10</td>
<td>1 indicator</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 11</td>
<td>3 indicators</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 13</td>
<td>1 indicator</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 16</td>
<td>6 indicators</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDG 17</td>
<td>1 indicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21.
Among pilot countries, SDG gender indicators for health (SDG 3), partnerships (SDG 17), decent work (SDG 8), and gender equality (SDG 5) had the highest coverage, with average availability of at least 75% (Figure 2.5). The greatest gender data gaps related to poverty (SDG 2), sustainable cities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), and peace and justice (SDG 16), with average availability at 25% or less. These figures are especially striking since the number of gender indicators allocated across SDGs is uneven. SDGs 1 and 13, for example, include only one gender indicator each but are nonetheless among the SDGs with the lowest gender indicator coverage among pilot countries.

While SDG gaps were concentrated under particular themes, bounded interventions are limited in their potential to enable the NSS to apply a gender lens across all areas of official statistics. Since the launch of the SDGs, the international community has made important strides in supporting efforts to enhance gender statistics for SDG monitoring. For example, several pilot countries, including El Salvador and the Maldives, pointed to recent projects with international partners to develop a dedicated survey to measure time use or violence against women. These targeted projects in gender data collection have been instrumental in closing gender data gaps in areas that have suffered from limited measurement in the past. Such issue-driven initiatives can also help increase statisticians’ awareness of unique issues that arise in gender-sensitive data collection and analysis, but these wider benefits are indirect and gradual.

Disaggregation is a second area that remains under-addressed in gender statistics. Disaggregation by sex, in particular, is essential for gender-sensitive analysis of SDG progress. Of the 53 gender-specific SDG indicators analysed in the Women Count assessments, 33 call for sex disaggregation in their definition. However, disaggregation for SDG gender indicators was inconsistent in pilot countries (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6. Sustainable Development Goal gender indicators are not consistently disaggregated by sex even when this is required

Note: Authors’ calculations from country-level ADAPT Platforms hosted by PARIS21. Availability is calculated from the total SDG gender indicators requiring sex disaggregation in their specification. The total number of SDG indicators requiring sex disaggregation was determined based on localised SDG indicators for each pilot country.
Since all pilot countries had some gaps in sex disaggregation, it can be concluded that gender data availability is, in fact, lower than expected from the analysis outlined in section 2.1.2; some countries collected SDG gender indicators but neglected to disaggregate them by sex. Fewer than 60% of relevant SDG gender indicators in Egypt, Lesotho and Senegal were disaggregated by sex. In Lesotho, coverage stood at 42%, with only 9 of the 21 relevant SDG indicators available. In comparison, sex disaggregation in Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives and Paraguay exceeded 75%. This finding is especially notable in the case of Paraguay, where the SDG gender indicator coverage overall is still quite low, at 46% (Figure 2.4.b). While moving towards incorporating sex disaggregation as a standard practice in data collection and analysis is positive, it may also intimate a constrained definition and scope for gender statistics in Paraguay. At the time of the assessment, the National Statistics Institute (INE) achieved most of its gender indicator coverage through sex disaggregation rather than through targeted data collection or analysis on gender issues.

Missing levels of disaggregation hinder analysis of intersectional vulnerabilities for women and men in society and ultimately pose an obstacle to delivering on the commitment to leave no one behind. In the absence of granular data, vulnerable sub-populations are often invisible in official statistics. Disaggregation across multiple dimensions is an important step to counter these systematic gaps. Broadly, sex and age disaggregation were the most common variables available in pilot countries. Other variables such as disability status, migratory status, ethnicity and income level were less prevalent.

In the absence of granular data, vulnerable sub-populations are often invisible in official statistics.

Finally, patterns in data sourcing for gender indicators also highlight the limits of current efforts towards more system-wide gender mainstreaming in pilot countries. The most common data sources for gender indicators in pilot countries were censuses or large household surveys undertaken in ten-year and five-year intervals, respectively. Overwhelmingly, gender data gaps for the SDGs in pilot countries correspond to indicators that require administrative data (Figure 2.7).

In seven pilot countries, more than 70% of gaps in SDG gender indicator coverage call for administrative data sources. In El Salvador, 100% of the missing gender indicators required administrative data to fill. This finding is consistent with previous work on SDG data production (UN Women, 2019[19]; Open Data Watch, 2019[16]) and highlights the need to engage the NSS as a whole to close gender data gaps by enhancing co-ordination, improving administrative data quality, and establishing regular protocols for data sharing and exchange between NSOs and line ministries (section 3.1.2).
Mainstreaming gender in survey and census production is vital to deliver high-quality gender data and statistics and foster more inclusive and gender-responsive statistical systems. However, there are a number of limitations, particularly related to gender data frequency and sustainability, associated with over-reliance on new survey instruments as a strategy to close gender data gaps. In El Salvador, for example, more than 50% of available SDG gender indicators were collected for the reference year 2016 or earlier. Only in Cambodia, Paraguay and Senegal were more than 40% of gender indicators available for the reference year 2017 or later.

Administrative data are an important piece of the puzzle for closing gender data gaps, providing individual-level data and a high frequency. However, administrative systems introduce additional challenges, as reuse of these data for official statistics is generally not their primary purpose. As a result, protocols for data sharing and quality assurance are often underdeveloped. Despite these limitations, investing in the development of key administrative systems is an important strategy to advance regular production of gender statistics in the future.

Apart from the regular cycles of survey and census production, other factors may affect the frequency and timeliness of gender statistics. Limited financing in particular is a challenge all pilot countries faced (Section 3.2.2). Since the launch of the SDGs, some countries have made significant progress in developing new instruments and frameworks to close gender data gaps. However, further effort to institutionalise and scale these approaches is needed to ensure they are sustainable. Without a more integrated approach to gender statistics, including surveys and census data alongside quality-controlled administrative records, tracking progress towards gender equality and designing inclusive, evidence-based policies will remain a challenge for countries as they advance to the 2030 horizon and beyond.
As shown in the pilot country snapshots in Chapter 2, evidence of gender data gaps is growing. However, practical solutions to reduce these gaps are less clear. Exclusion in data and statistics is rooted in the same structural inequalities and norms that lead to exclusion in the real world (Criado Perez, 2019[3]). As such, and despite global efforts to leave no one behind, exclusion persists.

While the underlying drivers that shape gender data gaps are structural, the mechanisms that reproduce and maintain them manifest on both technical and non-technical fronts and vary by country and institution. For example, a national statistical office (NSO) might need technical training on gender-sensitive data collection and analysis. However, ensuring such initiatives are sustainable requires non-technical intervention to improve strategic planning and financing for gender statistics. Gender data gaps are more than a data production problem: Capacity gaps reinforce them at all stages of the data value chain from data collection through to data uptake and use (Open Data Watch, 2018[20]).

Understanding and addressing gender data gaps thus require a deeper analysis of the capacity to collect, publish, access and use gender statistics in each country. For this reason, each Women Count pilot included an analysis of statistical capacity based on the PARIS21 CD4.0 framework13 (PARIS21, 2020[11]). CD4.0 unpacks statistical capacity across systems, organisations and individuals in five target areas:

- resources, or the means (human, physical, financial, legal) required to produce an output
- skills and knowledge, or the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities required to perform a task
- management, or the combination of skills, knowledge and resources to produce an output
- politics and power, or the interactions and relationships between organisational units and individuals that often determine the dynamics of the whole system
- incentives, or the motives guiding individuals, organisations and the system itself.

Within this framework, findings from the capacity assessments revealed a diverse set of capabilities that shape supply and demand for gender statistics in pilot countries. As a cross-cutting area in official statistics, gender statistics can also be a bellwether for statistical capacity more broadly. The assessments revealed capacity gaps that plagued the national statistical system (NSS) in general also affected gender data quality and availability in pilot countries. In some cases, producing gender statistics further amplified these pre-existing constraints. This chapter synthesises findings from the pilots, highlighting patterns in statistical capacity at the level of the system, the organisation and the individual.
3.1. Fostering systems for gender statistics

As a manifestation of structural exclusion, the gender data gap, at its core, is a systems problem. Unequal representation in data and statistics mirrors systemic gender inequality in society as a whole. In the policy space, corrective frameworks for inequality such as gender mainstreaming are cross-cutting: They affect numerous ministries, departments and agencies across government as a system. Likewise, overcoming exclusion in official statistics entails multi-stakeholder engagement and a systems-driven approach.

Unequal representation in data and statistics mirrors systemic gender inequality in society as a whole

But what is a “system” for gender statistics? The PARIS21 CD4.0 framework defines a statistical system as “an organised, purposeful structure consisting of interrelated and interdependent individuals, organisations and stakeholders whose activities relate to official statistics” (PARIS21, 2020[11]). Thus, a gender statistics system includes government and non-government stakeholders from both the NSS and the wider data ecosystem.

In their most basic form, systems for gender statistics consist of two primary constituencies: gender data producers and gender data users. Countries optimise their gender statistics system when gender data supply (from producers) aligns with gender data demand (from users). Many factors may either cause the system to break down or disrupt its development and efficiency. Insights from pilot countries revealed three key dimensions of statistical capacity that affect the enabling environment for a gender statistics system and allow it to develop and thrive:

- securing a mandate for gender statistics through appropriate legal, regulatory and policy frameworks
- establishing mechanisms to co-ordinate gender data production and respond to needs
- engaging gender data users to promote uptake and increase impact.

This section unpacks these system-level capacities across the nine pilots, identifying lessons and opportunities to optimise gender statistics systems at the country level.

3.1.1. Strong legal, regulatory and policy frameworks are necessary to enable gender statistics systems but are insufficient to mobilise them

As noted in Chapter 2, international and regional agendas as well as national policies and plans play a role in driving and substantiating demand for gender statistics. National legal and regulatory frameworks also serve an important function in mainstreaming gender across government (OECD, 2018[21]) and, consequently, on mainstreaming gender in official statistics. By signalling political buy-in and commitment, these formal commitments raise the public profile of gender data and statistics, which often suffer from low visibility and prioritisation in government planning and budgeting (PARIS21, 2019[11]; UN Women, 2018[22]). On a more technical level, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks from national, regional, and global plans and agendas also support dialogue and understanding among stakeholders in the NSS, providing a shared language around targets for gender equality and statistical production.

All nine pilot countries draw on their own unique configuration of laws, regulations, policies, agendas and plans to develop gender data and statistics. However, with rare exceptions, these instruments alone were not sufficient to establish and mobilise coherent systems for gender statistics in pilot countries, suggesting a substantial disconnect between commitment and action. Although the reasons behind this disconnect vary by context, some important patterns emerged.
First, gender statistics tend to be covered in multiple legal and policy frameworks. International, regional and national instruments across a variety of issues – gender equality, sustainable development, human rights and data and statistics, among others – have implications for gender statistics. Second, and relatedly, in many cases existing legal and policy frameworks fail to provide a coherent mandate to establish and mobilise gender statistics systems. Most pilot countries cobbled together a mandate from multiple laws, regulations and policies, increasing the burden on NSOs and other gender data stakeholders to define their role in the gender statistics system.

International instruments: agendas, conventions and platforms

At the international level, pilot countries identified several frameworks in addition to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that influenced the enabling environment for gender statistics. For example, NSOs in Cambodia, El Salvador and Kyrgyzstan all identified commitments related to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as part of their mandate to produce and report on gender indicators. Although the call for more and better gender data and statistics is not always explicit in such high-level agendas, conventions and platforms, country stakeholders recognise and leverage them to frame demand for gender statistics within a broader narrative around gender equality. Where gender statistics are embedded in these instruments, either in monitoring frameworks or within an agenda-setting document, there is still a need to develop standards and frameworks to enable systems that deliver more and better gender data.

As discussed in section 2.1.1, delays in developing technical definitions, methodologies and metadata for SDG gender indicators introduced additional barriers to gender data production in the early years of Agenda 2030. Continued effort to develop standards around gender statistics can enable NSOs to respond to and leverage international agendas and develop institutional capacity for gender data production, analysis and dissemination.

National instruments: legal and regulatory frameworks

At the national level, stakeholders identified a range of legal and regulatory frameworks, national policies, and plans that guided their work in gender statistics. On the legal side, instruments related to official statistics or gender equality in general were most common. Five pilot countries (Cambodia, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, the Maldives and Paraguay) had statistical legislation that broadly aligns with UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. General statistical legislation that introduces standards for co-ordination (Section 3.1.2), data sharing and access and for data disaggregation (Section 2.1.3) has important implications for gender statistics. However, best practices around designing statistical legislation and regulatory frameworks to promote inclusive, gender-responsive statistics are at an early stage.

In terms of legal frameworks for gender equality, all nine pilot countries benefit from some provisions related to gender equality in their national constitutions, of which eight (Lesotho being the exception) cited such provisions as part of the legal basis for gender statistics production. In addition, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives and Paraguay all cited further thematic legislation related to gender equality, violence against women (VAW), other forms of gender-based violence or equal opportunities. However, only four pilot countries (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Paraguay) benefitted from specific legal or regulatory provisions for gender statistics. In two of these four cases, Paraguay and El Salvador, the provisions were specific to statistics on VAW.

In Paraguay’s Law 5777 for Comprehensive Protection for Women against All Forms of Violence (Protección Integral a las Mujeres contra toda forma de violencia) mandates the Ministry of Women and the National Statistical Institute (INE) to design and implement a unified system for VAW data and statistics. Similarly, El Salvador’s Comprehensive Special Law for a Life Free of Violence (Una Vida Libre de
Violencia), establishes a national system for statistics, data and information on VAW and is the most expansive of the pilot countries’ laws on the subject as it includes a mandated budget (El Salvador country spotlight). Such detail and clarity are the exception, not the rule, among pilot countries.

**National instruments: policies and plans**

Stakeholders also identified national policies and plans as another set of key instruments that make up the enabling environment for gender statistics. Seven of the nine pilot countries (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho and Senegal) include gender provisions in their current national development plans (NDPs). In each of these countries, the government also introduced a thematic policy or strategy related to gender equality. The remaining two pilots, Paraguay and the Maldives, were in the midst of planning cycles that would bring gender onto the national development agenda. As noted in Chapter 2, taking these cycles into account is essential to assess gender data gaps and, ultimately, capacity to close them (Section 2.1.2). In both countries, new commitments and indicators that were emerging from new national planning instruments were an impetus for their engagement in the Women Count assessment pilots and near-term prioritisation of gender statistics.

Outside their MEL frameworks, gender data and statistics were often under-addressed in gender equality policies (GEPs) in pilot countries. Although eight of the pilot countries had at least one policy or planning instrument in place for gender equality (Paraguay being the exception), only four (Dominican Republic, El Salvador, the Maldives and Senegal) include specific references for gender data and statistics. Excluding data as a dimension of national GEPs perpetuates an environment where gender data gaps go unaddressed, in that the NSO is not recognised or engaged as a key stakeholder in the implementation of the GEP or the wider effort to advance gender equality at the country level. Of the four pilots where gender statistics were recognised, the Dominican Republic was only one with a dedicated policy for gender statistics (Dominican Republic country spotlight). The other three countries (El Salvador, the Maldives and Senegal) integrated objectives for statistics as part of a larger gender equality agenda.

### Country spotlight: Challenges to fulfilling mandates for gender statistics in the Dominican Republic

The Dominican Republic was one of the few pilot countries to have made a concrete, formal commitment to produce gender statistics prior to the Women Count assessment pilots. This is expressed in the law establishing the Ministry of Women as well as an article in Law 1-12: National Development Plan 2030 that mandates sex, age and geographic disaggregation in official statistics to ensure that data adequately reflect national realities. Building on this legal framework, the government introduced a policy, Mainstreaming Gender in Official Statistics, that also includes objectives for production, analysis, dissemination and co-ordination of gender statistics.

These frameworks have created a strong enabling environment for the general director of the National Office of Statistics (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, or ONE) to include gender statistics as a strategic priority from the start of her tenure in 2020. Nevertheless, the lack of a statistical law to govern the NSS limits statistics office’s ability to deliver on a formal mandate for gender statistics. Without a strong legal framework for its operations, it remains challenging to co-ordinate the NSS, ensure data quality and standards, and mobilise resources to produce gender statistics in the Dominican Republic.
While GEPs tend to omit gender statistics from their main narratives, even an indirect linkage to gender statistics in the corresponding MEL frameworks have significant implications for gender data production. As discussed in Chapter 2, coverage in pilot countries was higher on average for national gender indicators than for the SDGs, underscoring the importance of national policies and plans as an entry to engage the NSO and introduce a country-driven agenda for the gender statistics system. It is also important to note, however, that some pilot countries struggled to make these connections. For example, Senegal’s National Strategy for Gender Equity and Equality (SNEEG) includes a dedicated objective to develop a specialised database for social, economic and environmental gender data along with an indicator framework to monitor implementation. However, development of the gender database and compilation of indicators to implement the strategy had not yet materialised at the time of the assessment (Senegal country spotlight).

A national strategy for the development of statistics (NSDS) can connect national and international frameworks for gender equality to the NSS and provide a coherent mandate for gender data production (Box 3.1). However, the NSDS is an underused tool to establish and develop gender statistics systems. While some pilot countries had developed an NSDS (Lesotho, Maldives and Senegal), none had included a dedicated plan or objective for gender statistics prior to the Women Count assessment. As a follow-up to the Women Count pilots, NSOs leveraged the assessment findings to design targeted gender statistics strategies and engage the NSS. In Senegal, for example, the findings related to SNEEG provided a strong impetus to include gender statistics as the first pillar of the country’s third NSDS, paving the way for new partnerships and engagements to strengthen capacity for gender statistics in the National Agency of Statistics and Demography (ANSD) and other agencies in Senegal’s NSS.
Box 3.1. National strategies for the development of statistics: What are they and how can they develop and strengthen gender statistics systems?

An NSDS is a national planning approach to develop capacity to produce, disseminate and mainstream the use of statistics. An NSDS is a government-owned strategy, designed to align with the national development plan and regional and international commitments. It is a medium-term planning instrument, typically designed for five- to ten-year intervals, to set an agenda and budget for production of official statistics.

Critically, a country’s NSDS is a framework, a process and a product built through the collective and co-ordinated work of the NSS. The NSDS lifecycle reflected in the PARIS21 NSDS Guidelines captures the multifaceted nature of the NSDS as a tool to drive statistical development by engaging stakeholders in the preliminary stage, identifying priorities and results in the design stage, and mobilising resources and partners in the deployment stage. The results of NSDS deployment should inform the preliminary stage for the next NSDS design, feeding into a virtuous cycle of evidence-informed action to deliver more and better development data and the national level.

Figure 3.1. The national strategy for the development of statistics lifecycle


In light of the established processes and systems around the NSDS life cycle in countries, the NSDS is a critical platform to promote gender mainstreaming in statistical practice and formalise strategic planning for gender statistics. Building on insights from the Women Count pilots, PARIS21 and UN Women developed a Gender Module for the PARIS21 Guidelines that defines processes and entry points where countries can consider and integrate gender statistics into the life cycle and mobilise gender statistics systems, including by:

- outlining a business case for focusing on gender statistics to improve the overall efficiency of the NSS through strengthened co-ordination as well as intra-institutional and inter-institutional exchange and dialogue
• calling for awareness raising and promotion of a basic understanding of gender statistics in statistical planning and as a key element of advocacy for gender equality
• putting users at the heart of the gender data value chain to build rewarding partnerships when designing data collection, filling data gaps and scaling up data use.

The pilot countries illustrate how an NSDS can be used to help develop and strengthen gender statistics systems. Broadly, the pilots pursued one of the three following strategies to apply insights from the Women Count assessments in statistical planning:

**NSDS integration.** Fully integrating gender statistics within the NSDS offers a direct line to connect gender mainstreaming in official statistics with political buy-in and resource mobilisation for the NSS overall. In cases where an NSDS design progressed in tandem with the Women Count assessment, pilot countries used assessment reports as direct inputs in the NSDS design process. The Maldives, Senegal and Lesotho adopted this approach.

**Standalone gender statistics strategy.** Although distinct from the NSDS, a gender statistics strategy provides a unique opportunity to set an agenda, increase visibility and engage stakeholders. This approach is also useful where an NSDS design is on hold or has recently launched, serving as a standalone strategy that allows a country to take immediate action around gender statistics at any point in the NSDS life cycle. Pilots in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Paraguay adopted this approach to enable action around gender statistics after the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Strategic framework.** The lightest option for statistical planning, a strategic framework for gender statistics can be a useful tool to guide future efforts towards gender mainstreaming in an NSDS design process. However, its potential to drive immediate action or mobilise stakeholders is limited. Pilots in Cambodia, Egypt and Kyrgyzstan adopted this approach to provide a roadmap for ongoing or future NSDS designs.

Fitting the approach to gender mainstreaming to the national context maximises potential to align with demand for gender data (Section 2.1.1) and expand national ownership (Section 2.1.2). The Women Count pilots highlight the practical importance of this process as a critical enabler for effective strategy design and, ultimately, for strategy implementation.


### 3.1.2. Dedicated co-ordination mechanisms are rare but vital to empower gender statistics systems

Like official statistics in general, gender statistics often suffer from a co-ordination deficit. As a cross-cutting issue, gender data production engages the NSO and a variety of line ministries, departments and agencies across governments. However, optimising gender statistics systems requires strong linkages between gender data users and producers, including a broad set of non-government stakeholders from civil society, development partners, academia and the private sector, among others. The diversity of actors implicated in gender statistics systems makes establishing and mobilising them a complex endeavour. A robust mechanism for multi-stakeholder co-ordination and engagement can help mitigate this complexity and facilitate an ongoing exchange of knowledge and expertise around gender data at the country level.
The diversity of actors implicated in gender statistics systems makes establishing and mobilising them a complex endeavour. A robust mechanism for multistakeholder co-ordination can help mitigate this complexity.

All nine Women Count pilot countries reported some existing mechanism for general statistical co-ordination among data producers. In most cases, national laws or policies (Section 3.1.1) provided the foundation for such mechanisms. In principle, statistical laws and regulations play an especially important role, providing a roadmap to structure and co-ordinate operations within the NSS and regulate data sharing and exchange. Depending on their scope, such provisions can enable and strengthen flows of administrative data (Section 2.1.3) and alternative data sources such as citizen-generated data from civil society organisations and mobile data from telecom companies; the potential of these alternative sources to close gender data gaps is widely acknowledged by experts and stakeholders alike (UN Women, 2018[22]; Data2X, 2021[24]).

However, existing legal provisions in pilot countries proved largely insufficient to co-ordinate gender statistics systems. At the time of the assessment, only Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho and Paraguay had statistical laws that authorised the NSO as a standard-setting institution.16 Some pilot countries benefitted from more narrow legal provisions covering specific issues related to gender statistics. For example, the legal framework in the Dominican Republic requires sex and age disaggregation as a standard dimension of administrative data. Cambodia’s statistical law designates the Ministry of Women’s Affairs as the lead entity for gender statistics production (Cambodia country spotlight).

The process of analysing gender data gaps in pilot countries also demonstrated the limitations of prevailing frameworks in terms of optimising gender data production across institutions. Inconsistent disaggregation, limited interoperability and weak flows of administrative sources of gender data all point to insufficient frameworks for technical co-ordination among gender statistics producers across the NSS (Section 2.1.3). In sum, weak co-ordination reinforces gender data gaps.

This vicious cycle is further reinforced by limitations in current statistical standards, guidance and tools to support gender statistics. In the absence of established methodologies and metadata, approaches to gender data production, analysis and dissemination remain diffuse and lack harmonisation – even within the NSS of a single country. Thus, clear and coherent standards and frameworks for gender statistics are key to enable co-ordination and effective gender data governance at a technical level as these enable a shared understanding of what gender statistics are and how they should be produced. This is an especially important enabler for further re-use of administrative data to produce gender statistics, a significant untapped resource in pilot countries (Section 2.1.3).

Despite these challenges, two pilots had established dedicated co-ordination mechanisms for gender statistics prior to the Women Count assessments (Dominican Republic and El Salvador) and two others developed new co-ordination initiatives in response to assessment findings (Maldives and Paraguay). Each is a highly specific case, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive approaches to consolidate gender statistics systems. For example, the Dominican Republic lacks a legal framework to establish and co-ordinate the NSS in general, but the government introduced a policy to establish and co-ordinate a gender statistics system (Dominican Republic country spotlight). El Salvador had a strong legal mandate to produce gender statistics, which led to the establishment of dedicated group on gender statistics by the Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women (Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer, or ISDEMU), a leading entity in the national women’s machinery. By providing a space for regular dialogue among stakeholders, this group enabled more effective co-ordination of special surveys and other activities to support gender statistics.
The Women Count assessments provided an opportunity for countries to review their current approach to co-ordination and revise or introduce new initiatives. The Maldives Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services created a new inter-agency group on gender statistics to engage and convene stakeholders, co-chaired by both agencies (Maldives country spotlight). Similarly, the ISDEMU invited the country’s General Directorate of Statistics and Census (DIGESTYC) to co-chair the gender statistics group in El Salvador, institutionalising collaboration between the two entities and providing a platform for the DIGESTYC to engage with gender data producers, users and development partners.

These examples show that introducing or improving co-ordination around gender statistics is an important step forward in empowering gender statistics systems to tackle gender data gaps and accelerate gender data use. Experiences in pilot countries also show the importance of legal and policy frameworks (Section 3.1.1) and technical assistance (in this case, provided through the Women Count pilots) to jump-start this process. A clear mandate to develop gender statistics is still necessary to ensure that interactions between actors within the gender statistics system are institutionalised and sustained over time. Without it, co-ordinating around a shared vision and mobilising resources for gender data collection and analysis remain challenging.

**Country spotlight: Establishing an inter-agency working group for gender statistics in the Maldives**

While preparing its ten-year NSDS in 2019, the Maldives Bureau of Statistics (MBS) decided to take stock of gender statistics and their link to administrative records. At the time, there was no separate unit or department for gender statistics in the Maldives NSS.

The PARIS21-UN Women assessment pilot revealed missing protocols for co-ordination and exchange between MBS and the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (MGFSS). Furthermore, other relevant line ministries lacked gender data literacy. Although there were ad hoc exchanges on gender data between the MBS, the MGFSS and other state agencies, there was no mechanism to mitigate overlaps and or address gaps in gender statistics production across the NSS.

User-producer meetings held over 2019 and 2020 as part of the assessment process revealed a strong interest among country stakeholders in leveraging statistics to address key topics related to gender equality. For example, the MGFSS requires data from all key government sectors to report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators. Civil society organisations also expressed interest in developing initiatives on citizen-generated data to close gender data gaps.

In light of these findings, the MBS and MGFSS established an inter-agency working group on gender statistics, co-chaired by the two institutions. The new co-ordination mechanism responds to Goal 3 of the country’s new GEP on “institutional gender mainstreaming”.

The first meeting of the inter-agency group took place in June 2020, at which time the MBS and the MGFSS set the following agenda items:

- establish a sustainable co-ordination mechanism for production of gender statistics in the NSS
- promote gender statistics use in the country among policy makers, media and other users
- report on the activities undertaken and submit recommendations to the National Statistics Coordinating Committee.

One of the first tasks of the group was the validation of the PARIS21-UN Women assessment findings. Beginning in 2023, the new working group will develop and launch a gender statistics strategy aligned to the NSDS and the Gender Equality Action Plan to guide national efforts to strengthen gender statistics production and use.
3.1.3. Broken linkages with gender data users disrupt the development of cohesive, policy-relevant gender statistics systems

While co-ordination among gender data producers was underdeveloped in the Women Count pilot countries, assessments also revealed a significant disconnect between gender data users and producers. None of the pilot countries had established regular patterns of dialogue with a wide spectrum of gender data users at the time of the assessments.

This lack of regular stakeholder engagement served to maintain a status quo wherein demand for gender statistics is unclear, use cases are invisible and awareness of gender issues in statistics remains low. User engagement around gender statistics was limited to ad hoc interactions between NSOs and women’s machineries in pilot countries, often as part of a review process for planned surveys or publications. While these linkages are important, they were often too bounded (in both form and substance) to enable more coherent and policy-relevant gender statistics systems.

The concept of a data value chain can be a useful framework to identify and interpret the nature of this disconnect by unpacking “the evolution of data from collection to analysis, dissemination, and the final impact of data on decision making” (Open Data Watch, 2018[20]). As its name implies, the data value chain emphasises that value is fully realised and enriched through regular patterns of use and re-use. The OECD virtuous data cycle takes this concept a step further to illustrate how data use sets the stage for continued investment in data systems, feeding into future data production (OECD, 2017[25]). As such, engaging with gender data users is also an important strategy to mobilise resources for gender statistics (Section 3.2.2).

Historically, there has been a tendency to invest effort upstream in the gender value chain – on data production and publication – over downstream uptake and impact (OECD, 2017[25]). In practice, efforts to close gender data gaps often emphasise engagement with gender data producers over engagement with gender data users. In most pilot countries, communication and dissemination of gender statistics are limited to one or two products – for example, a gender statistics booklet or infographic, developed and disseminated for International Women’s Day. This limited approach short-circuits efforts to promote gender data uptake for policy making and planning.

With only nascent efforts toward co-ordination around gender data and statistics (Section 3.1.2), mechanisms for dialogue between would-be gender data users and gender data producers were limited (or non-existent) in pilot countries, inhibiting progress along the value chain. As a result, opportunities to develop connections and increase influence – critical precursors to gender data impact – were disrupted. Regular dialogue with gender data users is key not only to respond to demand but also to build it. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the NSO reported limited demand from the government for gender statistics, which weakened incentives to enhance gender data production.

Repairing broken links between gender data production and use requires a deeper understanding of statistical capacity and its effect on the performance of gender statistics systems. The Women Count assessments provided such insights, offering NSOs and other NSS stakeholders in pilot countries an unusual opportunity to reflect on how to shift and accelerate gender data uptake and impact.

In Paraguay, for example, the INE convened government and non-government stakeholders, including civil society and women’s rights associations, to develop a new gender statistics strategy, building on insights from the Women Count assessment. As the strategy moved to implementation, the INE institutionalised
this multi-stakeholder group, convening the members on a quarterly basis as a platform to amplify collaboration, mobilise resources and enhance accountability. Each quarterly session tackles a different issue identified jointly by the members, including communication of gender statistics and administrative statistics on violence against women.

Other user-focused initiatives that pilot countries are taking forward emphasise upskilling and awareness raising. In Lesotho, the Bureau of Statistics (BOS) identified low gender data literacy as a barrier to implement its agenda on gender mainstreaming that emerged from the Women Count pilot. As one of its first initiatives under the new NSDS, the BOS implemented a training with both government and non-government stakeholders, introducing participants to key concepts in gender data and statistics and initiating a dialogue between the BOS and other gender data producers and users. The ONE in the Dominican Republic is developing a tool to capture and learn from existing gender data use cases to mobilise stakeholders around its new gender statistics strategy. To develop and pilot the new tool, the ONE will analyse and disseminate insights from a recent use case from the national parliament, where gender statistics informed a new policy initiative to prevent early pregnancy.

Across all pilot countries, strengthening the dialogue and co-ordination among NSOs and national women’s machineries proved to be one of the most important strategies to enhance engagement with gender data users. As both a gender data user and a producer, national women’s machineries hold unique insights into gender data needs and potential use cases. Connections between these entities prior to the Women Count assessments in Egypt, El Salvador (El Salvador country spotlight), and Cambodia (Cambodia country spotlight), for example, had enabled much of their progress in gender statistics. As NSOs in pilot countries shift from assessing gender statistics to designing gender strategies, enhancing collaboration with national women’s machineries will be a vital enabler of strategy implementation.

3.2. Enabling organisations to deliver gender statistics

While systems shape the enabling environment for gender statistics, organisations hold the mandate to collect and curate gender data for their production. Thus, organisation-level capacities shape the supply of gender statistics. The PARIS21 CD4.0 framework describes an organisation as “a social entity ... comprised of multiple interacting individuals who are co-ordinated through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility to achieve an explicit, common purpose” (PARIS21, 2020[13]).

Gender statistics implicate a large number of organisations due to the cross-cutting nature of gender equality. Although the configuration of organisations varies across countries, two entities hold an important place in every case: the NSO and national women’s machineries. An active exchange between the NSO and the women’s machinery is often an important factor in capacity development for gender statistics at the country level (Section 3.1.3).

For the purpose of the Women Count pilots, PARIS21 and UN Women focused primarily on the NSO and its role as a leader in the NSS for the assessment of organisation-level capacity. This analysis revealed varying patterns of engagement between the NSO and national women’s machineries and their distinct but complementary roles in producing, disseminating and ultimately, promoting use of gender statistics. Within this scope, insights from pilot countries highlighted two dimensions of statistical capacity that shape an organisation’s engagement and performance in gender statistics: first, positioning gender and inclusion within the organisation structure and culture and second, mobilising resources through strategies for gender statistics.

This section unpacks how these capacities manifested across the nine pilot countries and identifies challenges and best practices emerging among the NSOs as they worked to deliver more and better gender data.
3.2.1. Ad hoc production and analysis of gender statistics underscore the importance of gender in NSO design and culture

Gender data production is an expression (or a consequence) of the NSO institutional set-up, including its design and culture. Organisational design, encompassing “the distribution of roles and responsibilities”, plays an important role in establishing regular workflows and setting priorities in the NSO (PARIS21, 2020[11]). It thus influences regular production of gender statistics. Organisational culture, on the other hand, reflects “a system of shared values, norms of conduct …and expectations”, which shape performance and potential for change within the NSO (PARIS21, 2020[11]). Without concerted efforts to delineate roles and demystify expectations around gender statistics, they remain at the periphery of production and dissemination of official statistics.

Broadly, there are two common models for including gender in NSO organisational design: the focal point model and the unit model. While some pilot countries had established gender statistics units (GSUs) in the NSO, others had not specified gender statistics in the organigram at all. In many cases, gender statistics activities remained hidden, undermining efforts to close gender data gaps.

Without concerted efforts to delineate roles and demystify expectations around gender and inclusion, they remain at the periphery of official statistics.

Two of the nine pilot countries (El Salvador and Egypt) had a GSU within the NSO. This model creates space for NSOs to make gender more visible in the organisation and to recruit specialised staff to produce and disseminate gender statistics. In El Salvador, for example, the GSU was in charge of gender-sensitive data collection and analysis, undertaking specialised surveys on priority topics, such as VAW, and facilitating inter-institutional dialogue to co-ordinate gender data production across the NSS. Drawing on a strong mandate from the country’s legal framework, El Salvador’s GSU developed a vibrant community around gender data and statistics supported by a regular annual budget (El Salvador country spotlight).

It is also important to note that the NSO does not host the primary GSU in some countries. Two pilot countries (Cambodia and Lesotho) have established GSUs in national women’s machineries. In Lesotho, for example, the Ministry of Gender and Youth hosts a GSU within its Population Statistics Unit. This external GSU co-ordinates with the BOS to produce gender statistics. In this model, the NSO faces a challenge in establishing sustainable patterns of collaboration with the external GSU and aligning efforts. Since the GSU is not officially under the NSO’s purview, the need for a clear co-ordination mechanism for gender statistics is especially acute. This set-up can also divert resources for gender statistics (including funding) away from the NSO, impeding efforts to mainstream gender in official statistics more widely.

NSOs in five pilot countries (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho and Senegal) had appointed statistical staff as gender focal points. In most cases, NSOs embedded their focal points within a relevant unit such as a division for social and demographic statistics. However, the gender focal point role was often an add-on to an individual’s overall job profile. Because of this pattern, focal points often struggle to hone their expertise in gender statistics and can face a significant burden balancing competing priorities (Section 3.3.1). In practice, gender focal points usually complete specific projects or tasks related to gender statistics such as the development of an annual gender statistics booklet. In these conditions, the success of gender focal points often hinges as much on their communication and leadership skills as it does on their technical knowledge or expertise (Section 3.3.2).

In the Dominican Republic, for example, technical staff for the research division of the NSO are also the primary focal points for gender statistics; they manage gender activities in addition to statistical research programmes on a broader range of topics. The organisational design in the Dominican Republic does not
clarify the role of focal points in mainstreaming gender in activities outside their unit. Without this operational clarity, they also have lower visibility and access to influence other parts of the NSO.

At the time of the assessment, Paraguay and the Maldives were the only pilot countries that operated without a fixed role for gender statistics in the organisational design. In Paraguay, for example, none of the 400 staff working at the NSO regularly worked on gender statistics. Instead, the NSO assigned gender statistics projects on an ad hoc basis, distributing them across the organisation in different departments. While this diffused approach represents an effort towards gender mainstreaming in the NSO, in the absence of organisation-wide training in gender statistics, it comes at the expense of developing and consolidating expertise to support improvements in gender-sensitive statistical practice over time.

Regardless of the organisational design in place, gender statistics often remain siloed and projectised, short-circuiting progress towards regular gender mainstreaming in NSO operations. This pattern at the organisational level was perhaps one of the most pervasive and structural barriers to closing gender data gaps in pilot countries.

To counter this tendency, closing gender data gaps requires more than a change in organisational design. It calls for a shift in organisational culture towards inclusion and gender sensitivity. Limited prioritisation of gender and intersectionality in NSO culture is an expression of structural exclusion in society, fostering an environment where skills and knowledge for gender statistics remain underdeveloped and resources for gender mainstreaming fall short. In sum, exclusion in official statistics is self-perpetuating – politics and power around gender issues at the country level reinforce it. NSO staff and leadership must recognise inclusion in official statistics as a shared norm and value if they are to break out of this cycle.

Closing gender data gaps requires more than a change in organisational design. It calls for a shift in organisational culture towards inclusion and gender sensitivity.

Country spotlight: Navigating complex institutional dynamics for gender statistics in Cambodia

Cambodia had the most extensive set of formal commitments related to gender data and statistics of all the pilot countries. For example, a mandate to design and maintain gender mainstreaming action plans across all sectors of government provides a strong incentive to strengthen the flow of data and evidence to monitor progress in gender equality.

While the enabling policy environment for gender statistics is quite strong, the organisation-level mandate to lead and co-ordinate production of gender data and statistics in Cambodia is ambiguous. The National Institute of Statistics (NIS) is the primary authority to produce, collect and process official statistics overall, but the statistical law identifies the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) as the lead entity for gender statistics. The positioning of NIS within the government, as a division within the Ministry of Planning rather than as a distinct entity, adds another layer of complexity to this overlapping mandate.

Despite vague institutional arrangements, the NIS and MoWA have developed a strong operational relationship. The two institutions regularly engage on emerging issues and priorities for gender data collection and exchange expertise through training (Section 3.3.1). In addition to consulting with the NIS on gender data collection, the MoWA has leveraged its position to consolidate gender data produced by line ministries (Section 3.1.2).
Informal interactions between the MoWA and NIS have supported some important achievements in gender data and statistics. For example, Cambodia is one of the few pilots with a dedicated space to disseminate gender statistics – i.e. a thematic filter and landing page for gender indicators on its national reporting platform, CamStat. However, with constrained human and financial resources for gender statistics in the NIS, the curation of gender statistics for the platform remains limited. Further efforts to position the NIS and strengthen its organisational approach in gender statistics are key to unlock the full potential of Cambodia’s enabling environment for gender data production, dissemination and use.

Gender focal points and GSUs across pilot countries all cited challenges in defining institutional priorities around gender equality and the extent of their mandate within the NSO and wider NSS. Critically, these challenges emerged regardless of the organisational design and had significant implications for gender data production. For example, El Salvador, Lesotho and Paraguay all worked under different models for gender statistics. But in each case, staff cited similar operational barriers to gender data collection and analysis such as weak infrastructure, insufficient tools and limited resources for specialised fieldwork. Although these barriers are not unique to gender statistics, it is important to recognise that weaknesses in organisational culture translate to low prioritisation and, ultimately, practical limits in statistical capacity for gender statistics.

3.2.2. Financing shortfalls reinforce gender data gaps but highlight untapped potential for gender mainstreaming

Targeted financing is key to closing gender data gaps, providing resources to improve infrastructure (Section 3.2.1) attract and retain specialised staff (Section 3.3.1), and develop gender-sensitive approaches to statistical activities. However, financing for gender statistics is insufficient and unsustainable at national and global levels (PARIS21, 2021[26]). Current estimates suggest a funding gap of up to USD 500 million per year to establish and maintain core gender data systems at the country level19 (Data2X & Open Data Watch, 2021[27]). Critically, this shortfall not only hampers gender data production today but also sets the stage for gender data gaps to persist in the future.

In line with global trends, the financing landscape for gender statistics in pilot countries was challenging and irregular. Among the nine pilot countries, only El Salvador benefitted from a regular, dedicated budget for gender statistics (El Salvador country spotlight). El Salvador formalised this commitment in its legal framework, which ensures that about 9% of the total budget for official statistics goes into gender statistics and maintenance of the GSU. This clarity and consistency allowed the GSU to more confidently plan regular activities, ensuring continued progress in developing gender statistics at the national level.

For the other eight pilot countries, NSOs managed diffused and variable domestic resources for gender statistics as part of their overall budget. This approach places the burden on the NSO to weigh funding needs for gender statistics against many other institutional priorities. Gender statistics projects are harder to prioritise when overall financing conditions are strained. In Lesotho, for example, the BOS highlighted ongoing challenges in securing resources for official statistics in general, making efforts to finance regular gender data production even more difficult.
In practice, NSOs often compile gender statistics as part of a larger data production line, such as a household survey or a census (Section 2.1.3). Including gender data production within broader activities helps to mitigate budget constraints and optimise operations. However, it is a complex exercise for NSOs to then cost and budget gender data production. Calculating the exact cost of producing an additional gender indicator is not feasible in this model unless this requires a special survey. None of the pilot countries included a specific gender marker in their overall budget for statistics. In several cases (Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan and Maldives), the actual budget available for gender statistics as well as its trend over time were unknown or impossible to track.

When gender statistics are not systematically included in NSO activities, the budget to produce them is less stable than for other statistical products in economic or demographic statistics. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, the NSO requests a budget for gender statistics based on special projects or activities planned for a specific period. However, revisions are made annually: The budget may include a designated line for gender statistics in one year, only to drop it the next. These irregular funding patterns set the stage for irregular production of gender statistics; they also make the budget for gender statistics more prone to instability due to shifting priorities and external shocks. Several pilot countries faced significant budget reductions during the assessment process due to COVID-19, for example.

Irregular funding patterns set the stage for irregular production of gender statistics; they also make the budget for gender statistics more prone to instability due to shifting priorities and external shocks.

Due in part to erratic patterns of domestic resource mobilisation, pilot countries relied heavily on external support to produce gender statistics. Development partners – including bilateral and multilateral donors, international organisations, and international non-governmental organisations – have made it possible for countries with constrained national budgets to undertake efforts to close gender data gaps. The benefits of these collaborations extend beyond financing. Interest and support from development partners have also been important for expanding political will in countries to produce more and better gender data and align statistical development with global priorities, including the SDGs.

Country spotlight: Institutionalising and resourcing gender statistics in El Salvador

Since 2012, El Salvador has been building a national approach to strengthen gender statistics. Two laws – the Comprehensive Special Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women and the Law on Equality, Equity and Eradication of Discrimination against Women (Ley de Igualdad, Equidad y Erradicación de la Discriminación contra las Mujeres) – ensure that a dedicated budget is available to support gender equality and work on gender statistics. In 2015, the national assembly also assigned a dedicated budget for the creation of a GSU in the DIGESTYC and to allocate staff and resources to support regular delivery of data and evidence on gender equality to inform policy making and programming.

No other pilot country reported a stable dedicated budget for gender statistics, much less one mandated by law. However, according to gender focal points in the DIGESTYC, the budget for gender statistics was still insufficient to fulfil all gender data needs. Units for economic and social statistics typically receive around 25% of the budget – more than double the allocation for the GSU. There are practical reasons for this disparity, and differences in budget are normal across statistical units, in part due to variation in scope and frequency of statistical production. Economic and social statistics, for example,
maintain annual data collection (or more frequently) in El Salvador, while the GSU conducted specialised data collection every four or five years.

Despite its limitations, the government’s financial commitment sent a strong signal to establish and prioritise a national system for gender statistics in El Salvador. The GSU worked within this framework to establish regular patterns of inter-agency co-operation on gender statistics activities and, critically, to crowd-in financing and technical support from development partners. During the Women Count assessment, the GSU emphasised the importance of these flows of external assistance to advance gender data production in the country.

The experience of El Salvador demonstrates the importance of both allocating resources and clarifying mandates in mobilising the NSO, highlighting a critical link between system-level and organisation-level capacities for gender statistics. El Salvador’s formal commitments were the only concrete solution that emerged to close a gender data financing gap in pilot countries.

Note: Since the conclusion of the pilot in El Salvador, the government has re-evaluated the role and mandate of the DIGESTYC with an aim to embed production of official statistics within the Central Bank.

Over the years, development partners have been instrumental in providing resources and technical assistance for key sources of gender statistics, such as the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), as well as new instruments for topics that have received limited attention in the past such as VAW and time use. The DHS in Egypt, a particularly important source of gender statistics, relies on the support of development partners, for example. According to Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), uncertainty or delays in regular production of the DHS are a significant issue that influence gender data gaps in the country. Similarly, development partners have been instrumental in financing specialised gender data collection in Lesotho. Habitat for Humanity funded the only national dataset on women’s access to land and housing, for example.

NSOs in all nine pilot countries highlighted the importance of donor support to enable gender data production and capacity development. However, dependence on external resources for gender data production amplifies risks around sustainability. Globally, official development assistance (ODA) for gender statistics plateaued and subsequently declined in recent years, though with investments coming from a small (but growing) number of donors (PARIS21, 2022[28]). Many countries can only produce gender statistics when ODA is available, particularly when the NSO is not set up for a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming. Under these conditions, some gender indicators in pilot countries had only one year of observation, with no resources available or planned to renew gender data collection.

Overcoming challenges around funding shortfalls and sustainability calls for a strategic approach to planning for gender data production. Developing a gender-sensitive NSDS (Box 3.1) or an independent gender statistics strategy provides a framework for NSOs to prioritise gender in their budget and attract international resources sustainably. Furthermore, a gender statistics plan will enable NSOs and partners to project financing needs in the medium term rather than on an ad hoc basis. However, as noted in Section 3.1.1, statistical plans such as an NSDS historically exclude gender statistics from their strategic frameworks.

While none of the pilot countries had included gender statistics as a priority in their NSDS prior to the assessment pilots, gender was visible in most NDPs (Section 2.1.2). This disconnect represents a missed opportunity for NSOs to mobilise resources to strengthen gender statistics. By connecting to demand for gender data in NDPs, the Women Count pilots positioned NSOs to leverage their NSDS to strengthen national ownership of gender statistics and mobilise resources for their production.
3.3. Empowering individuals to engage with gender statistics

Limits in gender mainstreaming at the system and organisation level place a heavy burden on individual staff to facilitate gender data production and use. Gender statistics often function on a de facto champion model – that is, a small number of motivated individuals play a disproportionate role in mobilising stakeholders and accelerating progress in the NSO and wider NSS.

The PARIS21 CD4.0 defines capacities at the individual level in terms of “a single human being within the NSS, for example a statistician, NSO employee or line manager” (PARIS21, 2020[11]). As discussed in Section 3.2.1, organisational design determines the number of individuals engaged in gender statistics in the NSO. In a situation where the NSO is mainstreaming gender across official statistics, most (if not all) statistical staff should have some fluency in key issues in gender data and statistics. However, in practice, this is rarely the case. More often, skills and knowledge for gender statistics are the domain of specific individuals: gender focal points.

For the Women Count pilots, the individual-level assessment unpacked the capacity requirements for statistical staff who regularly engage in gender data production and dissemination and the role of NSO leaders in setting an agenda. The assessment included an analysis of the type of work performed by gender focal points and the challenges and opportunities they encounter in their role within the NSO and wider NSS. Through this process, it became clear that gender statistics activities implicate both technical and non-technical skillsets. In particular, management, politics and power, and incentives all have a bearing on the success of individuals working in gender statistics. The assessments revealed two domains of statistical capacity (and two sets of individuals) that were instrumental at the individual level: first, career incentives and opportunities to develop professional skills and expertise and second, strong leadership and influence to convene stakeholders and deliver strategies.

This section unpacks the implications of these capacity gaps for NSO leaders and staff working to strengthen gender statistics across the nine pilot countries.

3.3.1. Gender focal points face limited incentives in their work but are important catalysts for gender data action

In the absence of dedicated resources and strategies for gender statistics in the NSO and NSS, progress in gender statistics often relies largely on a few key individuals: gender focal points or (where relevant) GSU staff. Thus, investment in gender focal points and the work they do is a critical input in the effort to develop and mainstream gender statistics.

Despite significant differences in the positioning and expertise of gender focal points in pilot countries, their individual experiences revealed some important patterns and similarities. As noted in Section 3.2.1, the number of focal points assigned within the NSO varied and in some cases, comprised only one or two staff persons (or none at all). Notable exceptions were El Salvador, with 9 individuals working on gender, and Kyrgyzstan with 12. Job profiles and official titles held by focal points also differed, ranging from mid-level statisticians, as in Senegal, to senior management, as in the Maldives. In countries without a GSU, focal points typically came from either the social and demographic statistics unit of the NSO or its statistical planning and standards unit.

In Cambodia, Egypt, El Salvador and Lesotho, gender focal points reported that they see their work on gender statistics as offering some unique professional opportunities and mobility. While there was not a permanent focal point for gender statistics in Paraguay, NSO staff engaged in the assessment reported some similar benefits. However, specialising in gender statistics had no direct positive effect on salaries of NSO staff in any of the pilots. A subset of staff in three countries cited concerns around more adverse implications of the focal point role, including bigger workloads and non-competitive pay relative to pay in other statistical sectors.21
Overall, investments in gender focal points to continuously develop expertise and retain top talent in gender statistics – in both monetary and non-monetary terms – fell short in most countries. In the case of the Dominican Republic, focal points reported that the lack of a regular budget for gender statistics reinforced their low prioritisation (Section 3.2.2), which can undercut visibility, lower professional incentives, and lead to higher turnover. Budget fluctuations in El Salvador led to a reduction in GSU staffing from 16 to 9 persons in just one year. Of the nine pilot countries, five cited issues around retention and turnover of staff working in gender statistics, which can disrupt and undermine efforts to sustain development of gender mainstreaming at the country level.

Among the benefits associated with their role, gender focal points highlighted opportunities for external engagement and collaboration, including with UN Women country offices. Development partners were instrumental in promoting visibility and strengthening expertise for individual staff by requesting their participation in gender-focused projects. In particular, development partners’ data collection initiatives, organised in collaboration with the NSO, exposed focal points to new survey tools and protocols. For example, the gender focal point in the Maldives participated in the design of a phone-administered Rapid Gender Assessment organised by UN Women to measure the gender-impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also involved exposure to private sector partnerships for survey deployment. Some partners have worked towards institutionalising these opportunities for external engagement. For example, Data2X and Open Data Watch partnered with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to establish a Gender Data Network connecting focal points in 22 countries. In 2021, PARIS21 joined this initiative to facilitate its expansion to new regions and countries.

Similarly, inter-institutional exchange across government also supported capacity development for gender focal points in NSOs. In Cambodia, for example, gender focal points from the NIS and MoWA had undertaken efforts to exchange knowledge and expertise (Cambodia country spotlight). NIS staff provided training on statistics, while the MoWA shared its knowledge on gender mainstreaming and gender equality. In Egypt, focal points at CAPMAS also highlighted training initiatives with line ministries related to gender issues, particularly in support of efforts to monitor progress in national programming on equal opportunities. Notably, these opportunities for external engagement, both within and outside the government, seemed to play a disproportionate role in individual capacity development for gender statistics.

However, not all focal points benefitted equally from such opportunities. While most participated in national workshops and events linked to gender statistics, NSOs in some pilot countries reserved participation in international fora for more senior-level staff. This approach comes with a trade-off: Senior-level engagement and awareness of gender issues can mobilise action (Section 3.3.2) and enable changes in organisational culture (Section 3.2.1), but it also limits gender focal points’ exposure to statistical standards, peer learning and networking opportunities. However, focal points from NSOs with an established GSU (Egypt and El Salvador) or larger staff allocations for gender statistics (Kyrgyzstan) were the exception, reporting regular access to engage in both domestic and international meetings and workshops on gender statistics.

In addition to engaging externally, some gender focal points also benefitted from increased visibility within their own organisations. Focal points in both the NSO and national women’s machineries were usually in charge of preparing reports and publication of gender data and statistics for their institutions. Given their greater awareness of gender data concepts and methodologies relative to other staff and senior management, focal points were invited by some NSOs to contribute to strategic activities in addition to technical work. For example, the NSO leadership called on gender focal points in Cambodia, the Maldives and Senegal to present findings from their work in management meetings or provide inputs on gender statistics during the NSDS design process.

None of the pilot countries benefitted from any specialised gender modules within national statistical training curricula. This gap has implications not only for gender focal points but also for the wider statistical workforce as there tends to be limited gender data literacy and awareness among NSO staff. In the

COUNTING ON GENDER DATA: FINDINGS FROM GENDER STATISTICS ASSESSMENTS IN NINE COUNTRIES
Dominican Republic, for example, focal points stressed that demand for technical training often exceeds supply and voiced concern that gaps in skills and knowledge might affect their work on gender statistics. Following the assessment pilots, Lesotho, the Maldives and Paraguay all identified a need to develop a more standard approach to technical training on gender statistics as a means of addressing individual capacity gaps more systematically in the future.

3.3.2. Individual leaders (and leadership skills) shape opportunities and partnerships to advance gender statistics

Breaking through institutionalised gender norms and guiding more structural change in the NSO and wider NSS call for additional skills beyond an increase in technical knowledge or expertise. Gender focal points require soft skills in project management, networking and communication to engage colleagues internally and develop strong partnerships externally. However, none of the focal points had benefitted from targeted training in these areas. The PARIS21 CD4.0 framework recognises these issues as core areas of statistical capacity, both to enhance individual skills and knowledge and to navigate politics and power dynamics around gender statistics and official statistics more broadly (PARIS21, 2019(1)).

Managing complex politics and limitations in organisational culture around gender statistics across the NSS requires increased engagement at a senior level. In the absence of clear mandates (Section 3.1.1) and regular funding (Section 3.2.2), vision and leadership from NSO top management shaped opportunities for gender focal points to operate effectively and improve gender statistics in pilot countries.

Gender focal points often drew on intrinsic motivation as an underlying driver of their work in gender statistics. Notably, almost all focal points engaged in the assessment identified as women, drawing on their personal stake and interest in measuring gender inequalities and adopting gender-responsive approaches in statistical practice. However, the PARIS21-UN Women pilots also found that this approach tracks a perception in the organisational culture of NSOs that gender statistics are a so-called “women’s issue” (Section 3.2.1). It is perhaps not a coincidence that countries with female leadership in the NSO undertook some of the most ambitious efforts towards gender mainstreaming observed during the pilots.

NSO leaders play a key enabling role for the success of gender focal points by clarifying their function in the organisation and legitimising their work (Section 3.2.1). In situations where political will is limited and institutional awareness or buy-in is missing, focal points have limited incentives beyond personal motivation to nurture the development of gender statistics. However, when NSO leaders engage with gender issues, incentives and opportunities shift. In the Dominican Republic, for example, the emphasis on gender on the part of the ONE director general enabled the statistics agency’s gender focal point to include targets related to gender statistics in its annual performance objectives (Dominican Republic country spotlight). In the Maldives, the chief statistician led by example in the MBS, participating in all events and activities related to the gender statistics assessment.

The assessment process itself found that NSO leaders were able to direct a strategic focus on gender statistics within the NSS even in contexts where there had been a limited focus on gender equality in the government’s overall development agenda. Awareness of gender issues helped guide gender mainstreaming in statistical processes, hedging against risks of insufficient political interest in gender equality more broadly. Even in countries such as Senegal, where national frameworks for gender equality were in place and relatively strong, engaging NSO leadership is essential to connect agendas for gender equality to priorities in official statistics (Senegal country spotlight).

The role leaders play in pilot countries was particularly evident in the development of gender statistics strategies. When NSO leaders engaged in the pilot process and embraced the insights from the assessments, they prioritised gender statistics strategies in the NSDS process. The NSDS co-ordinator at the ANSD played a key role in connecting the Women Count assessment findings to the concurrent NSDS design process, later presenting Senegal’s approach to colleagues from other NSOs in Africa during a...
regional training on gender mainstreaming. Similarly, in Lesotho, the BOS director general advocated for a holistic approach to gender mainstreaming in the NSDS lifecycle (Box 3.1), including gender within the traditional assessment of NSS performance rather than developing a separate report. This decision set the tone for the development of a new NSDS, which includes ambitious and concrete objectives to strengthen gender statistics in coming years.

The chief statistician in the Maldives adopted several initiatives during the Women Count pilot to improve the enabling environment for gender statistics, particularly by strengthening ties with other NSS stakeholders. First, with support from development partners, she organised gender awareness trainings for focal points for data and statistics in the NSS. Second, she initiated an effort to institutionalise co-ordination alongside the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services (Maldives country spotlight). Finally, she commissioned a National Strategy for the Development of Gender Statistics to consolidate the vision for gender statistics captured in the country’s new NSDS along with concrete activities and budget.

These bold commitments from senior leaders set the tone not only for activities during the Women Count pilots but also for the design and future implementation in resulting gender statistics strategies. Pursuing targeted engagement with leaders – both women and men – and developing leadership skills is an overlooked strategy for capacity development at the individual level for gender statistics.
4. Ways forward: The road to more and better gender data

At the halfway point to achieve Agenda 2030, gender data gaps remain common in countries all over the world. The COVID-19 pandemic raised the stakes to close these gaps, as policymakers and practitioners search for evidence-informed solutions and chart a path towards an inclusive recovery for women and girls. National statistical offices (NSOs) emerge from the crisis as critical stakeholders in this endeavour, grappling with new narratives around an old story: growing demand for data but constrained capacity to deliver it.

Under the framework of Women Count I, PARIS21 and UN Women found NSOs face multiple challenges in their efforts to deliver high-quality and policy-relevant gender data and statistics. Continued efforts to develop new instruments and standards for gender data production are essential, but they are not the whole story. National systems to produce and disseminate gender statistics – and connect gender data to policy – remain underdeveloped. Furthermore, investments to establish and mobilise such systems continue to fall short, calling for country-owned strategies and system-wide approaches.

The Women Count assessment pilots produced important insights on how to tackle these challenges in the future on the road to more and better gender data, both within the pilot countries and beyond.

4.1. Work with the grain of national priorities to advance gender data production and use

Gender data gaps are multidimensional, indicating the technical capacities of national statistical systems while also illuminating the enabling policy environment around gender equality more broadly. To develop more gender-responsive statistical systems that are fit for purpose, it is essential to consider both of these dimensions and identify entry points to build on national priorities.

Across all nine pilot countries, coverage was significantly higher for gender indicators associated with national development plans (NDPs) and gender equality policies (GEPs) than for other indicator frameworks associated with international or regional agendas (Section 2.1.2). This is a critical finding, illustrating the untapped potential of connecting production of gender statistics to national strategies, policies and plans; national ownership is a core enabler for development of gender statistics.

While Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) data coverage was comparatively less consistent across countries, the pilots also showed the extent to which countries have taken unique context-driven approaches to localise SDG gender indicators (Section 2.1.1). In each pilot, efforts to localise the SDGs were mediated through the current political economy of gender equality. This process has significant operational implications – for NSOs; for the collection, disaggregation and dissemination of gender statistics; and ultimately for the landscape for evidence-informed action for gender equality at the country level.

Working with the grain of existing national priorities and systems builds ownership and lays the groundwork to close gender data gaps and promote a culture of gender data use in the policy making process. When
gender data production responds to national priorities and agendas, opportunities to engage policy makers, civil society and other potential gender data users are easier to link to concrete, locally relevant use cases. For this reason, initiating efforts to mainstream gender in statistical planning and operations should emphasise linkages to national policies, strategies and plans for gender equality and sustainable development.

4.2. Invest in gender focal points and mobilise champions among gender data producers and users

Gender statistics often suffered from low visibility in pilot countries. Connecting with gender data champions has proven to be an important strategy to raise the profile of gender statistics at the national level, both within the national statistical system (NSS) and among stakeholders in the wider gender data ecosystem.

On the data production side, one important step towards mobilising champions within the NSO and NSS is to invest in the individuals responsible for gender statistics at both senior and technical levels. Directors general and gender focal points both play a critical role in delivering more and better gender data and promoting gender-responsive statistical practice. Initiatives like the Gender Data Network, a partnership between Data2X, Open Data Watch, UNECA and PARIS21, can also support this effort, emphasising the importance of raising up champions and building a community around gender data and statistics.

Although many gender focal points and other technical staff in NSOs had benefitted from some thematic training in gender statistics, standard statistical training programmes are often gender blind (Section 3.3.1). Furthermore, insights from pilot countries reveal a skills gap beyond technical training that hampers progress in gender statistics. Closing gender data gaps and advancing gender data use require identifying and engaging strategic partners, enhancing co-ordination, and influencing statistical communities. To do so, greater attention must be paid to non-technical areas of capacity, or soft skills, to support and empower gender focal points in their role in the NSS (Section 3.3.2).

However, advocating for more and better gender data is not the work of gender focal points alone. Broader engagement with gender data users can help jump-start a virtuous cycle of gender data production, analysis, dissemination and use. National women’s machineries, civil society and other external stakeholders are important champions, not only for gender data production but for data-driven action for gender equality.

Notably, even where pilot countries had improved gender data coverage, efforts to communicate and disseminate the data were limited (Section 3.1.3). NSOs and partners must move beyond narrow, thematic interventions to address gender issues across the data value chain. Partners, including UN Women and PARIS21, can support such efforts by adopting a wider, multi-stakeholder approach to training and capacity development for gender statistics and addressing broken or missing linkages between the NSS and gender data users, including policymakers, practitioners and advocates.

4.3. Mobilise and co-ordinate investments in gender statistics to make funding go further

Without concrete strategies and dedicated resources, efforts to develop capacity in gender statistics will continue to falter. Mainstreaming gender in statistical plans provides a framework to increase awareness of gender data gaps, prioritise gender statistics in national planning and budgeting, and, critically, mobilise resources for their production (Section 3.2.2). NSOs benefit from this approach, which provides a framework for more stable budgets around gender statistics and signals priorities to development partners.
Official development assistance (ODA) has been an important (albeit limited) resource to drive agendas around gender statistics to date. However, with an acceleration of global crises and economic instability in the wake of COVID-19, resources for gender statistics have come under further strain. Stagnation and critical shortfalls in gender data financing threaten the sustainability of current initiatives and darken the outlook for gender statistics systems. In this environment, identifying smart solutions for gender data financing is critical to the effort to deliver more and better gender data.

Both countries and development partners have a key role to play in this regard by shifting investments towards systems, aligning with national policies and strategies, and collaborating with NSOs and other key stakeholders to define the business case for investments in gender statistics. The Bern Network Clearinghouse for Financing Development Data\textsuperscript{22} includes a dedicated space on financing flows and country budgets for gender statistics, providing a platform to identify and respond to emerging needs and trends.

As development co-operation providers widen the lens on gender equality through feminist foreign policy and thematic strategies, they should also consider how gender data and statistics figure into their approach. For countries, financing gender statistics programming in the framework of a national strategy for the development of statistics or a gender statistics strategy offers a path to make funding go further, mitigating risks of duplication and supporting more sustainable investments in gender statistics.

4.4. Bring gender equality into the statistics arena and statistics into the gender equality arena

With constrained resources and expertise, NSOs need a networked approach to develop gender statistics. Linkages with national women’s machineries proved to be one important factor in strengthening gender statistics in pilot countries and promoting gender data use (Section 3.1.3). Building on and expanding engagement to include a wider set of stakeholders – including civil society, women’s rights associations and other gender equality advocates – opens new opportunities to develop skills and exchange knowledge, track gender data impact, mobilise resources, and tap into new sources of gender data.

Partners and stakeholders working on issues related to gender equality – intersectional vulnerability, the gender-climate nexus, or sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example – can provide important insights on what needs to be measured and how gender inequalities might affect statistical processes from data collection through analysis. Given the thematic gaps in current SDG indicators and missing levels of disaggregation (Section 2.1.3), it is vital to connect NSOs and other gender data producers with gender equality stakeholders to make progress in gender data production.

However, platforms to support and encourage connections and partnerships across gender data users and producers are rare (Section 3.1.3). At the country level, co-ordination mechanisms for gender statistics are limited (Section 3.1.2) and a call for more and better gender data is often missing in GEPs (Section 3.1.1). Likewise, at a global level, agendas for gender equality and sustainable development often require gender data for monitoring and accountability but omit an explicit mandate to strengthen gender statistics systems. The Generation Equality Forum is the latest initiative to open an opportunity to connect to the global dialogue around gender equality, raising the profile of gender data and accountability as a cross-cutting area of the overall agenda. Time will tell how these commitments connect to action within gender statistics systems.

Breaking down silos and connecting communities through joint projects and partnerships is an important step forward in empowering and enabling gender statistics systems to develop and thrive. The Women Count programme itself is an important milestone in this regard, signalling UN Women’s commitment to support NSOs and country stakeholders to develop and strengthen gender statistics as part of its global effort to advance gender equality. Together, PARIS21 and UN Women work on both sides of the challenge, bringing gender into the picture for national statistical systems and engaging with national women’s machineries to encourage evidence-informed policy making to leave no one behind.
References


Annex A. Country indicator frameworks

Gender data gaps assessments in pilot countries were applied to varying national frameworks, under the guidance of NSOs and national women’s machineries. The indicator frameworks for each policy were analysed using the PARIS21 ADAPT Platform, providing a systematic approach to identify gender-related indicators and assess their coverage. Each participating country benefited from their own ADAPT platform instance, allowing NSOs to revisit the results of the data gaps assessment and update information on indicator availability.

The following table provides a complete list of frameworks assessed in the pilot countries and the corresponding number of indicators analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Geographic level</th>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Cambodia</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Neary Rattanak V, Strategic Plan for Strengthening Gender Mainstreaming and Women’s Empowerment, 2019-2023</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators DR</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Estrategia Nacional de Desarrollo (END) 2030</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional Plurianual del Sector Publico (PNPSP)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional Plurianual Salud (PNPSe) 2017-2020</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional de Igualdad y Equidad de Genero (PLANEG III)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Egypt</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>SDG Global Indicators El Salvador</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional de Desarrollo, Proteccion, e Inclusio Social 2014-2019</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional de Igualdad 2016-2020</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Kyrgyz Republic</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Lesotho</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>National Strategic Development Plan II</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Maldives</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>UN Minimum Set of Gender Indicators</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Paraguay</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2030</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan Nacional de Reducion de la Pobreza 2030 - Jajapo Paraguay</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>53 SDG Global Indicators Senegal</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Plan d’actions prioritaires 2019-2023 du PSE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>Strategie Nationale pour l’Equite et l’Egalite du Genre (SNEEG)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes

1 The gender module is available on PARIS21’s NSDS guidelines platform: https://nsdsguidelines.paris21.org/en/specialtopics/gender

2 The concept of national women’s machineries, or “national mechanisms”, originated in the United Nations (UN). UN Women defines these as follows: “Typically serving as central coordinating units for women’s affairs within national governments, [national women’s machineries] promote the integration of gender equality measures across national policies and programmes. They are vital partners in the process of developing national actions to achieve international agreements on women’s rights, including the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”. See, for example, https://www.unwomen.org/en/partnerships/national-mechanisms.

3 See https://paris21.org/node/3286.

4 See https://adapt.paris21.org/auth/login.

5 When the first assessment pilots were launched in 2018, UN Women specified a list of 54 gender-specific SDG indicators. Since that time, UN Women has revised the list to reflect changes in the overall SDG monitoring framework as well as progress in indicator specification and methods of computation.

6 In cases where the NSO had not designated a permanent gender data focal point, the lead focal point for the assessment process responded to the questionnaire in his or her role as a temporary gender data focal point.

7 See endnote 2.

8 A National Strategy for the Development of Statistics is a national planning approach to develop capacity to produce, disseminate and mainstream the use of statistics. It is a medium-term planning instrument, typically designed for five- to ten-year intervals, setting an agenda and budget for production of official statistics. See https://nsdsguidelines.paris21.org/.


10 A complete list of indicator frameworks assessed for each pilot country is available in the annex.

11 After the 2015 adoption of Agenda 2030, the Inter-agency and Expert Group for the SDGs established a tier classification system to clarify stages of methodological development for SDG indicators. At the time of the assessments (2019-21), some gender indicators remained classified at Tier III (“no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available”). Currently, however, all gender indicators are now classified at Tier II or higher. Further information on tier classifications is available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/tier-classification/.
It is important to note that not all SDG indicators can (or should) be disaggregated by sex. For example, some SDG gender indicators such as the maternal mortality ratio (SDG indicator 3.1.1) are specific to a subset (by gender) of the population.

The PARIS21-UN Women Gender Statistics Assessment Framework provides an extended discussion of the application of CD4.0 to gender statistics as well as a set of tailored questionnaires to guide the capacity assessment for gender statistics users and producers. See https://paris21.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Framework%202020_update_web_0.pdf.


At the time of the pilots, Paraguay and the Maldives were amid a national planning cycle. The Maldives was also in the process of finalising a new gender equality policy, along with Kyrgyzstan.

While the Maldives was in the process of developing new statistical legislation at the time of the assessment, it enacted a new instrument in 2021 that provides a stronger legal framework for official statistics in line with the United Nations Fundamental Principles.

In the Maldives, the assessment process itself provided an impetus to appoint a gender focal point, as the country looks forward to ramping up engagement through its newly established inter-agency working group for gender statistics.

Lesotho worked in a focal point model in the NSO but also engaged with an external GSU; El Salvador had established a GSU within the NSO; and Paraguay did not have gender focal points or a GSU.

This estimate includes the full costs of funding civil registration and vital statistics, Demographic and Health Surveys, and other sector-level systems such as Education Information Management Systems, which may serve as primary sources of gender data and statistics. Further details on the methodology for estimating the funding gap used by Data2X and Open Data Watch are available at https://opendatawatch.com/publications/state-of-gender-data-financing-2021/#text=To%20fully%20fund%20core%20gender%20achieve%20full%20funding%20by%202030.

Top management in NSOs nominated focal points for the Women Count pilots based on candidates’ knowledge and experience in gender statistics. For the purpose of the assessment, PARIS21 interviewed focal points to assess individual-level capacity including skills in teamwork and collaboration, communication and strategic networking; leadership; career expectations; and project management as well as their professional background. The assessment also included questions on focal points’ perceptions of gender equality, including areas that need more research and data at the country level.

It should be noted that individual staff did not share these views homogenously within any one single institution or country, and the majority of focal points interviewed in the assessments did not identify these concerns.

See https://smartdatafinance.org/.
In spite of growing awareness, gender data gaps persist across countries of all income levels across the globe. Data gaps put women and girls at particular risk and closing gender data gaps are a part of the global effort to build back better from the COVID-19 crisis as well as prepare for future crises.

Counting on Gender Data: Findings from Gender Statistics Assessments in Nine Countries distils findings from gender statistics assessment pilots conducted by PARIS21 and UN Women between 2019 and 2021 in nine countries: Cambodia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Maldives, Paraguay and Senegal. It sheds light on trends in gender data production and use in low and middle-income countries, with a particular focus on NSOs as the leading producers of official statistics. The report offers solutions to improve and increase gender data.