

The European year for development: Women and girls

Economic and political discrimination undermines women's opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and marginalisation.

International development cooperation recognises the importance of gender equality, to promote both human rights and sustainable development.

Official aid focused on gender equality has tripled since 2002.

The concrete situation of women and girls varies tremendously between countries and regions.

In many developing countries women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty and exclusion. Although the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979, women and girls still face discrimination in many societies today, particularly in the political and economic spheres. This undermines their opportunities to actively address their situation and break the cycle of poverty and marginalisation. In many contexts, women and girls are vulnerable to the risk of violence, including sexual violence in conflict situations, daily domestic violence and cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation.

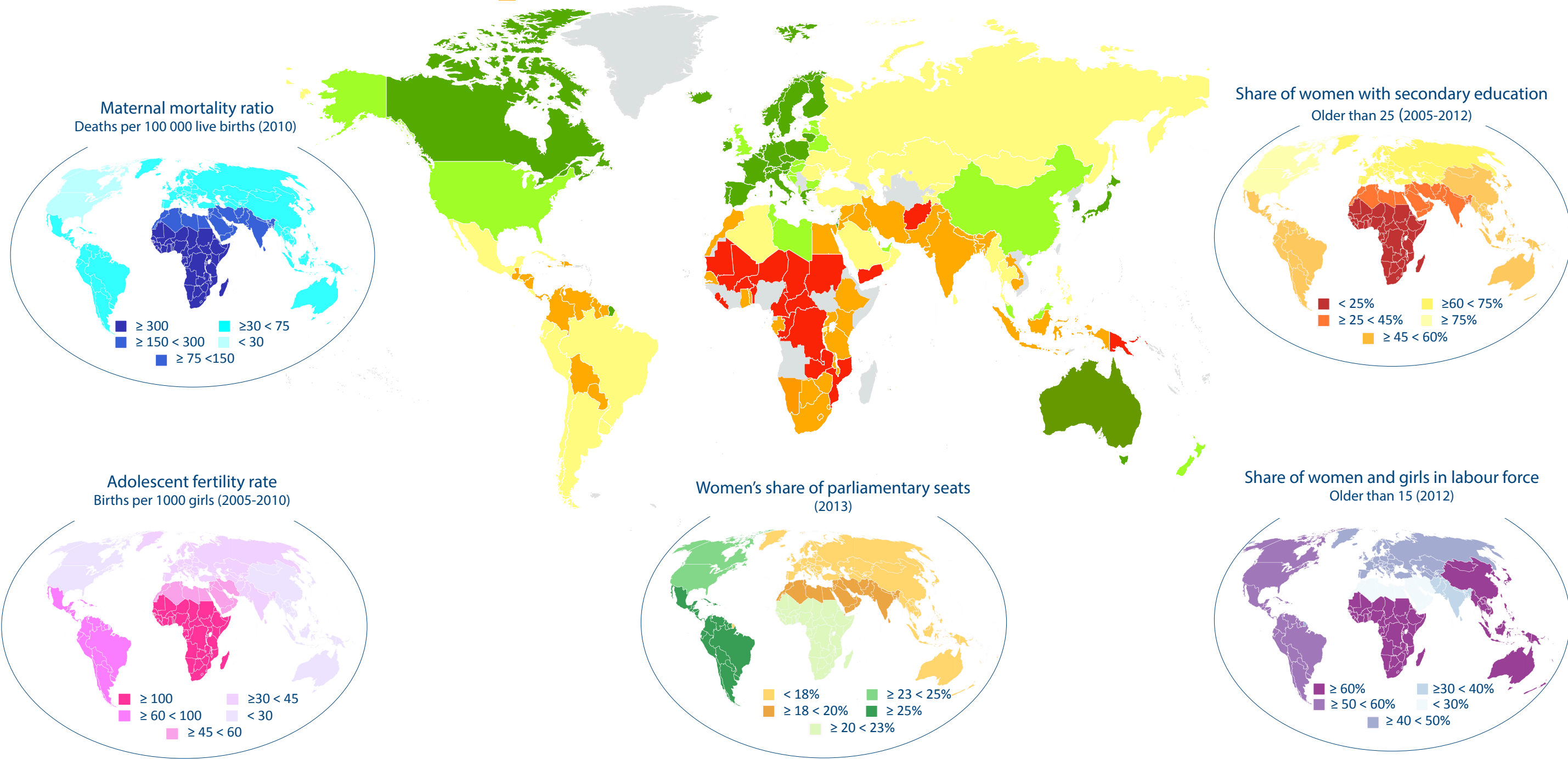
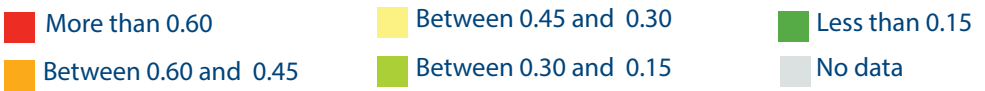
International development cooperation has increasingly recognised the importance of addressing the issue of gender equality, not only to promote fundamental human rights, but also to create sustainable development. The fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, underscored the fundamental importance of women's empowerment and full participation in all spheres of society to the achievement of equality, development and peace. For example, closing the gender gap in agriculture could contribute to eradicating hunger: it is estimated that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, total agricultural output in developing countries could increase by 2.5-4 %. Educating women and girls has proven to significantly reduce the risk of child mortality. And women's control of household resources boosts spending on food and education, thereby enhancing children's future prospects.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed by the UN General Assembly in 2000 triggered increased investment in women and girls, but much remains to be done. Official development aid focused on gender equality has tripled from USD 8 billion in 2002 to USD 24 billion in 2012. Most of this aid went to the education and health sectors, much less to economic empowerment and political participation. In all developing regions, gender parity has been or is close to being achieved for primary education, but not yet for secondary education in all regions. Maternal deaths declined by 45 % between 1990 and 2013, but the target of a two-thirds reduction is likely to be missed. Gender gaps also remain in access to employment: in 2012, the employment-to-population ratio for women was 25 percentage points lower than for men, and women continue to be overrepresented in low paid jobs. However, the situation varies tremendously between countries and regions, as shown by the UN Gender Inequality Index.

The European Union's development cooperation addresses gender equality in the context of international objectives, as well as according to the EU's own fundamental values. Equality between women and men is a key principle of European integration, enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The 2005 'European Consensus on Development', a joint,

Gender Inequality Index 2013

The index measures equality between men and women.
It is composed of indicators on reproductive health (maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rate),
empowerment (women's secondary school attendance and parliamentary seats) and labour market (women's share in labour force).
A value of 0 means maximum equality and 1 means maximum inequality.



Data sources: United Nations Development Programme

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of European integration, and has been integrated in EU development cooperation.

EU development aid focusing on gender equality doubled between 2009 and 2012.

The EP has called for a strong focus on women and girls in the post-2015 development framework.

Parliament has established internal structures to ensure that gender equality is 'mainstreamed' throughout its work.

statement of principles shared by the Member States and EU institutions, requires the EU to include a strong gender component in all its policies and practices in its relations with developing countries. The 'EU Guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them' acknowledge that violence against women and girls is 'one of the major human rights violations of today's world' and commit the Union to using its diplomatic and financial tools to help prevent violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. With the EU's 2010-2015 'Plan of action on gender equality and women's empowerment in development', the EU and its Member States set ambitious objectives to support women and girls through a three-pronged approach:

- (i) systematically making gender equality a topic of political dialogue with partner countries,
- (ii) addressing the specific concerns and needs of women and girls in all development operations ('mainstreaming');
- (iii) financing targeted actions to help women and girls.

In 2012, 28 % of the EU's aid included gender equality and women's empowerment as a principle or significant objective – a doubling of the 2009 rate. This is major progress, but remains far from the 75% target set in the Plan of action.

The European Parliament (EP) has always been a strong proponent of making gender a focus of the EU's development cooperation. In view of adopting a new international development framework in 2015 to succeed the MDGs, the EP has called for a stand-alone goal on gender equality while simultaneously ensuring the integration of gender across all goals. In particular, the EP has stressed the importance of:

- eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls, and sending a clear message about women's participation in decision-making processes;
- ensuring equal access to employment for both women and men, and equal pay for work of equal value everywhere;
- enhancing girls' access to all levels of education and removing gender barriers to learning;
- ensuring universal access to health services;
- establishing effective protections for migrant women.

The EP has also established internal structures to ensure that gender equality is 'mainstreamed': a standing Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality contributes to reports and resolutions on development cooperation, and the committee responsible for development cooperation has specified that one of its Members is responsible for mainstreaming gender equality throughout the committee's work..

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