



Guinee Bissau Deep Dive Report

Getting to Parity: Guinea-Bissau's Journey Towards Closing the Gender Gap

May 2022

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ACRONYMS

Acronyms	Definitions
AMAE	All-Progressives Congress
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
FEC	Fundação Fé e Cooperação
FINSJOR	Young Girls Social Intervention Forum
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GPS	Gender Parity Score
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCD	Human Capital Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAIGC	African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Guinea-Bissau has made efforts to close the gender gap, particularly in basic health services provision. Indeed, over the past decade, Guinea-Bissau has made progress in improving women's access to health services, despite the inadequacy of health infrastructure. Efforts to improve the quality of services and the construction of health centers have helped reduce maternal mortality from 762 to 560 per 100,000 between 2011 and 2021.

However, Guinea-Bissau's progress in improving women's health is threatened by political instability and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Political instability in recent years has jeopardized what little progress has been made to date in improving women's health, as access to health services has become more difficult due to health centers closures and the unavailability of equipment damaged during periods of political instability¹. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on women's health as it has led to an increase in cases of domestic violence.

Furthermore, Bissau Guinean women still face significant challenges in accessing education. In elementary school, gender disparities remain minimal, but the gap widens considerably from secondary school onwards, where 25.7% of girls are more likely to drop out of school due to early marriage, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of employment opportunities after graduation, leading a large proportion of women to be entrepreneurs (52.6% of them). Although most women are entrepreneurs, they still face more obstacles in developing their businesses than men. Additionally, access to financing remains one of the main challenges that women face.

Moreover, since the introduction of the parity law, efforts have been put in place to integrate women in the political sphere, opening doors for women to hold senior level positions. However, despite the efforts made, policies and programs are still not gender-sensitive, nor are the budgets that support them. As a result, women remain underrepresented in the executive and legislative branches.

This report is one of six country reports in the global study assessing the gender performance of ECOWAS member states through their gender parity scores (GPS) on key indicators in the areas of education, health, economic participation, and political empowerment. This report was based primarily on qualitative data such as stakeholder interviews conducted in Guinea-Bissau, as insufficient data was collected to be included in the modeling exercise to quantify the economic impact of gender parity.

¹ La Guinée Bissau, coup d'état avorté, link [here](#)

A. CONTEXT

A1. Objectives of the country deep dive

This deep dive analysis aims to provide an overview of Guinea-Bissau's gender parity performance as well as identify key interventions to close the gap and ultimately drive economic growth. The study will seek to identify underlying drivers of gender inequalities and binding constraints preventing further progress in Guinea-Bissau. While not an exhaustive list, this report is based on a set of selected gender indicators to consistently track the country's gender parity performance over time. Additionally, gender-focused recommendations to address remaining constraints to closing the parity gap will be formulated.

The ECOWAS region could generate up to \$105B by fully closing the gender gap by 2030

One of the study's key objectives is to assess the impact of achieving gender parity on the ECOWAS region's economy. The scenario analysis tested the hypothesis that the region is incurring an economic and societal loss by not reaching full gender parity. This best-case scenario measures the economic impact of reaching full parity in the ECOWAS region. Using the region's 2020 GDP as a baseline, the projected regional GDP value was estimated under the assumption that all Member States' gender parity scores for the indicators selected for this study reach full parity (increase to 1).

Reaching full gender parity in education and workforce participation was determined to have the most significant impact on ECOWAS' GDP growth. Reaching full gender parity in the following indicators can result in an increase in GDP growth: literacy rate (+1.53%), primary school enrollment rate (+1.54%), secondary school enrollment rate (+1.44%), tertiary school enrollment rate (+1.09%), and labor force participation (+1.62%). This finding implies that in order to optimize the economic impact of gender parity interventions, priority should be given to girls' education, from primary to tertiary levels, and to helping women enter the labor force. These gender-related interventions will most likely have the highest return on investment.

While health and political empowerment indicators were not found to have a direct impact on the region's GDP growth, they contribute to women's ability to thrive both at school and in the workplace. Greater gender parity in health service provision and political positions were not found to have a direct impact on ECOWAS GDP growth. However, these indicators showed a correlation with the five significant indicators mentioned above. For instance, increasing young women tertiary school enrollment results in the higher likelihood of more women holding ministerial positions across the region, while improvements in literacy rates can significantly improve women's maternal mortality ratio.

Guinea-Bissau will have to make significant efforts to reap the economic benefits of closing the gender parity gap. The country lags other Member States across all key indicators. Guinea-Bissau will have to significantly improve women's literacy rates, access to basic health services, and facilitate women's participation in the political sphere to generate inclusive growth.

A2. Landscape analysis

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau is bordered by Senegal to the north and Guinea to the south and east, and with a large archipelago, the Bijagos, consisting of over 100 islands to the west, and an estimated population of 1.7 million people (as of 2014), of which 51 % are women². The country's population is predominantly Muslim and is made up mostly of the Balanta people, representing more than a quarter of the population.

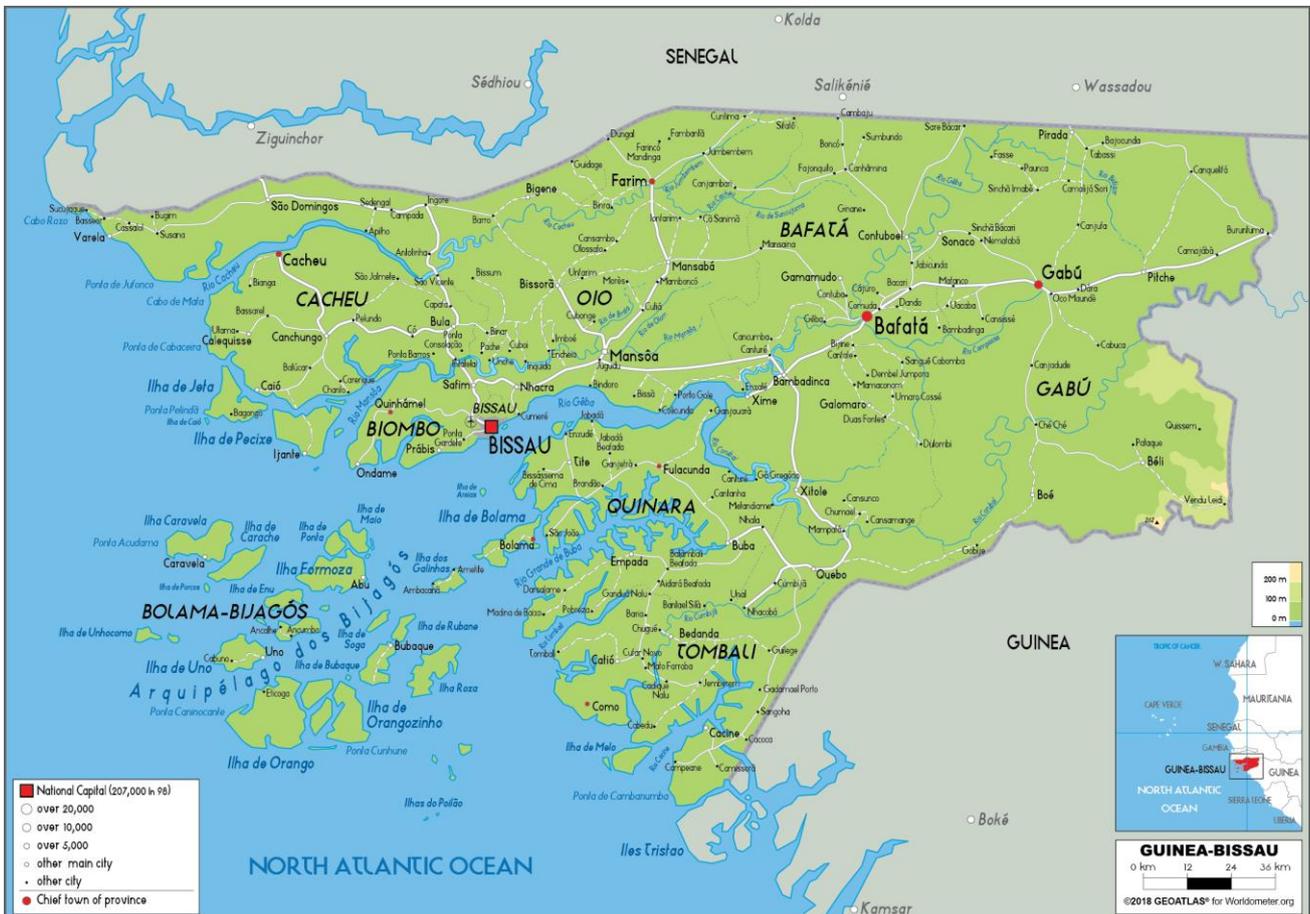


Figure 1: Map of Guinea-Bissau's regions

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau has experienced political instability in recent years. Guinea-Bissau is tied with Somalia for the number of planned or successful coups d'état recorded, driven by "weak" institutions, fragmented political elites, and high rent-seeking³. For more than a decade the country's political instability has hindered economic growth and human capital development, as Guinea-Bissau has been repeatedly ranked as one of the world's least developed countries. Guinea-Bissau is seemingly recovering from multiple coups, leading the way to a new government. In 2018, Guinea-Bissau held democratic elections, putting an end to over three years of political crisis. Umaro Sissoco Embaló was democratically elected president, representing an opportunity for change.

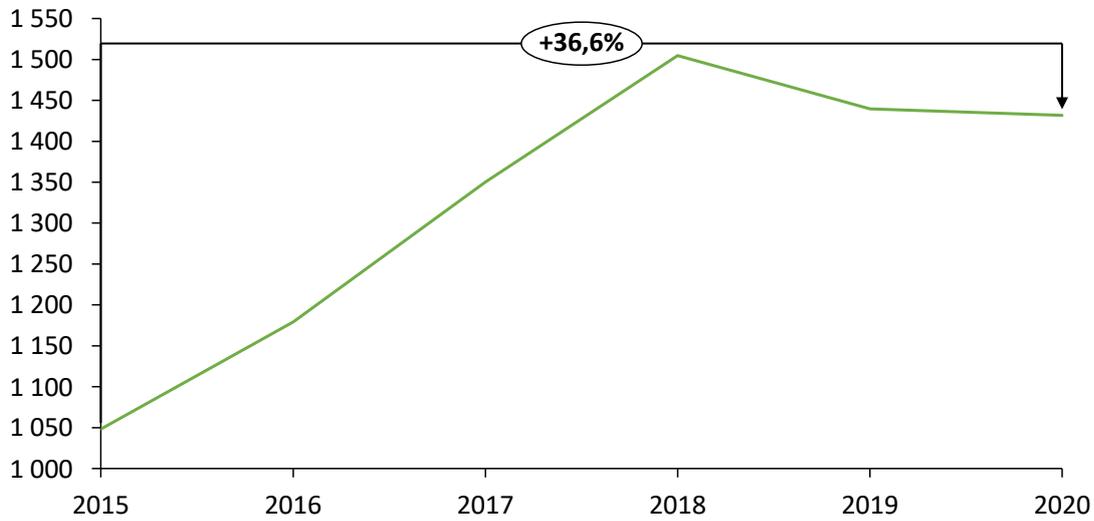
Despite its vast natural assets, Guinea-Bissau is still one of the poorest countries in the ECOWAS region. The country's potential is enormous because of its coastline, abundant in fish and its favorable climate for agriculture. Yet Guinea-Bissau's 2020 Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.4 billion

²United Nations, Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, 2022

³Chronic political instability and HIV/AIDS response in Guinea-Bissau: a qualitative study, 2020 link [here](#)

contributes about 0,50% of ECOWAS countries' GDP⁴. Agriculture is the main source of revenue for Guinea-Bissau and cashew nut exports represent 60% of the GDP. Additionally, the country has a vast forest and many minerals such as bauxites, wood, oil, phosphate rocks, most of which are informally exploited.

Figure 2: Guinea-Bissau's GDP growth (billion USD)



⁴ Countryeconomy.com

B. THE CURRENT STATE

B1. Gender parity performance overview

Guinea-Bissau's current health infrastructure negatively impacts health outcomes of the most vulnerable populations, including women and children. Guinea-Bissau currently has eleven functional national hospitals with five concentrated in Bissau – an insufficient number for a population of more than one million people. As a result, access to care remains very limited, because of outdated equipment and limited staff capacity in hospitals. The maternal mortality rate is 560 per 1,000,000 births,⁵ the highest in the region, and reflects the urgent need to equip hospitals to meet the needs of the population and to make life-saving care more accessible.

Child marriage is still prevalent in Guinea-Bissau. In rural areas, one third of the children were married before reaching the age of majority. As a result of this practice, there are many early pregnancies often accompanied by complications and lack of medical follow-up.

Guinea-Bissau has reached full gender parity in primary school, while disparities remain in secondary levels. In Guinea-Bissau, as many girls are enrolled in school as boys in primary school, but disparities are seen in secondary school enrolment. Between both cycles, 25% of girls and 15% of boys drop out of school, due to factors such as early marriage, long distances from schools and villages, and parents not encouraging them to continue their studies.

Limited opportunities for formal employment push women towards entrepreneurship. In Guinea-Bissau, the private sector recruits 95% of its profiles internationally, while the public sector recruits very few women for senior positions, often limiting them to secretarial work⁶. As a result, most women turn to entrepreneurship to earn a living. Even though 52.6% of entrepreneurs are women, they often lack the training and financial support to scale up their businesses.

The government introduced a parity law in 2018 that improved women political representation. The quota law requires a minimum of 36% of women representation on electoral lists.⁷ The introduction of this law has allowed the breakthrough of several female political talents who are moving gender lines on a larger scale like Ms Suzi Barbosa, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ms Conceicao Evora, Minister of Women, Family, and social protection⁸.

B2. Health & nutrition

Over the past 10 years, Guinea-Bissau has made progress in improving women's access to health services despite insufficient health infrastructure. Maternal mortality for instance was reduced through the combination of ministries and donors' efforts such as the initiative of the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization (WHO), which after conducting an inventory of the existing facilities, has provided latest technology to some hospitals in Bissau to better address the needs of the population, in a context where the supply of reliable health infrastructure is insufficient.

However, Guinea-Bissau's progress in improving women's health outcomes is threatened by socio-cultural barriers, political instability, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Political instability in recent years has threatened the little progress made to date on improving women's health, as access to health services has become challenging due to the closure of health centers and the unavailability of some

⁵ World Bank, WB Data warehouse, 2020

⁶ Dalberg, Stakeholder interview, 2021

⁷ Guinea-Bissau parliament passes law to ensure gender balanced political representation, link [here](#)

⁸ Guinea-Bissau names gender-par cabinet after Ethiopia, South Africa, link [here](#)

equipment damaged by conflicts such as the Civil War in the early 2000s and the recent coup d'état in 2015. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on women's health as it has led to an increase in cases of domestic violence. These setbacks have widened gender disparities, because women have been the most affected, further increasing their vulnerability in society.

Three core themes can be assessed to have a holistic view of women's current health outcomes in Guinea-Bissau, namely sexual and reproductive health, food security and harmful practices against women.

Sexual and reproductive health

Women in Guinea-Bissau severely lack access to basic care, due to insufficient medical infrastructure. Guinea-Bissau had the 7th highest child death rate in the world in 2019⁹, and the maternal mortality rate is 667 deaths per 100,000 live births¹⁰, which is well above that of its neighbors Senegal (323 per 100,000 live births¹¹) and Gambia (360 per 100,000 live births), and much higher than the regional average of 539.4 per 100,000 births¹². The country only has six functioning hospitals with limited equipment and those in rural areas also lack electricity. This limited infrastructure represents a significant challenge, especially for pregnant women and babies who need special care. The absence of health facilities and pre-natal care, especially in regions outside Bissau, contributes to high rates of maternal mortality. To address these shortcomings, several technical partners such as UNICEF and UNFPA have equipped hospitals in provinces like Gabu. Unfortunately, these efforts remain rather insufficient for a population of nearly 1 million women with only six fully functioning hospitals to accommodate them.

The inadequate access to basic care for women further limits the use of modern contraception, resulting in higher fertility rates. In 2018, the number of births per woman was 4.9, a slightly higher rate compared to the cluster average of 4.36 children¹³. There is a lack of sexual education and awareness of contraception methods in Guinea-Bissau. An estimated 93% of girls aged 15-19, the majority of whom are sexually active, are not familiar with the use of modern contraceptives¹⁴. In addition, Guinea-Bissau is a mostly Muslim country, therefore sexual education is not part of the educational curriculum offered to young girls and boys. To address these shortcomings, UNICEF has launched awareness campaigns in higher education institutions, but these campaigns are not large scale enough to address the urgent need for modern contraceptives and sexual education for men and women.

⁹ UNICEF, Guinea-Bissau Gender country profile, 2020

¹⁰ UN Women, Women count, 2020 available [here](#)

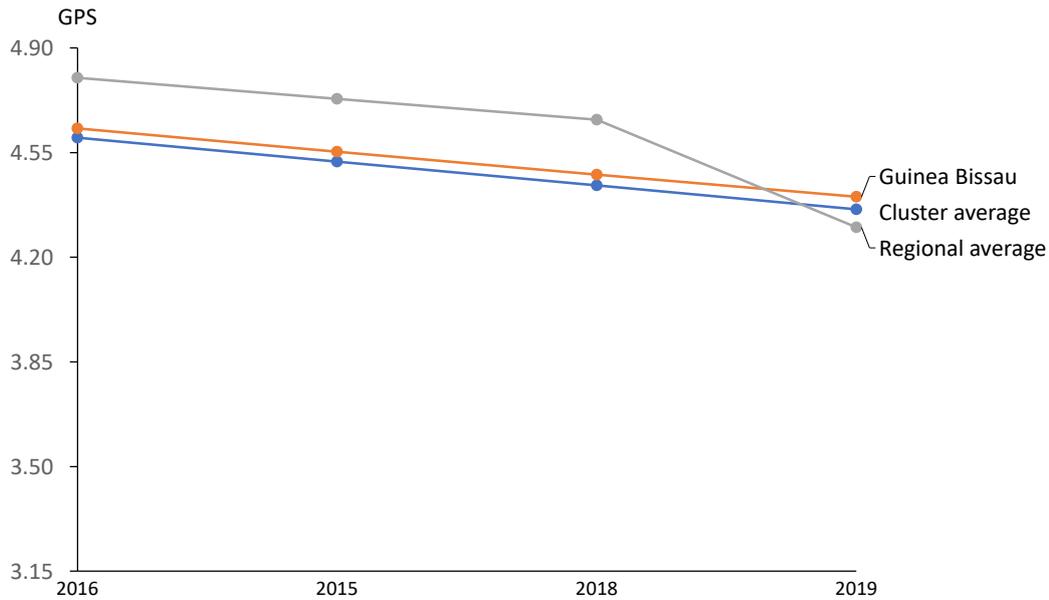
¹¹ UNICEF, Guinea-Bissau Gender country profile, 2020

¹² Ibid

¹³ World Bank, WB Data Warehouse, 2020

¹⁴ UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2020

Figure 3: Comparison of fertility rates in Guinea-Bissau versus regional and cluster averages (2016-2019)



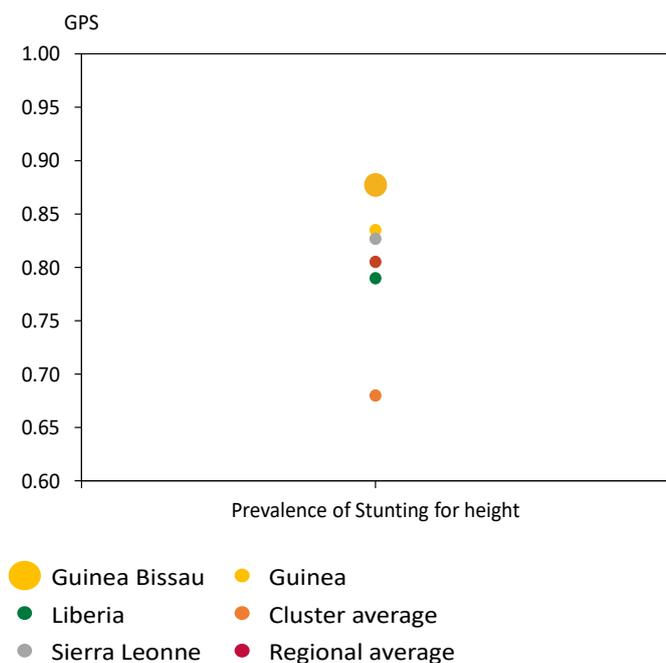
Women and food security

Although there are no significant gender disparities in child malnutrition rates, girls remain the most vulnerable to food insecurity. In Guinea-Bissau, malnutrition causes severe stunting in 26% of girls, compared to 22.2% at the regional level¹⁵. This high rate is explained by a lack of adequate monitoring of pregnant women and newborns, and by an average household income that is increasingly reduced by the high cost of living. For example, in 2021, with an estimated average household income of \$120 and economic inflation, it is very difficult for families to provide the recommended three meals per day¹⁶. To address this situation, initiatives by technical partners and the government have been put in place. The Ministry of Health has set up a system of free canteens in selected elementary schools to combat child malnutrition. Additionally, the World Health Organization has initiated a campaign to provide free vitamins to infants in public hospitals. As a result, several families were able to receive basic vitamins including A, C and D. Despite best efforts, food insecurity remains a challenge in Guinea-Bissau and additional interventions will be needed to ensure vulnerable populations have access to nutritious meals.

¹⁵ UNICEF, Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey Guinea-Bissau, 2020

¹⁶ Average Salary in Guinea-Bissau 2022 link [here](#)

Figure 4: Comparison of prevalence of stunting for height in Guinea-Bissau versus cluster and regional averages



Harmful practices against women

Child marriage remains highly prevalent in Guinea-Bissau, despite efforts to raise awareness to curb this practice. In 2018, 24% of girls were married before their 18th birthday, which is well below the average for the West African region (36.6%)¹⁷. The lack of birth certificates means that most children are not registered at birth in Guinea-Bissau and girls with no legal identity cannot provide proof of their young age, resulting in unreported cases. Additionally, it is customary in Guinea-Bissau to marry girls as soon as they are of childbearing age, as they are considered ready to take care of a home. Finally, the lack of resources represents another driver of child marriage, as parents prefer to receive money and gifts as dowries when they marry their daughters and thereby have one less mouth to feed within the household. This phenomenon results in young girls (i) early high-risk pregnancies and complications at birth; (ii) higher school dropout rates as married girls are often forced to quit school to take care of their households; and (iii) incidences of gender-based violence. To mitigate this harmful practice, efforts have been made to sensitize communities by selecting champions in the most affected areas like Bafata and Gabu. These efforts have raised awareness among peers and households about the dangers of child marriage.

The lack of a policy formally prohibiting child marriage allows this practice to flourish in Guinea-Bissau. The higher rate of child marriage is due to the lack of legal framework and sanctions to curb the practice¹⁸. Since 2011, child protection actors, such as UNICEF, have advocated with competent authorities for raising the minimum age of consent for marriage from 16 to 18. As of today, the minimum age for marriage with parents or legal guardian's consent remains 16 years old. These efforts remain minor given the prevalence of child marriage, particularly in rural areas such as Gabu, where 49% of girls aged 13 has experienced child marriage¹⁹. UNICEF's interventions are palliative to a much deeper problem and must be scaled up in partnership with government to drive reform and significantly curb the practice of child marriage.

¹⁷ World bank, WB data warehouse, 2020

¹⁸ UNICEF, Multiple Cluster Indicators Survey, 2020

¹⁹ UNICEF, Multiple Cluster Indicators Survey, 2020

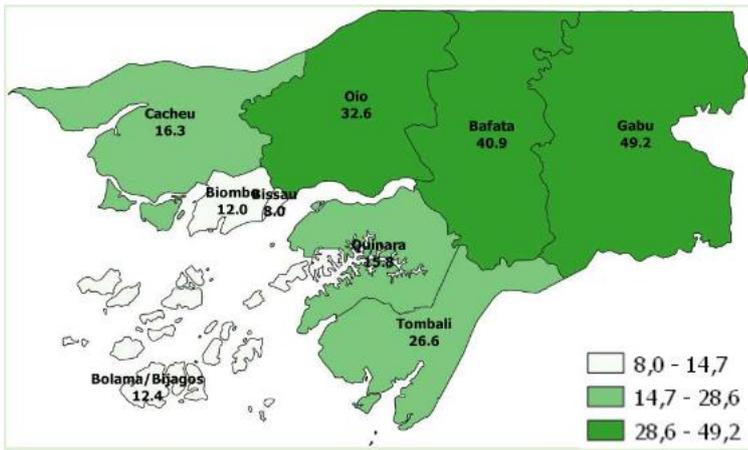


Figure 5: Map of areas most impacted by child marriage (%)

Gender based violence remains a common practice among Bissau Guinean households. Spousal abuse is prevalent as 42% of women aged 15-49 consider abuse to be justified and normal, while 24% of married women accept this practice as justified²⁰. Women justify this violence by (i) fear of spouse, (ii) fear to be subject of gossip, (iii) fear to be repudiated and returned to their parents' home. Additionally, 85% of violence against women occurs within the marital house²¹. To address this problem, civil society organizations such as Plataforma have focused on audiovisual and radio media campaigns sharing inspiring messages addressed directly to women to raise awareness. Plataforma has made videos in cartoon format to raise awareness in an original way to make the message easier to convey and less shocking to reach a maximum number of women. Additionally, other initiatives such as the Zero Gender Based Violence initiative allowed 5,000 young women to be sensitized by former female parliamentarians, journalists, religious and traditional leaders against domestic violence²².

B3. Education, skills, and labor participation

Women face significant challenges to access education, from primary school up until they are ready to join the workforce. While in primary school, gender disparities remain minimal, the gap widens significantly starting in secondary school onward. Indeed, in 2019 25.7% of girls drop out for the following reasons (i) child marriage, (ii) inadequate infrastructure to accommodate their needs, and (iii) lack of job opportunities after graduation²³. As a result, 52.6% of women in the workforce were entrepreneurs and business owners in 2019. Despite being heavily represented in entrepreneurship, they still face gender discrimination in the workplace.

Primary and secondary education

Girls' primary and secondary attendance is hampered by traditional norms and results in very low literacy rates. Guinea-Bissau's literacy rate is an alarming rate of 42.4%, well below the regional average of 76%.²⁴ Low literacy is due to girls' limited time to dedicate to their studies, which is caused by chores such as cooking and other household responsibilities. Additionally, most parents in Guinea-

²⁰ UNICEF, Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, 2020

²¹ UNICEF, Multiple Cluster Indicators Survey, 2020

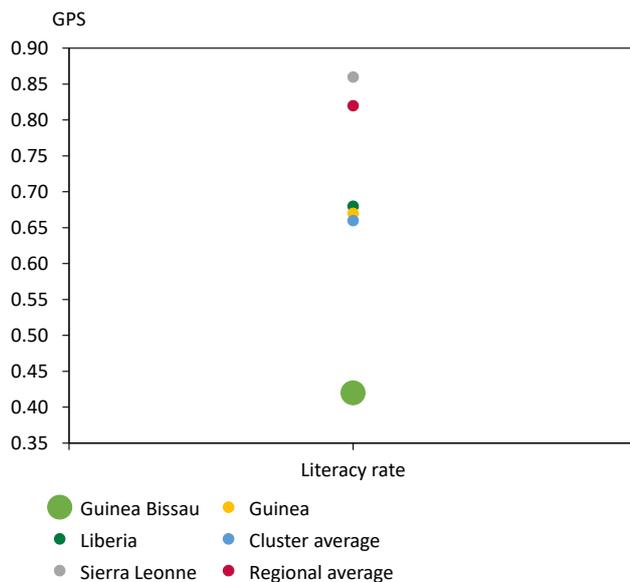
²² Zero Gender Based Violence, link [here](#)

²³ UNICEF, Multiple Cluster Indicators Survey, 2020

²⁴ Guinea-Bissau.net , démographie de la Guinée-Bissau, 2020 link [here](#)

Bissau are more comfortable with the idea of sending young boys to school because they believe that boys are more likely to succeed than girls. As a result, 52% of boys and 63% of girls between the ages of 7 and 17 could not read in 2019²⁵. To address this problem, UNICEF launched the "6/6" campaign to encourage children to enroll in school from the age of 6 and to maintain their attendance throughout primary education. In addition, UNICEF continued to build girls' skills through a life skills and literacy program, targeting 500 girls and women as agents of social norm change.

Figure 6: Comparison of literacy rates in Guinea-Bissau versus cluster and regional averages (2016-2019)



School dropout rates remain very high in Guinea-Bissau from primary to secondary school. The dropout rate for 10-11-year-olds is 25.7% for girls and 15.8% for boys²⁶. Additionally, more than one of four girls who have completed primary school do not graduate secondary school. This large girls' dropout rate is mainly due to (i) the high cost of supplies and materials; (ii) the location of high schools and colleges, which are often miles away from homes and villages; and (iii) the reduced capacity of schools and classrooms. To encourage school attendance, some public schools instituted a triple-shift system, which consists in using the same classroom for several grades at different times of the day to accommodate more students. Also, civil society organizations such as FINSJOR partnered with the Ministry of Education to create eight secondary schools near small towns and villages: two in Buba (Bairro Alto and Bairro Nema I) and six schools in the villages of Balanta, Mandinga and Biafada (Grampara, Tite, Nova Sintra, Brandao, Dáru and Grundjatra). These schools teach a public education program in the morning and Koranic education in the afternoon. Additionally, the ministry of Education has been distributing school kits in selected schools and surrounding towns to allow children who have left school due to lack of funds to purchase supplies to continue their studies.

The inconsistent quality of teaching in schools contributes to school dropouts and low literacy rates. In Guinea-Bissau, the level of education is relatively low, with nearly 20% of children scoring at less than the average mark for their level, compared with 10% in neighboring Senegal²⁷. The quality of education is one of the reasons for poor student performance. Indeed, a UNESCO test on the quality of education in the country showed that the quality of the education provided is poor. The test for

²⁵ UNICEF, Guinea-Bissau Gender country profile, 2020

²⁶ UNICEF Guinea-Bissau, Education Contributing for quality education for girls and boys, link [here](#)

²⁷ Wathi, la situation de l'éducation Bissau Guinéenne, link [here](#)

5th grade teachers showed that 95% of Portuguese teachers and 98% of math teachers did not master the subject they were teaching²⁸. These findings demonstrated significant gaps in the quality of education dispensed in Bissau Guinean schools and contributes to high levels of dropouts and low literacy rates. To address this problem, UNICEF, PLAN International, Handicap International and Fundação Fé e Cooperação (FEC) have trained 180 academic inspectors in over 1,700 schools to monitor teachers' attendance as well as their teaching and learning methodologies in the classroom. Their initiatives also included setting teaching standards, such as national quality standards and early learning development standards.

While efforts have been made to facilitate schooling for young mothers, the school infrastructure is not designed to accommodate them. There are serious structural barriers to overcome for young mothers who still want to attend school. Rural areas are especially impacted, where one third of girls are married before age 20²⁹. School timetables are not adapted to married women's family obligations, often forcing them to drop out of school. The infrastructure is not appropriate for these mothers, as there is no system in place that allows them to be reintegrated into school after marrying and giving birth. To face the situation of girls dropping out of school, the United Nations fund awarded Guinea-Bissau a \$3.5 million grant to support the development of a gender-sensitive, special needs, primary school-based distance learning program for out-of-school children. As a result, 70% of all 2,000 schools (primary and pre-school) have been impacted by UNICEF's initiative³⁰.

Moreover, the lack of adapted school infrastructure is a major obstacle to the inclusion of girls with disabilities in the educational system. People with disabilities, especially young girls, are not properly taken care of by the school system. School facilities such as classrooms, courtyards and sanitary installations are not adapted for handicapped people. There are few, if any, schools that welcome children with physical or mental disabilities. Technical partners such as Handicap International have undertaken actions targeting decision-makers to enable them to be more aware of the issue. Handicap International also delivered training on the concepts and challenges of inclusive education to 16 employees of the Ministry of Education to have a more inclusive schools in Guinea-Bissau for women and children with disabilities.

Women's higher education and vocational training

Persistent gender biased social norms in Guinea-Bissau are a barrier to women's access to tertiary education. For decades, society has confined women to the role of wife and mother to the detriment of their education. As a result, less than 10% of Bissau Guinean women have a tertiary level degree³¹. Many who can afford to study abroad, fly overseas to acquire knowledge, and achieve successful professional careers. To overcome these cultural barriers and offer young women the chance to study at university level, technical partners such as UNFPA have undertaken awareness campaigns in neighborhoods and schools on the need for university studies. Similarly, merit-based scholarship initiatives, such as one offered by the David Oyedepo Foundation, have been put in place to offer scholarship to hundreds of female students per year.

The lack of female role models constrains girls' engagement in higher education. In Guinea-Bissau, a minority of women access university studies for the following reasons: (i) lack of financial means (ii) lack of familial support and (iii) lack of access to educational opportunities. For the few who do, their successes are unfortunately rarely publicized. It is apparent that young girls lack role models and advice and therefore prefer not to engage in higher education, on the one hand for fear of failure

²⁸ Wathi, la situation de l'éducation Bissau Guinéenne, link [here](#)

²⁹ UNICEF, Guinea-Bissau Gender country profile, 2020

³⁰ GPE 20 years, Transformation education, link [here](#)

³¹ World Bank, WB Data warehouse, 2020

and on the other hand for lack of visibility on potential opportunities at the national and international levels. To overcome this lack of information, Bissau Guinean women have created a collective named AMAE (Associação Mulher em Atividades Económicas) to educate and mentor young girls with career ambitions.

Workforce participation

While Bissau Guinean women represent a majority of the workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in the formal sector. Women represent 52.3% of the active population compared to 41% in neighboring Liberia³². While women represent half of the Bissau Guinean labor force, approximately 51% of them work in the informal sector³³. Women's underrepresentation in formal sectors of the economy is due to a severe lack of training opportunities.

Women still face discrimination in the workplace, limiting their employability and career growth opportunities. In Guinea-Bissau, socio-cultural norms grant economic responsibilities to men, whether at home or in the workplace, which favors their recruitment within the private sector. Additionally, women represent only a tiny fraction of all public administration personnel. In most cases, the lack of skill or lack of training and job adequacy are the main reasons. Public sector authorities have recognized the need to build women's capacity. Training sessions have been set up by the national institute in charge of women's empowerment to solidify their skills, strengthen their capacities and thus make them more effective at work. As a result, 1,000 women have been trained and have seen their capacities reinforced.

B4. Entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and digital economy

Although Bissau Guinean most women are entrepreneurs, they still face more barriers to grow their businesses compared to men. Access to financing remains one of the major challenges women face due to banking networks providing inadequate services and the highly segmented nature of entrepreneurship, which hinders women in their business development efforts. Moreover, it remains difficult to formalise their businesses due to the lack of training and high levels of illiteracy, which remain obstacles to growing their subsistence businesses. Finally, it is also very difficult for women to become property owners, particularly in rural areas, which constitutes another obstacle to women's agricultural entrepreneurship.

Women's financial inclusion

Limited access to financing is one of the main barriers preventing Bissau Guinean women entrepreneurs from thriving. The country has four commercial banks and an embryonic Microfinance sector. Only 2.7 % of businesses have access to bank credit and financial services, compared to 20.7% of businesses in sub-Saharan Africa as a whole³⁴. Credit is often only available to the largest producers of the country's main exports like cashew nuts, excluding most small firms, and limiting investment opportunities for women. Efforts are being made by some women's associations in the form of tontines, or savings groups, to enable them to help each other to finance small projects, to increase their activities and to meet their financial obligations. Nevertheless, these tontines are insufficient to allow women to scale up their businesses. UNDP Guinea-Bissau has led an initiative to improve social inclusion through the creation and delivery of innovative low-cost financial services and solutions to the most vulnerable groups in local communities, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to enable them to carry out secure transfers and transactions at a lower cost.

³² Guinea-Bissau Statistics Department, Programa Nacional, 2019

³³ Dalberg Analysis, Stakeholders interviews in Guinea-Bissau, 2021

³⁴ Eric Rosenbaum, Borgen Magazine, 2020 available [here](#)

This initiative has impacted women entrepreneurs and small businesses across Guinea-Bissau, allowing them to scale up their businesses.

Women and entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in Guinea-Bissau is highly segmented and does not allow women to realize their full potential. Some lucrative sectors such as construction, real estate, mining, and oil are the preserve of men who know each other and prefer to do business among themselves. Women are relegated to farming, catering or other types of activities that are considered feminine. These limitations are rooted in persistent gender biases in society. Additionally, men often distrust women collaboration as they are perceived as less qualified than their male peers. Associations such as Plataforma militate for the inclusion of women in the sectors that are less invested by women through sensitization and empowerment campaigns.

Additionally, difficult access to business formalization is another obstacle preventing women entrepreneurs to scale up their businesses. In Guinea-Bissau, the limited access to formalization of their activities is due to the high illiteracy rate and the complexity of the required procedures, which are considered tedious and time-consuming. To overcome this problem, the one-stop service “guichê único” was created in 2017 to originally facilitate cashew producers export process and help local entrepreneurs formalize their businesses rapidly³⁵. A service for translating documents into local languages and providing support was also made available. Despite these efforts, women still do not take as much advantage of these services as their businesses remain highly informal and subsistence activities.

While women dominate the agricultural sector, there are still land barriers limiting their development. A crucial problem arises when women rent the land on which they labour³⁶. Acquiring a portion of land is difficult for the following reasons: (i) the land is often owned and managed by men; (ii) women generally cannot inherit over men; and (iii) the land acquisition process is tedious and unregulated, resulting in high probability of scams. For the time being, renting remains the main way for women to work the land while trying to overcome the above-mentioned challenges. Thus, government intervention in Guinea-Bissau agriculture, in terms of land policy and financing, remains weak due to chronic political instability. However, with the support of UNDP, the Association of Women Lawyers continues its efforts to revise the constitution with a gender perspective so that women's rights are explicitly protected under civil law. In the meantime, UN agencies and national and international NGOs are stepping in, supporting the self-advocacy of women's groups as they challenge patriarchal customs.

B5. Political empowerment

Since the introduction of the law on parity, politics has favored the integration of women in the political sphere by promoting the election of women to higher office. However, politics in Guinea-Bissau is not currently adapted to women needs. In addition, despite recent efforts, policies and programs are still not very gender sensitive, nor are the budgets that support them.

Women's political representation

The topic of gender parity in politics has been part of political discourse in Guinea-Bissau for several years. Guinea-Bissau experienced a historical peak in 1994, when 20% of the parliamentary assembly was composed of women. This peak was possible thanks to the "Parity Parliament" initiative,

³⁵ Guichet unique de l'entrepreneur en Guinée Bissau link [here](#)

³⁶ World Bank, WB Data warehouse, 2021

spearheaded by the government and their desire to raise awareness on gender inequalities in politics, which is the precursor to the parity law³⁷. This initiative stalled due to the change of political regime, which did not perpetuate the initiative.

Women's political representation in the legislative branch has improved with the advent of the parity law, although progress has been slow. The parity law introduced in 2018 introduced a 36% quota ensuring the inclusion of female candidates on electoral lists. This reform allowed the number of female parliamentarians to go from no women in parliament to 13 out of a total of 102 in 2018 elections. While the number of female representatives in parliament is still low, this slight improvement opens a window of opportunity for Bissau Guinean women to take more of an active role in politics. To further enhance these initiatives, civic education courses were included in the academic program to raise the political awareness and civic sense of young girls from an early age.

The current government of Guinea-Bissau has appointed more women in leadership positions in the executive branch, showcasing a willingness to support gender parity. The current government has engaged women as actors of change by positioning them at the helm of strategic ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Administration, Labor, Employment and Social Security. Thus, five women have been appointed as ministers out of a cabinet of 15 ministers. These five women ministers have surrounded themselves with competent women in key positions like chief of staff and senior advisers to accomplish their mandate and be role models to young girl wishing to enter politics and serve in senior leadership positions.

Political institutions are not built to accommodate women's needs in Guinea-Bissau. The political schedule often does align with women's household responsibilities, as critical discussions in politics often occur at night, thus excluding most women who have caretaking obligations. As a result, men do not see the usefulness of having a woman included in politics, given their limited availability. This results in women being added to electoral list as a formality to meet quotas without serious intentions to grant them any decision-making power or support their election.

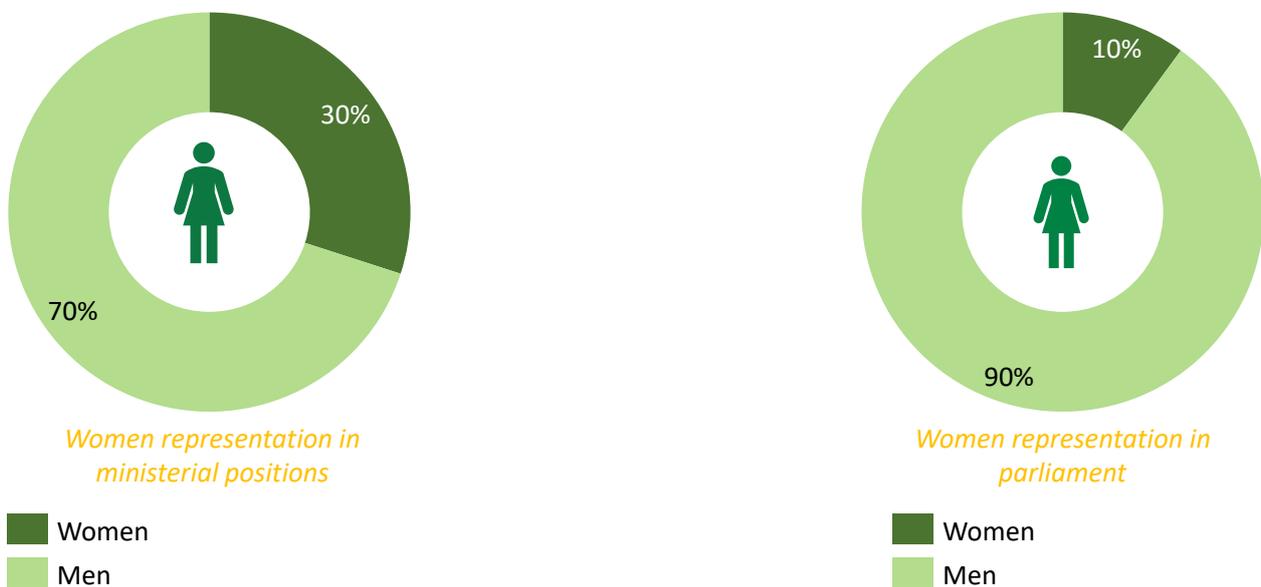


Figure 7: Women representation in the executive and legislative branches (%)

³⁷ Female politics in Parliament: addressing questions about political and journalistic representation link [here](#)

Gender mainstreaming

Efforts have been made by political authorities to improve gender mainstreaming in public policies and programs in all sectors. Under the impulse of women's activism and the desire of the current government to shape a more inclusive society, Guinea-Bissau has moved towards mainstreaming gender in policy making. Sectoral strategic documents are being reformulated to integrate gender equality considerations in their key actions and objectives. Their implementation is monitored by the Ministry of Women, the National Institute for Women (Criança da Mulher) and the General Direction for Gender Promotion. The latter two institutions were set up at the behest of the Ministry of Women's Affairs with an allocated budget and mandate for supporting gender initiative across Guinea-Bissau. These institutions have been allocated room to maneuver for women's initiatives, they set up gender point focal in rural regions to address women's needs more swiftly. Additionally, the Ministry has also called back one of the first female members of the PAIGC (African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde) to give expertise and support to ongoing gender initiatives.

Despite these best efforts, budget and capacity constraints are slowing progress. The capacity of gender centers to play a role in the systematic inclusion of gender issues in policymaking is limited by a significant lack of funding, despite support from technical partners. In terms of budget, no guidance is provided by the Ministry of Gender and no consistent budget line has been allocated to gender initiatives year over year to ensure continuity. The lack of financial support also has an impact on the gender focal points in the interior of the country, who are left to their own devices with minimal training and guidance. Most ministries also lack qualified gender experts to support mainstreaming efforts and build internal capacity. Finally, the lack of understanding of the importance of incorporating gender and the lack of mastery of tools for integrating gender into policies, programs, and budgets, severely limit progress.

B6. Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis emerged in Guinea-Bissau in March 2020, leading to a total of 8,149 cases as of March 2022. During the first month of the pandemic, the government restricted access to public services, markets, and restaurants and prohibited religious or traditional ceremonies to reduce the spread of the virus, but essential services for basic needs remained open as of March 31, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a multifaceted impact on women, notably around (i) the healthcare system, by revealing the weakness of its infrastructure; (ii) the education system, by leading to the closure of schools and (iii) the country's workforce by causing large number of female workers to lose their livelihoods mainly in agriculture.

Impact on health & nutrition

The COVID-19 pandemic has weakened the health infrastructure and made accessing medical care even more difficult for women. The prevalence of many diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases, combined with weak infrastructure made the COVID-19 outbreak a complex emergency for Guinea-Bissau. Low screening capacity and lack of hospital resources quickly pushed the health care system to its limits. Guinea-Bissau was one of the least affected countries, with 0.5% of the population infected with the COVID-19 virus³⁸. Nevertheless, the coronavirus crisis has weakened hospitals' capacity, and existing infrastructure was severely affected due to the popular panic during this period. The government has tried to respond to this threat by opening

³⁸ Stastica, Global Statistic, 2020

community-based care and testing centers to relieve hospital overcrowding and respond quickly to the needs of the population.

The COVID-19 crisis has resulted in an increase in cases of gender-based violence within the family unit. Before the pandemic, cases of violence were reported to the police by low recurrence. However, a toll-free hotline was set up by the national police at the start of the outbreak to deal with cases of domestic violence. This line has recorded about a dozen cases of domestic violence every day³⁹. Women being most often confined at home with children out of school were the most vulnerable.

Impact on education

During the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, schools had to close to comply with the government's barrier measures. Due to the lack of internet access in the country, online courses were not an option for Guinea-Bissau. As a result, there was a long period of uncertainty during which students were unable to access courses. This period affected young girls, as it led them to become more involved in household tasks. To overcome these difficulties, the government decided to use mass media such as television and radio to provide courses to students.

The COVID-19 crisis contributed to the repatriation of community teachers and the closure of community schools. This crisis contributed to the closure of community schools, resulting in the relocation of the assigned teachers to these communities. Partner agencies such as UNFPA and UNICEF have come to the support of the Government to address the situation. First, UNICEF's support for the COVID-19 response enabled the Ministry of Education to adopt a budgeted contingency plan for the education sector outlining key interventions and supplies needed to ensure that schools could reopen and function safely during the pandemic. With support from UNICEF, the government secured a Global Partnership for Education's grant of US\$3.5 million to fund the various components of the education contingency plan. The contingency plan was aiming to develop a response for the reopening of schools and the safe operation of schools during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Impact on the economy

The deterioration of the macroeconomic landscape due to COVID-19 has led to an increase in the unemployment rate of women. Market closures and other health measures taken by the authorities have disproportionately impacted women in the informal economy. Women represent more than 80% of workers employed in the cashew value chain, the country's main export crop. However, exports have dropped from 200,000 tons per year to 160,000 tons from 2019 to 2020 resulting in a fall of purchase prices to less than XOF 100/kg and unsold production. As a result, women in the cashew sector and other agricultural value chains were severely affected by the pandemic.

³⁹ Dalberg, Stakeholder's interview, 2021

C. THE JOURNEY TO ADVANCE GENDER PARITY

C1. Lessons Learned from Guinea-Bissau's gender parity journey

Lessons learned in health

Investing in human resources and infrastructure is critical to improve women's access to basic health services. With eleven hospitals, half of which are in the capital city, women's access to health infrastructures remains difficult. Existing infrastructures are also poorly equipped and adapted to women's specific needs. Building additional hospitals and adequately equipping existing ones is therefore paramount to improving women's health outcomes and effectively reduce maternal mortality. Moreover, limited human resources continues to hinder the provision of quality services, indicating a need to train more staff.

Targeted awareness campaigns will be key to achieve sustainable change in mindsets on gender-based violence. The population is still reluctant to receive messages from international organizations, especially when they are poorly tailored to local realities and delivered by outsiders. Recognizing this, local organizations like Plataforma adapted their communication strategies, creating cartoons that discuss issues such as gender-based violence and child marriage that would be broadcasted on TV and on their social media platform. This approach helped them reach a wider public and better raise awareness among the population.

Lessons learned in education

Substantial investment in the construction and expansion of school is key to improve the learning experience. As they are often overcrowded, many schools' resorts to a triple-shift system, which consists in using the same classroom for several grades at different times of the day. This situation affects the quality of education provided and contributes to student dropouts. Addressing these shortcomings is critical to effectively combat the country's high illiteracy rates.

Reviewing teachers training will be critical to achieve better results in education and improve the overall teaching quality. A UNESCO test on 5th grade teachers showed that 95% of Portuguese teachers and 98% of math teachers did not master the subject they taught. This situation impacts the quality of education provided and constitutes one of the reasons for dropouts.

Better synergy of actions between the technical partners and the government can lead to greater impact. In recent years, technical partners have expanded their initiatives to help close the gender parity gap. However, initiatives that are fully supported by the government tend to lead to a greater impact and sustainability. For instance, the partnership between Finsjor and the Ministry of Education led to the opening of eight secondary schools near small towns and villages (Bairro Alto, Bairro Nema I, Grampara, Tite, Nova Sintra, Brandao, Dáru and Grundjatra).

Lessons learned in entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and digital economy

Women entrepreneurs in Guinea-Bissau can only reach their full potential if they receive adequate support. No large-scale financial schemes or trainings dedicated to female entrepreneurs exist in Guinea-Bissau. This lack of support limits women's ability to thrive as well as formalize their businesses, keeping many in the informal sector.

Lessons learned in political empowerment

Guinea-Bissau will only be able to achieve full parity in politics if the laws passed are enforced in practice. In 2018, Guinea-Bissau passed a law advocating for a 36% quota of women on the electoral lists. However, its application both regarding elective and nominative positions remains low. Women account for 13 out of the 102 Members of Parliament and only 5 out of 15 are represented at the ministerial level.

C2. Recommendations

Improve access to basic services

The lack of infrastructure and the inadequacy of existing facilities are obstacles basic services provision. By building and adequately equipping health centers, particularly in rural areas, Guinea-Bissau could improve women's access to health services, and reduce the maternal mortality rate.

Additionally, substantial investment needs to be made in the construction of new schools, especially in remote areas. Building new schools would shorten the distance with villages, leading to higher girls' enrolment rates. These investments would also help relieve classroom congestion and improve the quality of education provided.

Scale-up capacity building efforts

By building human resource capacity in sectors such as public administration, education and health, Guinea-Bissau could gradually improve the quality of services provided to the population. Weak human resource capacity hinders the provision of quality services to the population, particularly to women. Investing in the training of additional public servants is paramount to improving basic services provision.

Building the capacity of existing data collection agencies would allow for an effective tracking of gender performance, improving the ability to design tailored solutions for women. Guinea-Bissau faces a lack of gender-disaggregated data, characterized by the difficulty of obtaining data on education, labor force participation, and health. Thus, building the capacity of administrative institutions in data collection methods would help provide a holistic view of the country and allow for more targeted solutions. Guinea-Bissau could draw inspiration from Senegal by setting up a data collection unit specifically dedicated to gender.

Address persistent gender-biased norms

In Guinea-Bissau, achieving gender parity is threatened by the persistence of gender biased norms. A change in mindsets can be achieved by leveraging various means including traditional media such as television and radio. Additionally, the promotion of gender champions within communities can help further engage the population and deconstruct gender stereotypes. Involving religious and community leaders would also give more weight to the messages conveyed. Raising awareness from a young age is critical to achieve sustainable change, which can be achieved by developing more gender sensitive curricula and materials for schools.

Create an inclusive legal framework

Reforming the legal framework to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women is essential to remove the persistent legal barriers faced by women. Furthermore, enforcing sanctions on those who do not comply with the laws in place would help to secure a more inclusive legal framework for women.

D. APPENDIX

D1. Methodology used for the case study

Anchoring the Gender Equality and Parity Study in the 2050 ECOWAS HCD Strategy

The ECOWAS Human Capital Development framework evaluates regional performance metrics across three dimensions, which measure social, economic, and educational elements, all critical for societies to thrive. Dimensions selected include:

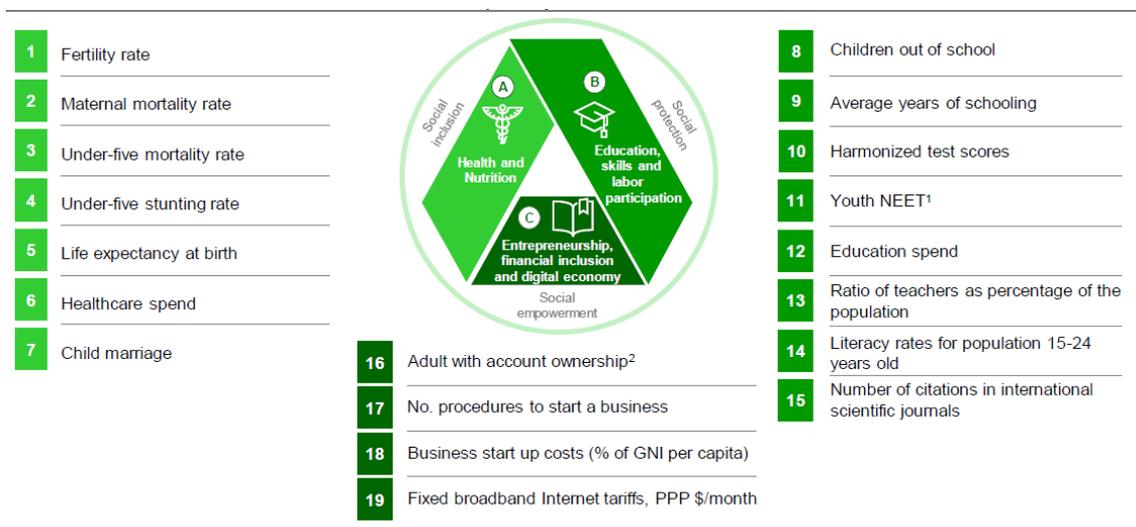
- Health and nutrition
- Education, skills, and labor participation
- Entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and digital economy

We have also added a political empowerment dimension to assess women’s representation in the political arena and capture the challenges they still face.

The gender-transformative human capital development (HCD) strategy is anchored into this overall HCD approach and aims to promote gender equity and equality as key to reaching inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Gender inclusion is critical to drive economic growth and increase societal value. All fifteen Member States have untapped opportunities when it comes to gender equality and parity. For these reasons, gender inclusion is a cross-cutting enabler of the HCD Strategy aligned around the previously outlined dimensions.

Each of these dimensions consists of a set of priority indicators as illustrated in the figure below:

Figure 8: The ECOWAS HCD framework

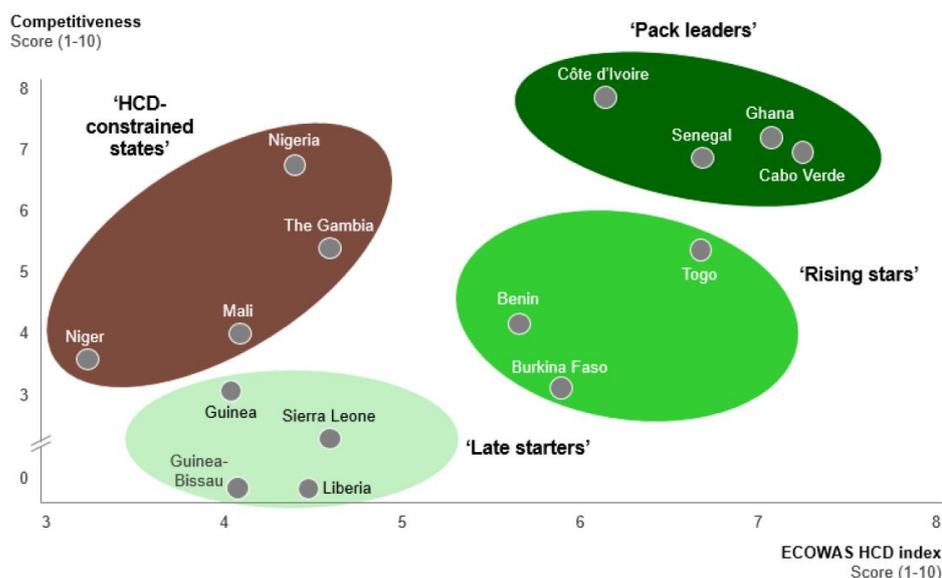


The ECOWAS HCD strategy categorizes countries in four clusters based on their HCD performance and economic competitiveness.

- **The Pack Leaders** are the strongest performers on both HCD and competitiveness
- **The Rising Stars** have registered average performances on both HCD and competitiveness
- **The HCD-constrained States** are lagging behind their peers on HCD indicators despite strong economic competitiveness performances

- **The Late Starters** have experienced slow progress on HCD indicators as well as below-average competitiveness

Figure 9: ECOWAS country clusters based on economic competitiveness and HCD performance⁴⁰



The country performance assessment is framed around these four archetypes and uses the selected indicators across each HCD dimension as guidance to evaluate the country's gender parity performance. This clustered approach captures the region's diversity and enables a comparison of the performance of countries that face similar constraints. This study then reviews the gender parity performance for each dimension of the HCD framework to understand the drivers and binding constraints to reach total parity (Score of 1 for the index).

Key indicators selected to assess gender parity performance

This study seeks to assess gender equality and parity across a set of key indicators under each dimension (i.e., health, education, entrepreneurship, and political empowerment). The figure below is an initial selection of relevant indicators for the gender parity analysis that are used to frame this country assessment. These indicators were chosen because they relate to gender parity and equality. While not an exhaustive list of indicators for lack of gender disaggregated data across all 15 Member States, these indicators capture the state of gender parity consistently across the region.

⁴⁰ ECOWAS 2030 Integrated Regional Strategy for Human Capital Development

Figure 10: Selected indicators across HCD dimensions for regional and country gender parity analysis

Selected indicators			
Dimension	Health and Nutrition	Entrepreneurship, financial inclusion and digital economy	Education, skills and labor participation
HCD Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fertility rate Maternal mortality ratio Child marriage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults with account ownership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average years of schooling Literacy rate
Additional indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life expectancy Prevalence of stunting for height 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated earned income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Labor force participation Primary school enrolment rate Secondary school enrolment rate Tertiary enrolment rate Average years of schooling
Additional dimension	Political Empowerment Seats in parliament Women in ministerial positions		

D2. Methodology used to conduct interviews and type of stakeholders interviewed

A total of 17 in-country stakeholder interviews were conducted to draft the Guinea-Bissau's dive report:

- 3 interviews with ministries and government agencies allowed us to identify challenges and potential opportunities in current gender focused interventions implemented by Member State governments.
- 4 interviews with technical partners were conducted to identify successful gender focused interventions to scale up and synergies between their activities and ECOWAS interventions.
- 7 interviews with civil society organizations focused on promoting women and girls' social, political, and economic inclusion. These conversations were critical to identifying successful initiatives implemented by these organizations to advance gender parity objectives.
- 3 interviews with private sector actors were held and conversations with female-led businesses across a wide range of sectors were prioritized to better understand the hurdles women face when pursuing their professional aspirations.

We applied a hypothesis-driven approach to develop tailored interview guides for each interviewees/stakeholder archetypes. The table below outlines the list of stakeholders interviewed for the purpose of this study.

Table 1: List of stakeholders interviewed in Guinea-Bissau

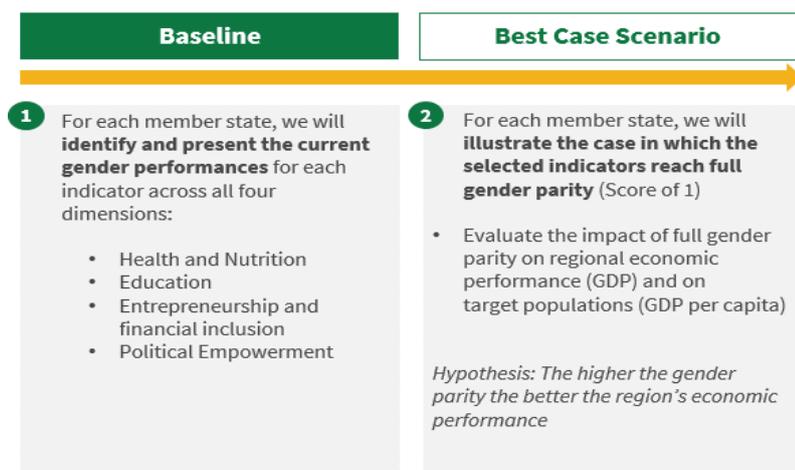
Type	Name
Civil society	Office of Gender in Ministry of Women, Family and Social Cohesion
Civil society	Instituto da mulher e crianca
Civil society	Women and children institute
Civil society	Association of Women in Economic Activity (AMAE)
Civil society	FINSJOR (Young Girls Social Intervention Forum)
Civil society	National Parliamentry
Civil society	Plataforma politica das Mulheres
Government	Ministry of National Education and Higher Education
Government	Ministry of Women, Family and Social Protection
Government	Ministry of foreign affairs
Private sector	Chamber of commerce of Guinea-Bissau
Private sector	RUMU Sarl
Private sector	B&F Enterprise
Technical and Financial Partners	UN Women
Technical and Financial Partners	WHO
Technical and Financial Partners	UNICEF
Technical and Financial Partners	UNHCR

D3. Methodology used to measure the economic impact of gender parity

The methodology focused on testing the hypothesis that higher gender parity scores lead to a more inclusive society and drive sustainable economic growth. The objective of the modeling exercise was to size the economic potential across each dimension if the region is to achieve gender parity. The purpose is to understand how improvements in gender parity in each dimension can positively impact economic performance.

By using GPS scores for selected indicators and for each country, a baseline and a best-case scenario were developed as illustrated below.

Figure 11: Illustration of the scenario modeling methodology



Prior to running the simulations, the pre-selected indicators were presented to ECOWAS to review their relevance to gender. Upon validation of the indicators, a baseline was created for each country using their current gender parity performance scores and determine their current economic performance.

Panel data on the evolution of economic growth was used for each year between 2000 and 2030 in fourteen (14) West African states, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Capo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo⁴¹. This model analyzed the impact of these different variables on the economic growth for the fourteen (14) countries.

$$\text{GDPgrowth}_{it} = \alpha + \delta \text{GPS}_{it} + \beta \text{X}_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

GDPgrowth_{it} = dependent variable- GDP growth for the country (i) at time (t)

α = the constant

δ = the coefficient of Gender Parity Index for country (i) at time (t)

GPS_{it} = Gender Parity Score is the variable of interest – independent variable for country (i) at time (t)

β = the coefficient of the control variables

X_{it} = control variables for country (i) at time (t)

⁴¹ Guinea-Bissau was excluded from the model due to insufficient data availability

ϵ_{it} = error term

A baseline and a best-case scenario simulation were conducted to estimate the impact on the economic performance and targeted populations. With GDP growth as the dependent variable and the GPS as the independent variable of interest. World Bank databases on population growth, the share of international trade in GDP, gross savings rate, and the corruption index were used as control variables in the model. Thus, the indicators whose coefficients were found to be more significant on GDP growth were retained. As a result, primary, secondary, tertiary enrolment rates, literacy rate and labor force participation were determined to be the indicators that had the most significant impact on GDP growth.

D4. Indicators tables across the 4 dimensions

Health & Nutrition

Table 2: Guinea-Bissau's health and nutrition indicators and Gender Parity Scores (GPS) in cluster and region⁴² (2020)

Late staters	Gender parity scores	Fertility rate	Maternal mortality ratio	Prevalence of stunting of height	Child marriage	Life expectancy at birth
	Guinea	4,31	495,03	0,83	24,47	1,02
Sierra Leone	4,47	652,41	0,86	4,27	1,05	
Liberia	4,32	916,25	0,79	7,50	1,03	
Guinea Bissau	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Cluster Average	4,36	687,89	0,82	12,08	1,03	
Regional average	4,75	496,78	0,82	22,06	1,04	

⁴² Regional average is excluding Guinea Bissau, with no available data across the 4 indicators; Child marriage data are sourced from the UNICEF Data warehouse which contains data gaps across years: calculated averages are based on the most recent data by country between 2012 and 2019, Guinea-Bissau data is from 2018.

Education, skills, and labor participation

Table 3 : Guinea-Bissau's education, skills, and labor participation Gender Parity Scores (GPS) in cluster and region (2020)⁴³

Late staters	Gender parity scores	Literacy rate	Labour force participation	Primary school rate	Secondary school rate	Tertiary school rate
	Guinea	0,67	1,06	0,85	0,78	0,59
Sierra Leone	0,68	0,88	0,96	0,77	0,68	
Liberia	0,86	0,97	1,03	0,89	0,60	
Guinea Bissau	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Cluster Average	0,73	0,97	0,94	0,81	0,62	
Regional average	0,83	0,84	0,97	0,87	0,71	

⁴³ Due to missing data, regional average's calculation is excluding Guinea Bissau across the 6 GPS and is excluding Liberia and Sierra Leone for the average years of schooling GPS