

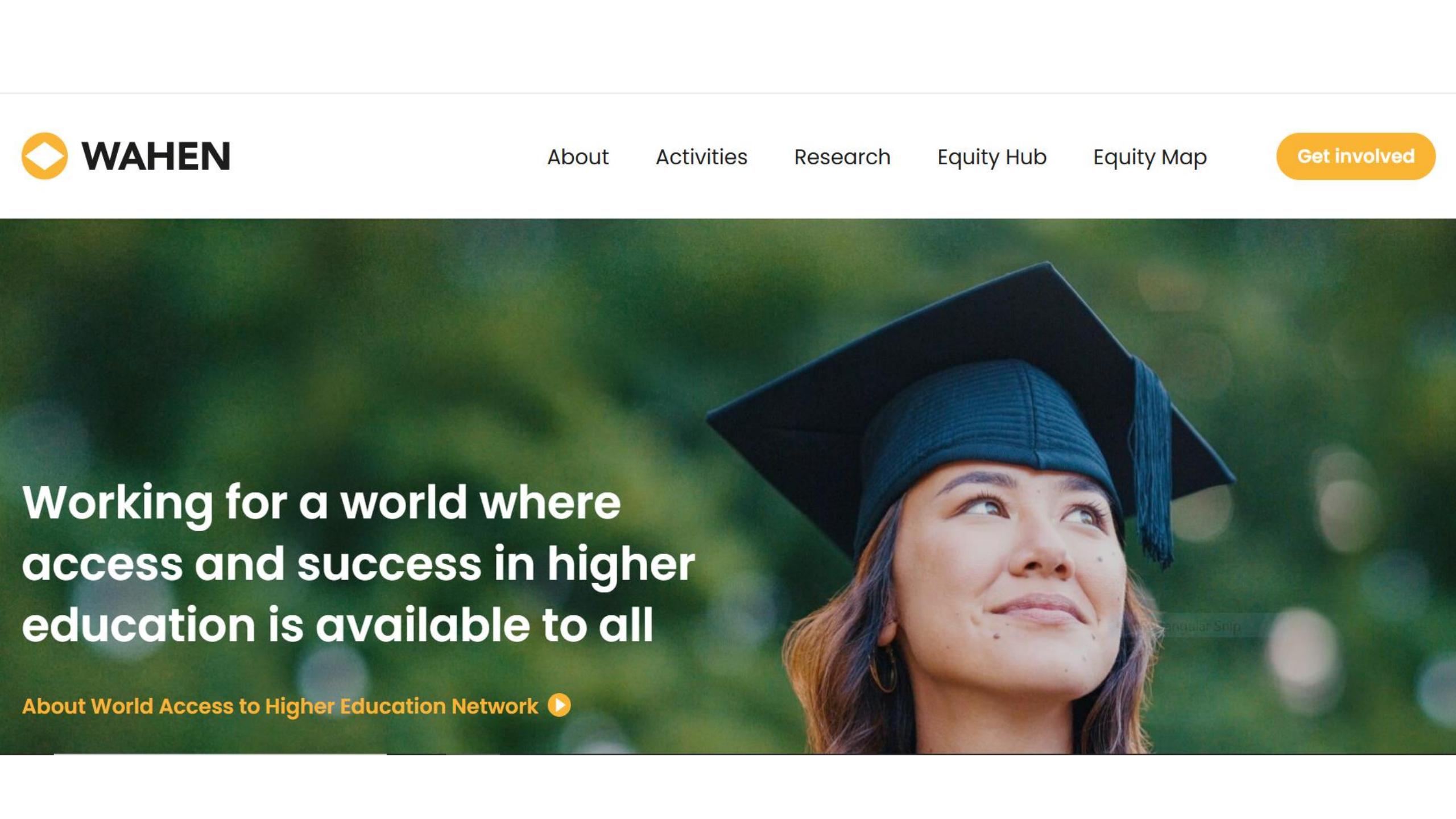


Drawing the Global Access Map 2 – Using Data to Drive Change

What is WAHEN?

#WAHEN

- Launched in December 2024.
- Led by Ruskin College, Oxford which is part of University of West London.
- First global network focused on **equitable access and success in higher education.**
- Follows on from World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED) which ran from 2018-2022.
- Board includes World Bank, UNESCO, Asia-Europe Foundation.

A photograph of a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue graduation cap with a tassel. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting like a park or campus.

**Working for a world where
access and success in higher
education is available to all**

[About World Access to Higher Education Network](#) 

What will WAHEN do



#WAHEN



Drawing the Global Access Map 2:

Understanding higher education
inequality across the world



Drawing the Global Access Map 2

#WAHEN

- Most comprehensive study bringing together data on who participates in higher education by background characteristics.
- Data on gender from 200+ countries and socio-economic backgrounds from circa 150.
- Survey of 55 countries on data collection.

When the data is so different,
how can we measure
and compare?



Data sources

	By gender		By socio-economic background	
	Participation	Attainment	Participation	Attainment
World Bank Open Data hub	✓	✓		
UNESCO's World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE)	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Center of Distributive, Labor and Social Studies (CEDLAS)'s Socioeconomic Database for Latin America and the Caribbean (SEDLAC)		✓	✓	✓
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)				✓
Eurostat				✓
Eurostudent Project			✓	

Inequality by gender - Gender Parity Index (GPI)

Participation/attainment rate of **female**

÷

Participation/attainment rate of **male**

Smaller than 0.97



Fewer female than male

*Fewer low SEB students
than high SEB students*

0.97 to 1.03
Equal

Larger than 1.03

Fewer male than female

*Fewer high SEB students
than low SEB students*

Inequality by socioeconomic background - Socioeconomic Background (SEB) Equality Index

Participation/attainment rate of **lowest SEB group**

÷

Participation/attainment rate of **highest SEB group**

Key Takeaways

#WAHEN

Data
gaps
is still
an issue

Inequality
remains
pervasive

Inequality
is not just
about
money

Progress
is uneven
& fragile

Data gaps is still an issue

Gender and proxy measures of socioeconomic background remain the characteristics about which data is most frequently collected.

Data quality remains a major challenge.

'There is a lack of standardisation and data integration among institutions, with much data also being self-reported and voluntary.'----- Brazil

'Political instability and conflict, especially since 2021, have disrupted data collection systems and reduced institutional capacity. Lack of centralised and updated data systems mean data is often fragmented, outdated, or unavailable at the national level.'----- Afghanistan

Key Takeaways

#WAHEN

Inequality remains pervasive

Inequality by gender is a **GLOBAL** problem

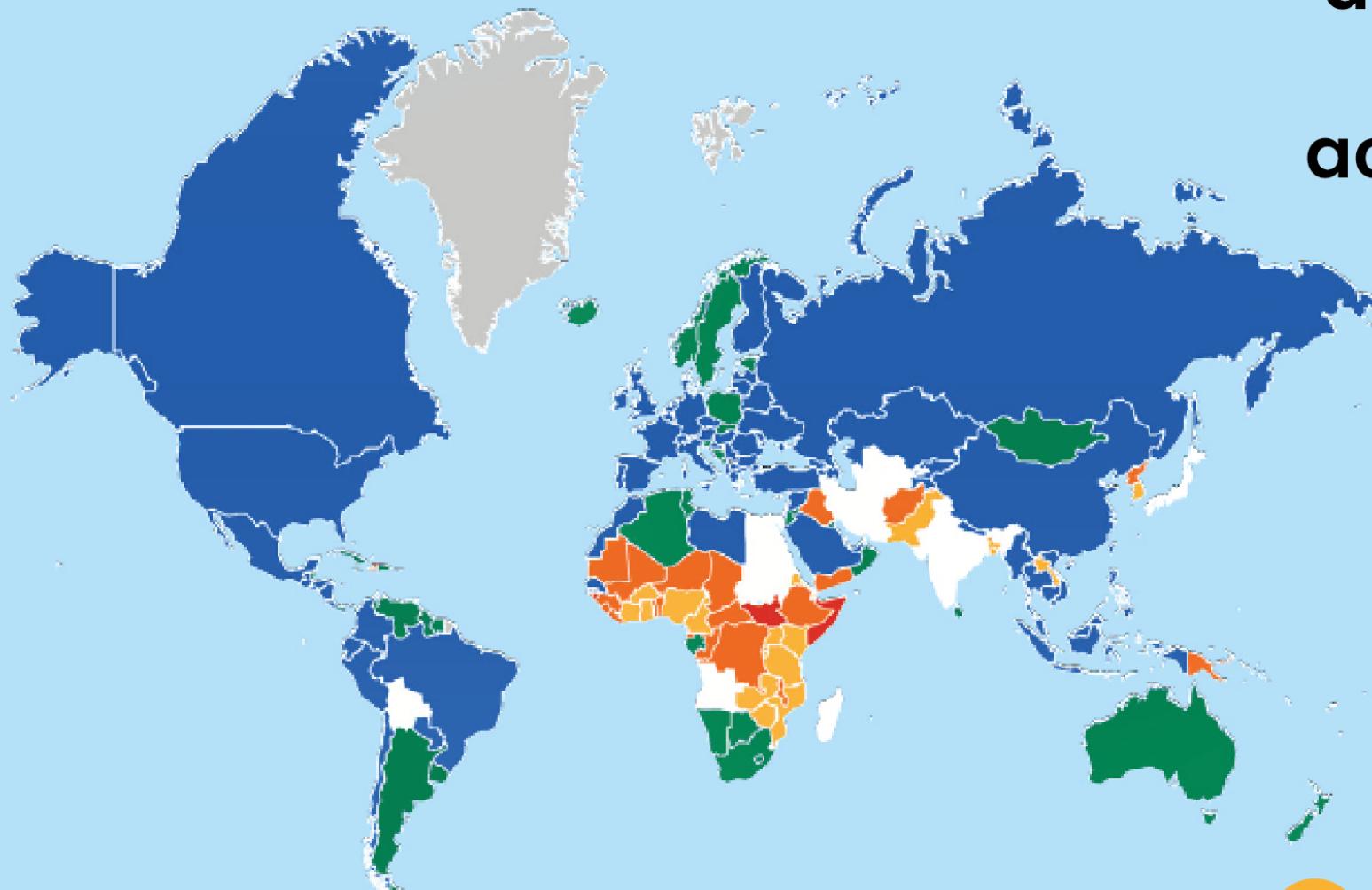
Take higher education participation as an example

Inequality exists in 190 out of 202 countries with data.

Female students are under-represented in 51 countries (25% of countries with data) while male students are under-represented in 139 countries (69% of countries with data).

Only around 12 countries
achieved gender parity
in higher education
access and attainment.

Read the [Drawing the Global Access Map 2](#) report for more.



*Higher education
participation by gender*

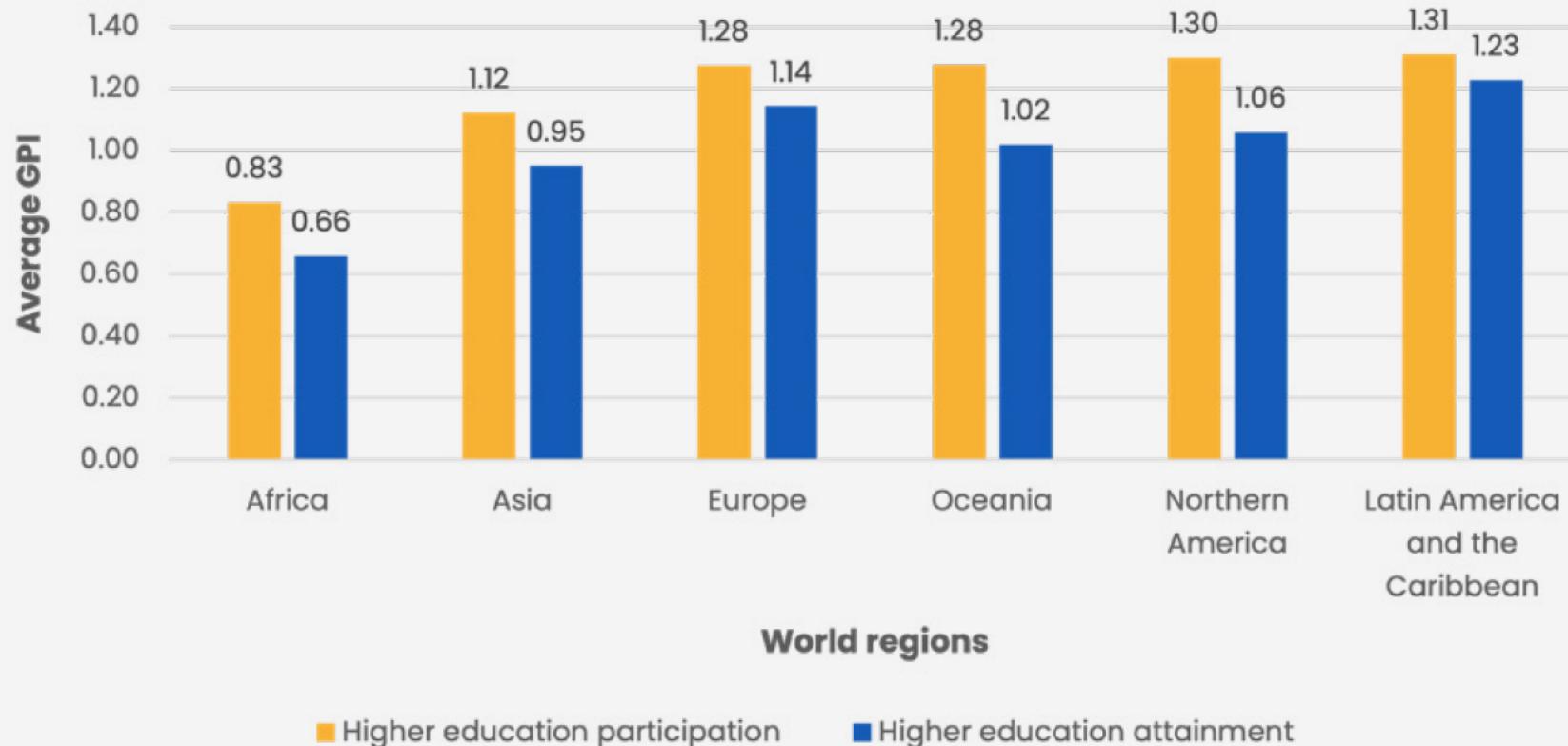
High under-representation of female
Moderate under-representation of female
Slight under-representation of female
Equal
Slight under-representation of male
Moderate under-representation of male
High under-representation of male
No data

Key Takeaways

#WAHEN

Inequality remains pervasive

Average GPI for higher education participation and attainment by regions of the world



Inequality remains pervasive

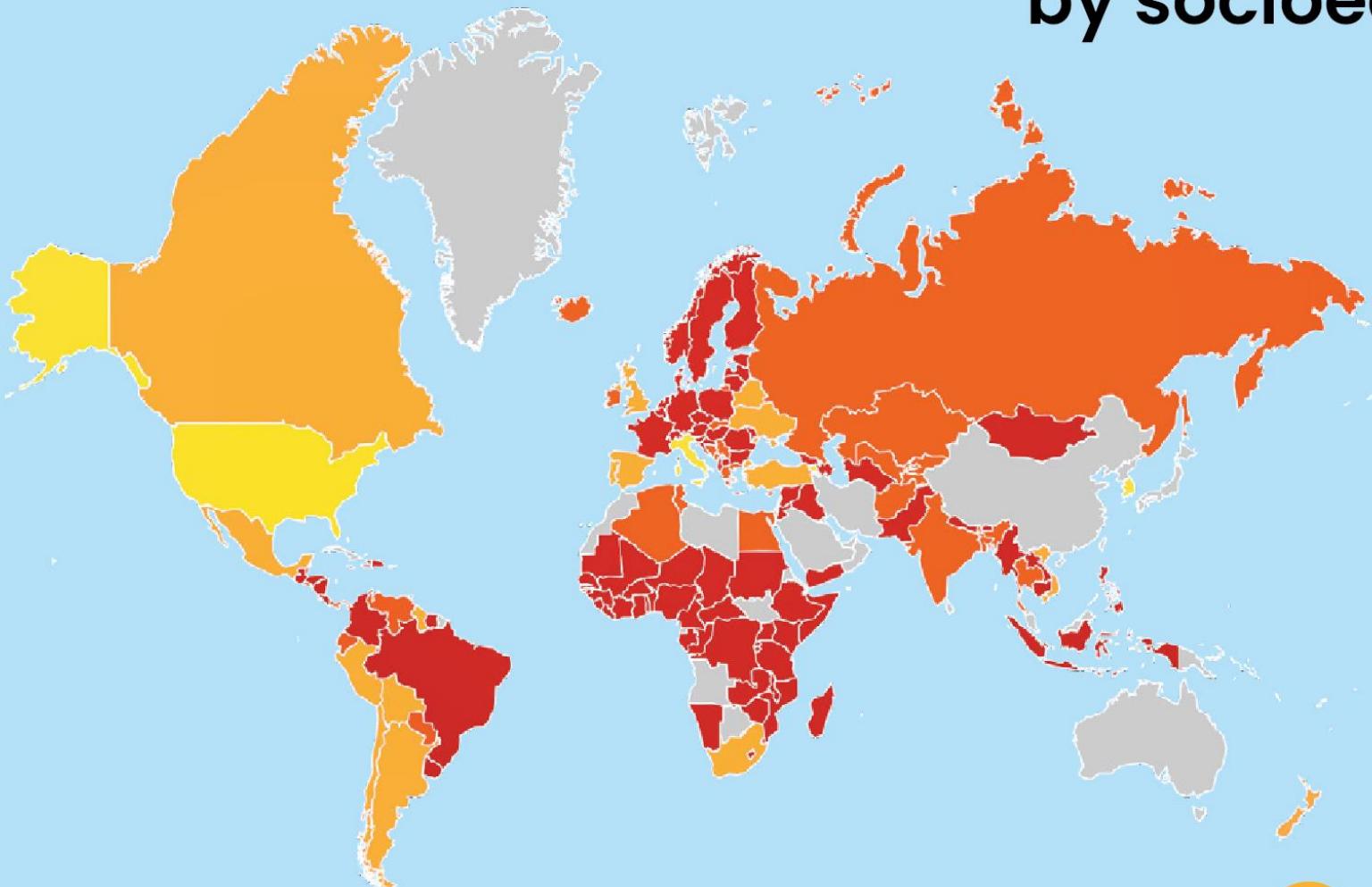
Inequality by socioeconomic background is a **GLOBAL** problem

Take higher education participation as an example

Inequality exists in all countries where we have robust data (150).

In most countries (132), the percentage of students from higher socioeconomic groups participating in higher education is at least double that from lower socioeconomic groups.

Higher education inequality by socioeconomic background exists in all countries where we have data.



Read the [Drawing the Global Access Map 2](#) report for more.

*Higher education participation
by socioeconomic background*

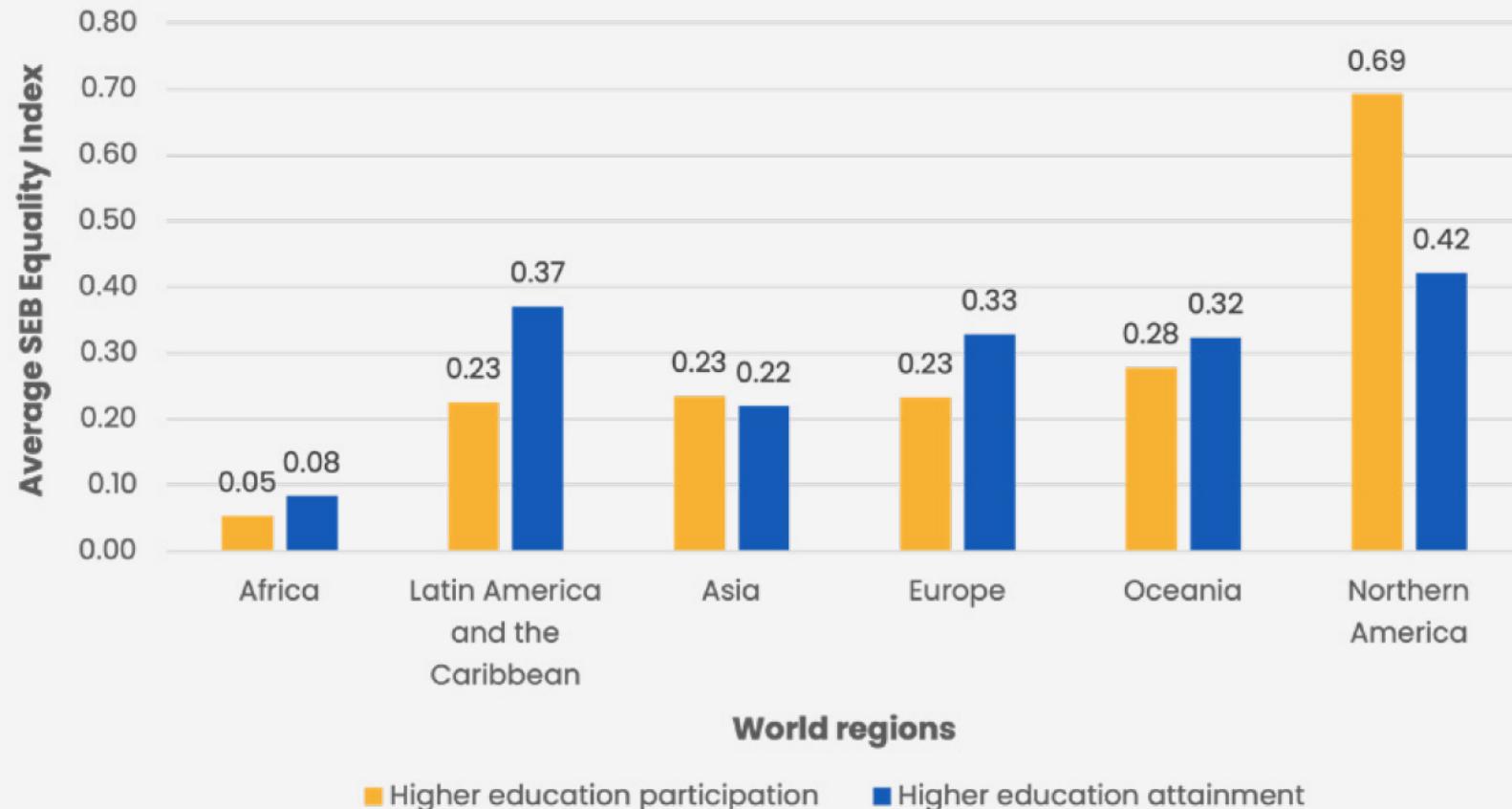
Very highly unequal
Highly unequal
Moderately unequal
Slightly unequal
Equal
No data

Key Takeaways

#WAHEN

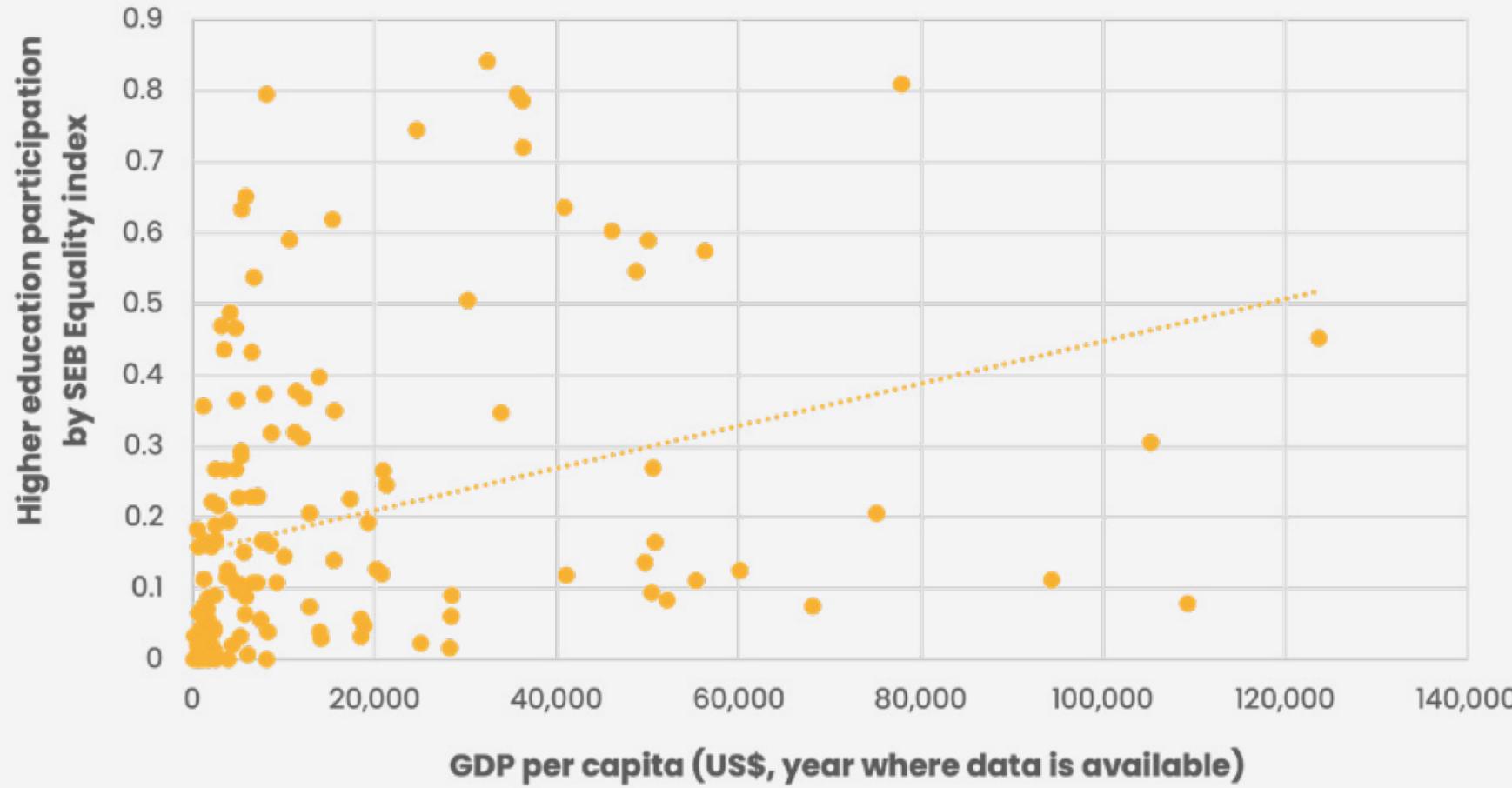
Inequality remains pervasive

Average SEB Equality Index for higher education participation and attainment by regions of the world



Inequality is not just about money

Inequality in higher education participation by socioeconomic background and the national income of the country



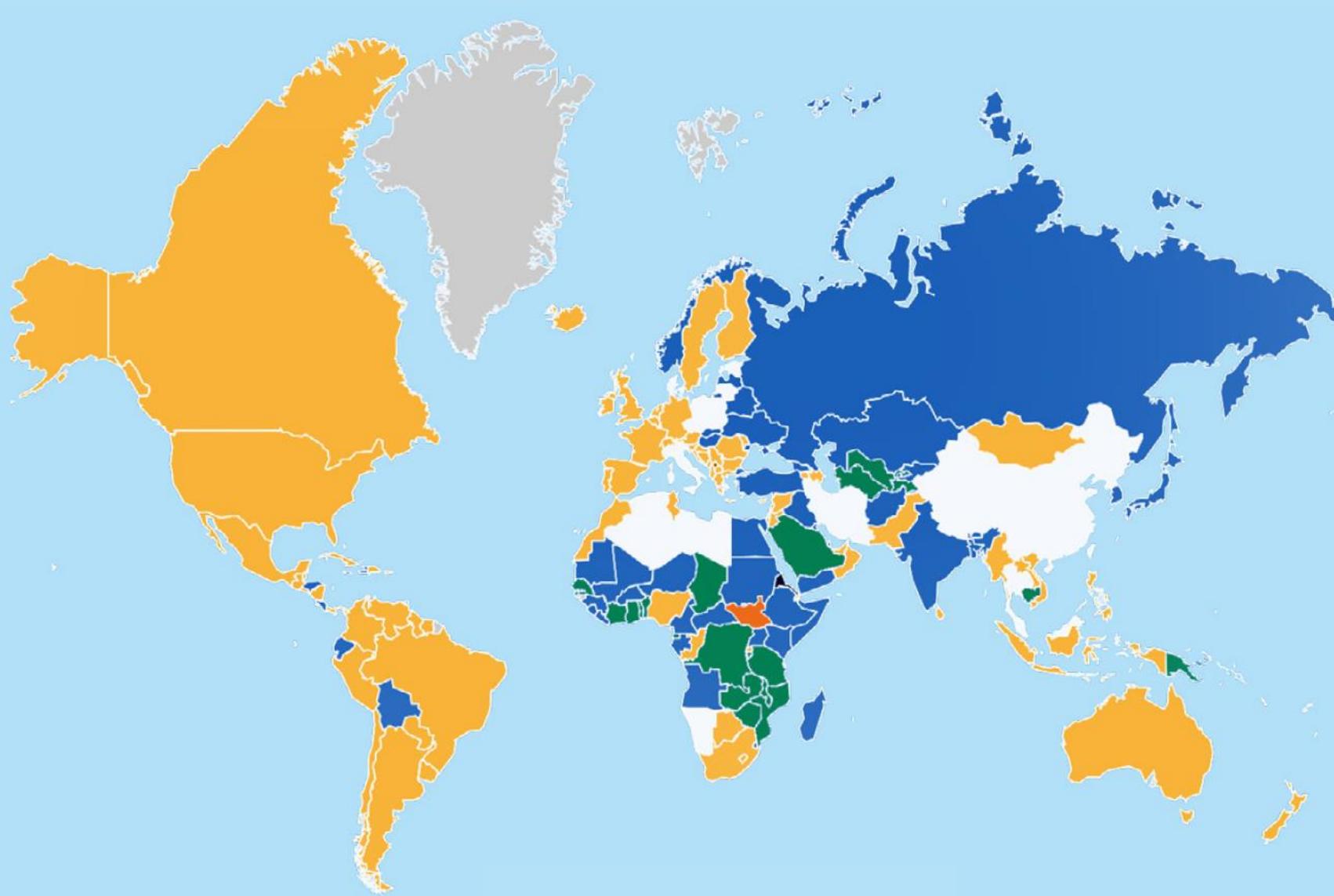
Progress is uneven & fragile

A country has shown progress if:

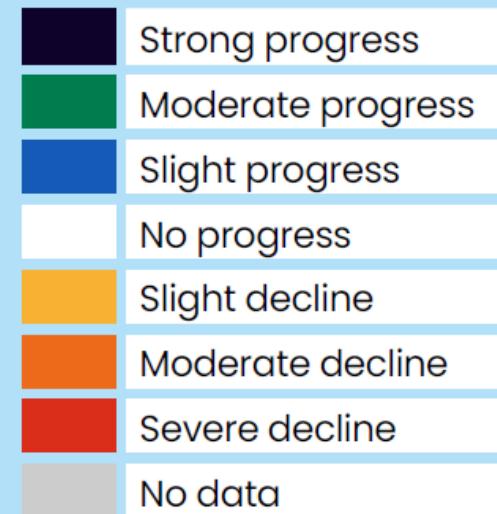
Inequality by gender:
Its Gender Parity Index (GPI)
value has got
Closer to
0.97 to 1.03
Equal

Inequality by socioeconomic
background:
Its Socioeconomic Background
(SEB) Equality Index has
Increased

Changes ranging from -0.01 to 0.01 = no progress over time

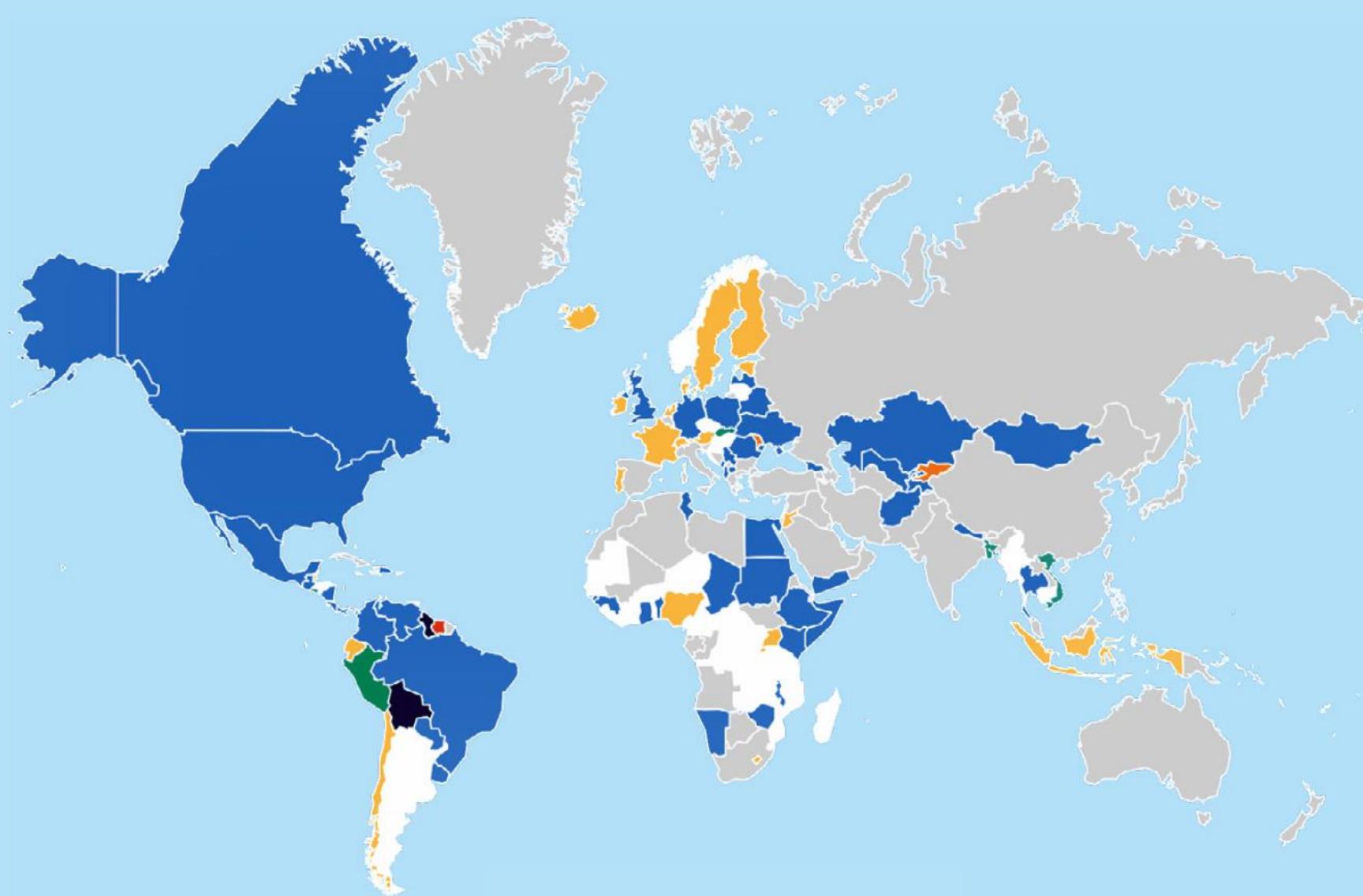


Progress in achieving gender parity in higher education participation

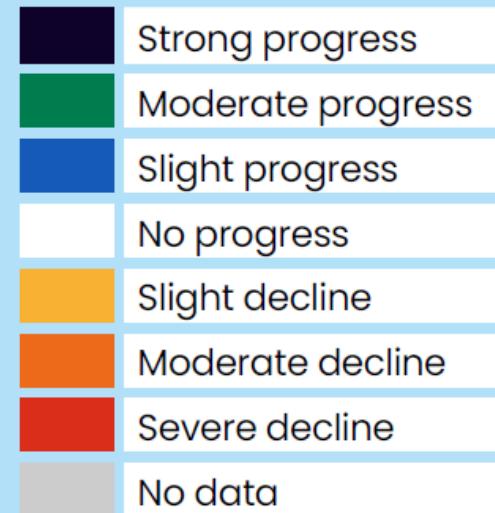


Out of the 197 countries where data were available, 92 have seen gender parity improve, 17 saw no change and in 88 gender parity has worsened.





Progress in reducing inequality in higher education participation by socioeconomic background



Out of the 110 countries where we could find comparative data over time, 57 have made progress, 26 saw no change and in 27 countries inequality has worsened.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1

UNESCO should review the wording of SDG 4.3 to include socio-economic background as well as gender.

2

Governments should construct targets for access & attainment by socio-economic background.

3

Regional agencies should convene constituent countries to share data, improve strategy & push forward the forming of targets.

4

Further research should be done to understand why some countries have made progress, identifying what can be learnt and scaled up globally.

5

University representative organisations should increase their focus on addressing inequalities in access and attainment.

6

International organisations collecting data should share knowledge and explore how to develop a global higher education access data depository.

A large, solid orange circle is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the white background. It is centered vertically and has a slight shadow or gradient effect.

WAHEN
2026

- WAHED membership subscription **opens March 2026 to all organisations** including universities, ministries, NGOs and foundations.
- 8 online global communities
- WAHEN Global Academy
- WAHED 2026
- WAHEN Equity Hub
- WAHEN Quality Mark

Global co-operation crucial in equity, access, social dimension.



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Understanding higher education
inequality across the world



Access the full report

Learn more at:
worldaccesshe.com

