

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Gender Inequality Index (GII)

What is the Gender Inequality Index?

The Gender Inequality Index is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It varies between zero (when women and men fare equally) and one (when men or women fare poorly compared to the other in all dimensions). The health dimension is measured by two indicators: maternal mortality ratio and the adolescent fertility rate. The empowerment dimension is also measured by two indicators: the share of parliamentary seats held by each sex and by secondary and higher education attainment levels. The labour dimension is measured by women's participation in the work force. The Gender Inequality Index is designed to reveal the extent to which national achievements in these aspects of human development are eroded by gender inequality, and to provide empirical foundations for policy analysis and advocacy efforts.

How is the GII calculated, and what are its main findings in terms of national and regional patterns of inequality?

There is no country with perfect gender equality – hence all countries suffer some loss in their HDI achievement when gender inequality is taken into account, through use of the GII metric. The Gender Inequality Index is similar in method to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) – see Technical Note 3 for details. It can be interpreted as a percentage loss to potential human development due to shortfalls in the dimensions included. Since the Gender Inequality Index includes different dimensions than the HDI, it cannot be interpreted as a loss in HDI itself. Unlike the HDI, higher GII values indicate lower achievement.

The world average score on the GII is 0.492, reflecting a percentage loss in achievement across the three dimensions due to gender inequality of 49.2%. Regional averages range from 31% in Europe and Central Asia, to 61% in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the country level losses due to gender inequality range from 4.9% in Sweden, to 76.9% in Yemen. Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arab States suffer the largest losses due to gender inequality (61%, 60.1% and 56.3% respectively). Regional patterns reveal that reproductive health is the largest contributor to gender inequality around the world – women in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a massive 73% loss, suffer the most in this dimension, followed by South Asia (65.9%) and the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean (each with 62.5% loss). The Arab States and South Asia are both also characterized by relatively weak female empowerment.

What are the limitations of the Gender Inequality Index?

The Gender Inequality Index faces major data limitations, which constrains the choice of indicators. For example, we use national parliamentary representation that excludes participation at the local government level and elsewhere in community and public life. The labour market dimension lacks information on incomes, employment and on unpaid work by women. The Index misses other important dimensions, such as time use – the fact that many women have the additional burden of care giving and housekeeping, which cut into leisure time and increase stress and physical exhaustion. Asset ownership, gender-based violence and participation in community decision-making are also not captured, mainly due to limited data availability.

What are the sources of data used for calculating the Gender Inequality Index?

The Gender Inequality Index relies on data from major publicly available databases, including the maternal mortality ratio from UNICEF's The State of the World's Children; adolescent fertility rates from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs World Population Prospects; educational attainment statistics from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics educational attainment tables and the Barro-Lee data sets; parliamentary representation from the International Parliamentary Union; and labour market participation from the International Labour Organization's LABORSTA database.

What is the rationale for using indicators for health without equivalents for men?

It is true that reproductive health indicators used in the Gender Inequality Index do not have equivalent indicators for males. So in this dimension, the reproductive health of girls and women is compared to what should be societal goals—no maternal death, and no adolescent pregnancy. The rationale is that safe motherhood reflects the importance society attaches to women's reproductive role. Early childbearing, as measured by the adolescent fertility rate, is associated with greater health risks for mothers and infants; also, adolescent mothers often are forced out of school and into low-skilled jobs.

Why do many GII indicators have a value of zero?

This year only the parliamentary representation of women in 2 out of 146 countries included in the GII are equal to zero. We replaced the zero value with 0.1% to make the computation possible. The rationale is that while women may not be represented in parliament, they do have some political influence. The relative rank of these countries is sensitive to the choice of the replacement value. The lowest observed non-zero parliamentary representation was 0.7.

Was there any change in 2011 in the calculation of the GII?

Yes, there was an additional normalization of the maternal mortality ratio. The maternal mortality ratio enters the Gender Inequality Index truncated at 10 which affects the range of Gender Inequality Index values which theoretically should be between 0 and 1. This is corrected by normalizing the maternal mortality ratio by 10. This intervention generally reduced the values of the Gender Inequality Index. To facilitate the comparison a trend of the Gender Inequality Index has been calculated. Please see [Gender Inequality Index Trends 1995-2011](#) (UNDP Intranet).

Why has the Gender Inequality Index replaced the Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure used in previous Reports?

The introduction in 1995 of the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) coincided with growing international recognition of the importance of monitoring progress in the elimination of gender gaps in all aspects of life. While the GDI and the GEM have contributed immensely to the gender debate, they have conceptual and methodological limitations. The Gender Inequality Index was introduced as an experimental index in 2010 as part of the 20th anniversary edition of the Human Development Report. Just as the HDI continues to evolve, the Gender Inequality Index will also be refined.

The GDI was not a measure of gender inequality: it was the HDI adjusted for gender disparities in its basic components and cannot be interpreted independently of the HDI. The difference between the HDI and the GDI appears to be small because the differences captured in the three dimensions tend to be small, giving a misleading impression that gender gaps are irrelevant. In

addition, gender-disaggregated incomes have to be estimated in a very crude way using not so realistic assumptions due to the lack of income data by gender for over three-fourths of countries.

Both the GDI and GEM combined relative and absolute achievements. The earned income component uses both—the income level and the gender-disaggregated income shares. However, income levels tend to dominate the indices, and as a result, countries with low income levels cannot achieve a high score even with perfect gender equality in the distribution of earnings and other components of the indices. Nearly all of the GEM indicators reflect an elite bias, making the measure more relevant for developed countries and urban areas in developing countries.

The Gender Inequality Index introduces methodological improvements and alternative indicators. It measures inequality between genders in three dimensions, with carefully chosen indicators to reflect women's reproductive health status, their empowerment and labour market participation relative to men's. The Gender Inequality Index combines elements of the GDI and the GEM. Income, the most controversial component of the GDI and GEM, is not a component of the Gender Inequality Index. Moreover, the new Index does not allow high achievement in one dimension to compensate for low achievement in another dimension.

How is the GII different from other recently released Gender indices?

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGI), released on November 1, 2011, differs from the Human Development Report's GII in many ways. First, the dimensions and indicators are different. Second, the GGI measures gender gaps without taking into consideration a country's level of development. In contrast, the GII shows the loss to potential achievement in a country due to gender inequality across reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation. The Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunity Index (WEOI) is also different in that it focusses on laws and regulations about women's participation in the labour market and social institutions that affect women's economic participation. It has five dimensions—labour policies and practice, women's economic opportunity, access to finance, education and training, women's legal and social status, and general business environment. Each category or sub-category has four to five indicators. Like the OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), the WEOI complements the GII by helping us understand the underlying causes of gender inequalities in economic participation.

What is the policy relevance of the Gender Inequality Index?

The Gender Inequality Index provides insights into gender disparities in health, empowerment and labour market in 146 countries. It can be useful to help governments and others understand the ramifications of gaps between women and men. The Gender Inequality Index, as any other global composite index, is constrained by the need for international comparability. But it could be readily adapted for use at the national or local level.