

2015 HDR

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the Gender Inequality Index (GII) measure and how is it calculated?

The GII is an inequality index. It shows the loss in potential human development due to disparity between female and male achievements in two dimensions, empowerment and economic status, and reflects a country's position relative to normative ideals for the key dimension of women's health. Overall, the GII reflects how women are disadvantaged in these dimensions.

There is no country with perfect gender equality – hence all countries suffer some loss in achievements in key aspects of human development when gender inequality is taken into account. The GII is similar in method to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) – see Technical Note 4 for details. It can be interpreted as a combined loss to achievements in reproductive health, empowerment and labour market participation due to gender inequalities. Since the GII includes different dimensions than the HDI, it cannot be interpreted as a loss in HDI itself. The GII ranges between 0 and 1 and higher GII values indicate higher levels of inequalities.

What are the strengths and limitations of the GII?

The GII includes reproductive health and goes beyond the literacy and primary education. It also reveals gender disparities in labour market participation, instead of using the flawed sex-disaggregated income measure.

Like all composite measures, the GII has some limitations. First, it does not capture the length and breadth of gender inequality. For example, the use of national parliamentary representation excludes participation at the local government level and elsewhere in community and public life. The labour market dimension lacks information on employment, having an adequate job, and unpaid work that is mostly done by women. The index misses other important dimensions, such as time use – the fact that many women have the additional burden of caregiving and housekeeping cuts into their leisure time and increases stress and physical exhaustion. Asset ownership, child care support, gender-based violence and participation in community decision-making are also not captured in the GII, mainly due to limited data availability.

Which data sources are used for calculating the GII?

The GII relies on data from major publicly available international databases, including the maternal mortality ratio from United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-Agency Group (MMEIG), which includes WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank; adolescent birth 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 (IPU); and labour market participation from the International Labour Organization's Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM).

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

Reproductive health indicators used in the GII do not have equivalent indicators for males. In this dimension, the reproductive health of girls and women is compared to what should be the 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 birth 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. Values for men for these two indicators are set at 0, which is the same as the societal goals for women.

What do you do in situations where female parliamentary representation is zero?

Only 4 out of 155 countries included in the GII has female shares of parliamentary seats equal to zero. Because the functional form is multiplicative, we replaced the zero value with 0.1 percent 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 the country is sensitive to the choice of the replacement value. The lowest observed non-zero female shares of parliamentary representation was 0.7% for Yemen.

Was there any change in the calculation of the GII in the 2015 HDR?

No, there has been no change in the calculation of the GII.

What is the policy relevance of the GII?

The GII provides insights into gender disparities in health, empowerment and labour market in 155 countries. It can help governments and others understand the ramifications of gaps in achievements between women and men. The component indicators highlight areas in need of critical policy intervention. The GII, 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.