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FAQ

Gender Inequality Index

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 achievements in key aspects of human development when gender inequality is taken into account. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is similar in method to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) – see Technical Note 3 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. Higher GII values indicate higher inequalities and thus higher loss to human development.

The world average score on the GII is 0.451. It reflects a percentage loss of 45.1% in achievement across the three dimensions due to gender inequality. Regional averages range from 12.6% among European Union member states to nearly 57.8% in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the country level losses due to gender inequality range from 2.1% in Slovenia, to 73.3% in Yemen. Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arab States suffer the largest losses due to gender inequality (57.8%, 53.9% and 54.6% respectively).

What are the limitations of the Gender Inequality Index?

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 national parliamentary representation 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 mostly done 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 international databases, including the maternal mortality ratio from United Nations Maternal Mortality Estimation Group (MMEIG), 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; and labour market participation from the International Labour Organization's Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM) 7th Edition.

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. 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 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.

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

Only 1 out of 152 countries included in the GII have female shares of parliamentary seats equal to zero. Because the functional form is multiplicative, 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 the country is sensitive to the choice of the replacement value. The lowest observed non-zero female parliamentary representation was 0.7% for Yemen.

Was there any change in 2014 in the calculation of the GII?

No, there has been no change in calculation. As in 2011 and 2013 HDR, maternal mortality ratio enters the GII truncated at 10 which affects the range of GII 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 GII. To facilitate the comparison a trend of the Gender Inequality Index based on consistent time series data has been calculated. Please see: Gender Inequality Index (GII) Trend (2000-2013).

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 152 countries. It can help governments and others understand the ramifications of gaps between women and men. 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.