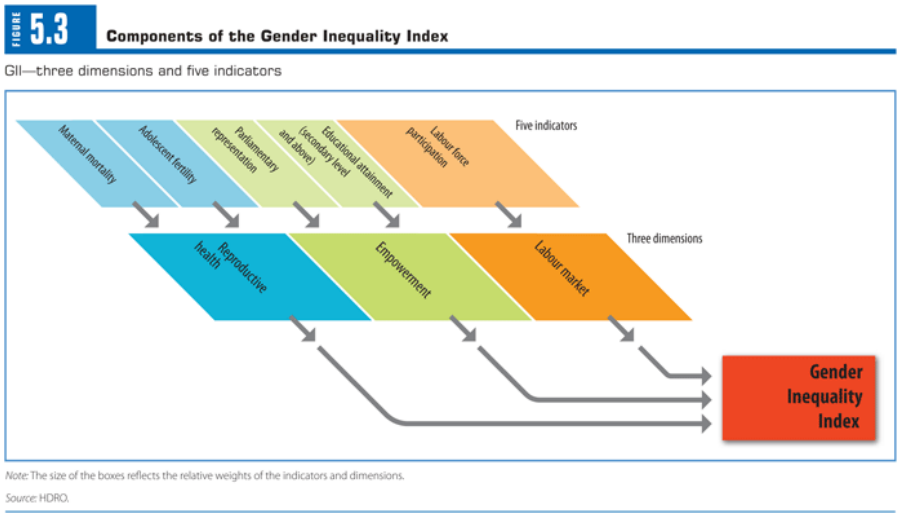
The Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The disadvantages facing women and girls are a major source of inequality. All too often, women and girls are discriminated against in health, education and the labour market — with negative repercussions for their freedoms. We introduce a new measure of these inequalities built on the same framework as the HDI and the IHDI — to better expose differences in the distribution of achievements between women and men.

Gender inequality varies tremendously across countries—the losses in achievement due to gender inequality (not directly comparable to total inequality losses because different variables are used) range from 17 percent to 85 percent.



Countries with unequal distribution of human development also experience high inequality between women and men, and countries with high gender inequality also experience unequal distribution of human development.

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 human development achievements are eroded by gender inequality, and to provide empirical foundations for policy analysis and advocacy efforts.

- What are its main findings in terms of national and regional patterns of inequality?

The world average score on the GII is 0.56, reflecting a percentage loss in achievement across the three dimensions due to gender inequality of 56 percent, Regional averages range from 32 percent in developed OECD countries, to 74 percent in South Asia. At the

country level losses due to gender inequality range from 17 percent in the Netherlands, to 85 percent in Yemen. Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Arab States suffer the largest losses due to gender inequality. Regional patterns reveal that reproductive health is the largest contributor to gender inequality around the world – women in sub-Saharan Africa, with a massive 99 percent loss, suffer the most in this dimension, followed by South Asia (98 percent) and the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean (each with 96 percent loss). The Arab States and South Asia are both also characterized by relatively weak female empowerment.

- How can the GII be interpreted?

The Gender Inequality Index is similar in method to the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (HDI) – 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 to the HDI, unlike the IHDI, it cannot be interpreted as the loss in HDI itself. Unlike the HDI, higher values of the GII indicate worse achievements.

- What are the limitations of the Gender Inequality Index?

The Gender Inequality Index faces very major data limitations, which constrained 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. Also, 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 exhaustion is not taken into consideration. Asset ownership, gender-based violence and participation in community-level decision making are also not captured, mainly due to limited availability of data in these areas.

- 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 maternal mortality ratio from UNICEF's *The State of the World's Children*, adolescent fertility rates from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affair's *World Population Prospects*, educational attainment statistics from 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 the indicators for health when there are no equivalents for males?

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.

Reproduction is risky, and often begins too early, compromising health and future opportunities. 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.

- How do you calculate the Gender Inequality Index when some of indicators have a value of zero?

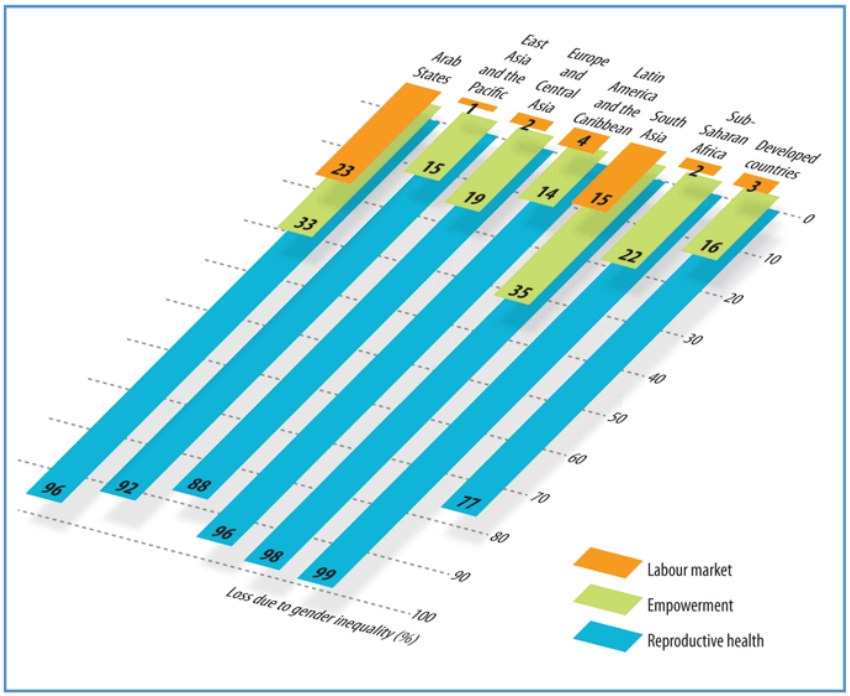
This year only the parliamentary representation of women in 2 out of 138 countries are equal to zero. We replaced the zero value with 0.1 percent to make the computation possible. The rationale is that while women may not be represented in parliament, they do have some political influence. The relative rank of these countries is sensitive to the choice of the replacement value. The lowest observed non-zero parliamentary representation was 0.7.

- Does the new Gender Inequality Index replace previous Reports' Gender Development Index and Gender Empowerment Measure?

Yes. 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. In the 20th anniversary edition of the *Human Development Report*, the Gender Inequality Index has been introduced as an experimental index. It is not a perfect measure. Just as the HDI continues to evolve, the Gender Inequality Index will also be refined.

FIGURE 5.5 Reproductive health is the largest contributor to gender inequality

Loss due to gender inequality, by region



Source: HDRO calculations using data from the HDRO database.

- What were the main limitations of the previous gender measures (the GDI and GEM)?

The GDI is not a measure of gender inequality; it is 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 indexes, 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 indexes. Also, nearly all of the GEM indicators reflect a strong elite bias making the measure more relevant for developed countries and urban elites in developing countries. Further, the indicators used as proxy do not correspond to the underlying concept.

- How does the Gender Inequality Index overcome these limitations?

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. However, like the GDI, one cannot determine which of the sexes is better off by looking at the value.

- 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 almost 140 countries. It can be useful to help governments and others better understand the gaps between women and men.

- How are the Inequality-adjusted HDI and Gender Inequality Index related?

The Inequality-adjusted HDI defines the loss in human development, as measured by the HDI, due to inequality in distribution of health, education and standard of living across a population. The Gender Inequality Index measures the loss in human development due to inequality in reproductive health, empowerment and labour market between women and men. Losses in HDI and the Gender Inequality Index are highly correlated (0.87), indicating that unequal distribution of human development is strongly associated with gender inequality.

- Can the indicators be adapted at the country level?

Yes. The Gender Inequality Index, as any other global composite index, is constrained by the need of comparability. However, national teams can use the indicators that may make more sense. Also, the functional form allows easy extension to more indicators and dimensions.

- Will the Gender Inequality Index become a permanent feature of UNDP's global Human Development Report?

The Gender Inequality Index is one of three experimental indices introduced in 2010, alongside the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index and the Multidimensional Poverty Index. It will be revised and improved in light of feedback and data availability.

- What is the difference between the 2010 Human Development Report's Gender Inequality Index (GII) and other recently released Gender indices?

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGI), released in October 2010, differs from the Human Development Report's GII in many ways. First, the dimensions and indicators are different. Second, 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. Another recent gender index -the Economist Intelligence Unit's Women's Economic Opportunity Index (WEOI), launched earlier this year –focuses 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 policy 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 because it helps us to understand the underlying causes of gender inequalities in economic participation.

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