

Event Report: The European Institute for Gender Equality presents the Gender Equality Index

Author bio for Laura de Bonfils

Laura de Bonfils joined EIGE in 2012 to work on the Index. She has previous experience working in communications for different organisations in the UK and Italy. She studied Communication and Journalism in Rome at LUMSA University and in Madrid at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos and completed an MSc in Gender, Media and Culture at the London School of Economics and Political Science with her research focus on the representation of sexuality and LGBT rights.

Measuring gender equality is not an easy task given different conceptions of what is to be measured and how. Composite indicators are one way in which to measure gender equality and several have been developed at the international level, but none of the existing ones provided an adequate tool for Member State comparisons at the EU level.


The Gender Equality Index, presented at the LSE on 24 October 2013, is the first synthetic statistical tool that aims to map and measure the complexity of gender equality, drawing on the policy priorities of the European Union. **The event**, hosted by the LSE Gender Institute, brought together researchers of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),

LSE Staff and postgraduate students to discuss and engage with the findings of the Gender Equality Index and build networks for future research and collaboration.

A composite indicator is obtained when individual indicators are compiled into a single measure, on the basis of a multidimensional concept, in other words a complex reality is described by aggregating together different concepts through statistics in a meaningful way. The Gender Equality Index does not represent the first attempt to measure gender equality through such a composite indicator. The two initial gender indices have been developed by the UNDP: the Gender-related Development Index, which is based on the Human Development Index, created originally in 1990, with the addition of the desegregation by sex, and the Gender Empowerment Measure. Numerous studies have attempted to expand on the conceptual frameworks of the initial gender indices, with some attempt to construct alternative indices such as: the Gender Inequality Index by UNDP; the Gender Gap Index by the World Economic Forum; the Gender Equity Index realised by the Social Watch and Social Institutions and the Gender Index by OECD.

LSE EIGE presentation of gender equality index

The EIGE's Gender Equality Index combines gender indicators into a single summary measure according to a conceptual framework based on the EU policy priorities. It takes into account the situation of women and men in various aspects of economic and social life, defined as domains, including those where men are in disadvantaged situations. It consists of six core domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, health and two satellite domains, intersecting inequalities and violence. The satellite domains are conceptually related to gender equality, but cannot be included in the core index because they measure a specific phenomenon that applies only to a selected group of the population. For example the domain violence measures gender-based violence against women while intersecting inequalities examines gender gaps among specific population groups (people with disabilities, lone parents, migrants etc.).

The Index is organised in a hierarchical tree structure based on a conceptual framework developed after an analysis of key policy documents at the EU level and international level, theoretical equality frameworks and relevant academic literature. It provides results at the domain and sub-domain level for the EU overall and for each Member State. It provides a measure of how far (or close) each Member State was from achieving complete gender equality in 2010. **The index** assigns a score from 1 (total inequality) to 100 (full equality). 

The Gender Equality Index relies on gender gaps, that is the difference in the levels of achievement between women and men on a given indicator. No distinction is made as to the direction of this gap, without showing whether it is in favour of men or women. The gaps are adjusted to levels of achievement. For example a high score needs to be the reflection of both a low gender gap but also a high level of participation in the labour market or education. These levels are taken into account in order to avoid situations misinterpreting low gaps as positive gains, since these low gaps might just mean adverse conditions for both women and men. For example, the impact of the economic crisis would show the temporary reduction in certain gender gaps, hiding the worsening of conditions for both women and men.

The results have shown that although gender equality is considered as a fundamental value in the European Union, it is still far from being a reality. The EU is only halfway toward reaching full gender equality: the average score of the 27 EU countries is just 54.0, although there are large differences between Member States. The scale ranges from 35.3 to 74.3, with Romania at the bottom and Sweden leading. The UK scores only 60.4 despite ranking 5th in the Index. The biggest gaps are identified in the areas of decision-making (Power 38.0 for the EU-27) and the division of time (Time 38.8 EU-27). The Index also highlights the absence of suitable data at the EU level to measure gender-based violence against women. These findings show that there is still a lot to do in order to achieve and to measure gender equality.


Gender equality index scores

The Gender Equality Index is the result of three years of work of the EIGE, the European Agency whose mandate is to study gender equality, based in Vilnius, Lithuania. The need for a composite indicator was originally introduced by the European Commission in the [Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006-10](#) and included in the [action plan](#) of its [Strategy for Equality between women and men 2010-15](#). The Index was first presented to the public at a conference in Brussels on 13 June 2013.

The recent LSE presentation aimed at explaining the findings of the Index, and the discussion explored new ways of improving the measurement of such a complex concept, opening up debate on different approaches, studies and research. Questions raised during the discussion included identifying new indicators for example regarding the measurement of gender-based violence included in the Index as an empty domain for the lack of harmonised and comparable gender indicators at the EU level. Since, as explained by the EIGE team, principles of crime classification systems for statistical use have yet to be established in the EU and the possibility of obtaining comparable administrative data is also very limited because there is no common methodology agreed within the Member States. For this reason it was chosen to include the domain of *violence* as a clear call for data at the EU level.

The EIGE team explained the constraints encountered due to the availability of data, and the lack in some domains of specific gender indicators with the right definitions. For example in the domain of money, individual rather than household level indicators could measure gender differences in a more sensitive way. This means that the indicators which are included in the domain of money (mean equivalised income, income distribution, at-risk-of-poverty) are collected at the household level and rely on the assumption of equal distribution of financial resources between members of the household. This ignores possible power relations within the family, and thus underestimates the true extent of gender gaps in this domain.

Moreover, some sub-domains could not be measured due to lack of available or comparable data across EU member states, such as social power in decision-making or health behaviour. The research illustrated that the time domain could be greatly improved if the Index could use the data of a time-use survey[1], which at the moment does not cover all the Member States.

The presentation showed that this tool is not enough to provide a complete picture of the situation of gender (in)equality in the EU, and must be analysed together with other indicators  and

research. The Index is based on individual-level variables bound by stringent statistical requirements for building a composite indicator. But these scores must be considered in connection with other institutional or macro-level variables, legal frameworks, policy measures, and services and qualitative studies. This is why the EIGE, in addition to the [Report on the Index](#), also publishes the [Country Profiles](#), which contains additional information intended to give a fuller picture. Nevertheless, the Gender Equality Index provides a valuable instrument for evidence-based policy making and research, and for advocating for greater gender equality. All the information is available online in a dedicated [website](#) and the Index will be updated every two years (2015).

The event was inspiring, and the questions provoked interesting discussions that were critical but constructive. I want to thank all the participants for attending the event and participating in the discussion.

[1] The Gender Equality Index uses Indicators taken from Eurofound's European working conditions survey

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