The unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender is a deeply rooted problem in most societies. It started becoming an important part of academic research in the 1980s. The issue of gender inequality also became, in various measures, part of the Human Development Index (HDI), the annual report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and was eventually integrated as the Gender Inequality Index (GII) in the 2010 report. It is designed to measure the loss of achievement within a country caused by gender inequality.

According to the report, discrimination and under-representation of women in health, education, politics, work and other parts of life has repercussions for the development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice. Four of these aspects form the index which puts them in a globally measurable and comparable form: reproductive health is measured by the maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; female empowerment is measured by the proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females; education is expressed by the proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; the economic status is included as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older. Using these aspects, the index shows human development costs of gender inequality. A higher GII value relates to more disparities between females and males within a country.

While gender inequality remains a problem even in the more equal societies, it is a major barrier to human development in others, with the worst performing in the two highest quintiles of the data (having index values of 0.45 and above) covering a substantial part of the global population, most notably the African continent and the Indian subcontinent.

The cartogram above shows this in its real human dimensions. The map is a gridded population cartogram in which every square of land is resized according to the total number of people living in that space. The transformed map therefore shows the gender inequality index on an equal population projection, emphasizing where and how many people live in the more equal or unequal societies. This highlights the high need for action combating gender gaps for a large share of the world’s population in order to overcome systematic disadvantages of women.

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