

Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap



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Overview

This study¹ is a first attempt by the World Economic Forum to assess the current size of the gender gap by measuring the extent to which women in 58 countries have achieved equality with men in five critical areas: economic participation, economic opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies are misallocating their human resources and undermining their competitive potential. Consolidating publicly available data from international organizations, national statistics and unique survey data from the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey, the study assesses the status accorded to women in a broad range of countries.

Even in light of heightened international awareness of gender issues, it is a disturbing reality that no country has yet managed to eliminate the gender gap. Those that have succeeded best in narrowing the gap are the Nordic countries, with Sweden standing out as the most advanced in the world. These are followed by New Zealand (6), Canada (7), United Kingdom (8), Germany (9) and Australia (10), countries that have made considerable progress in recent decades in removing obstacles to the full participation of women in their respective societies. France (13) ranked ahead of the United States (17) among the 58 nations. Seven East European nations hold places among the top 25, with Latvia (11), Lithuania (12) and Estonia (15) the highest ranking in that group. Switzerland (34), Italy (45) and Greece (50) perform poorly, lower in rank than many of the East European group, and below Latin American nations such as Costa Rica (18), Colombia (30) and Uruguay (32). Brazil (51), Mexico (52), India (53), Korea (54), Jordan (55), Pakistan (56), Turkey (57) and Egypt (58) occupy the lowest ranks.

These country comparisons are meant to serve a dual purpose: as a benchmark to identify existing strengths and weaknesses, and as a useful guide for policy, based on learning from the experiences of those countries that have had greater success in promoting the equality of women and men. The study provides concrete measures of the gender gap within the five categories identified above, providing an unambiguous framework for future policy-making in each of the countries. By quantifying the size of the gap in each of five key categories, the study highlights the priority areas for reform.

The Status of Women: Current Reality

The past three decades have witnessed a steadily increasing awareness of the need to empower women through measures to increase social, economic and political equity, and broader access to fundamental human rights, improvements in nutrition, basic health and education. Along with awareness of the subordinate status of women has come the concept of gender as an overarching socio-cultural variable, seen in relation to other factors, such as race, class, age and ethnicity. Gender is not synonymous with women, nor is it a zero-sum game implying loss for men; rather, it refers to both women and men, and to their status, relative to each other. Gender equality refers to that stage of human social development at which "the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female,"² in other words, a stage when both men and women realize their full potential.

In recognition of the importance of establishing gender equality around the world, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established as a separate fund within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1984. At that time, the General Assembly instructed it to "ensure women's involvement with mainstream activities."³ The Platform of Action resulting from the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women expanded this concept, calling it "gender mainstreaming"—i.e. the application of gender perspectives to all legal and social norms and standards, to all policy development, research, planning, advocacy, development, implementation and monitoring—as a mandate for all member states.⁴ In this way, the gender factor is no longer to be only a supplement to development but central to the practice of development. As a result of the Beijing conference—and the many years of work leading up to it—more than 100 countries announced new initiatives to improve the status of women. In 2000, the follow-up Beijing +5 conference further strengthened the application of the mainstreaming concept, and used it to highlight the need for more progress in reaching equality worldwide.

Achieving gender equality, however, is a grindingly slow process, since it challenges one of the most deeply entrenched of all human attitudes. Despite the intense efforts of many agencies and organizations, and numerous inspiring successes, the picture is still disheartening, as it takes far more than changes in law or stated policy to change practices in the home,

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community and in the decision-making environment. In many parts of the world rape is not considered a crime, goes unpunished and continues to be used as a tool of war. Even in highly developed countries, violence against women of all kinds is routine, and often condoned. Female sexual slavery and forced prostitution are still terrible “facts of life” for poor, often very young, women. Genetic testing for defects of the unborn is used in some parts of the world to determine the sex of the foetus, so that females can be aborted⁵, while in some countries, female infants are buried alive. Forced marriage and bride-burning are still prevalent in the Asian sub-continent.⁶ A pregnant woman in Africa is 180 times more likely to die of pregnancy complications than in western Europe.⁷ Women, mostly in rural areas, represent more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults.⁸ In the United States, 90% of AIDS cases under 20 years of age are girls.⁹ In many developed countries, where basic gender equality appears to have been achieved, the battlefield has shifted to removing the more intangible discrimination against working women. Women still hold only 15.6% of elected parliamentary seats globally.¹⁰

It is clear that the world has a long way to go to achieve equality and that this work will require concentrated efforts on many fronts. The work of the United Nations and many other agencies in advancing gender equality has converged in three closely interconnected areas: strengthening women's economic capacity, with a focus on new technologies and the new trade agenda; promoting women's leadership and political participation; eliminating violence against women and supporting the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Contribution of the World Economic Forum

In recent years, the Women Leaders Programme of the World Economic Forum has been focused on supporting the advancement of women to positions of leadership in society, and on promoting consideration of other issues affecting women's lives. Furthermore, for the past four years, the Forum's Global Competitiveness Reports have provided data on the qualitative aspects of women's participation in the workforce. The Forum has begun to explicitly incorporate in its measures of competitiveness aspects of gender equality, recognizing that, far from being a matter of mere political correctness, the advancement of women is an important strategic issue. Countries

which do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their societies are misallocating their human resources and compromising their competitive potential.¹¹

Despite worldwide evidence of the low levels of female participation in social, educational, economic and political spheres, there is still a tendency to see it as a real problem only in a limited number of countries. Yet, as noted above, the reality is that no country in the world, no matter how advanced, has achieved true gender equality, as measured by comparable decision-making power, equal opportunity for education and advancement, and equal participation and status in all walks of human endeavour. Gender disparities exist, even in countries without glaring male-domination, and measuring these disparities is a necessary step towards implementing corrective policies. Yet measurement is challenging and country performance difficult to assess using disaggregated and diverse data for each nation. Our study is an attempt to consolidate these data in a manner that allows us to take a closer and more structured look at relative country strengths and weaknesses.

The year 2005 marks the tenth anniversary of the Beijing World Conference on Women, bringing renewed focus and energy to the efforts to empower women. Thus, it is timely for the Forum to undertake the present study, in order to facilitate the work of aid agencies, governments and policy-makers by providing a benchmarking tool to assess the size of the gender gap in 58 countries, ranking these nations according to the level of advancement of their female population and identifying successes and failures, based on economic, political, educational and health-based criteria.

Criteria for Measurement

Five important dimensions of female empowerment and opportunity have been chosen for examination, based mainly on the findings of UNIFEM, concerning global patterns of inequality between men and women:

1. Economic participation
2. Economic opportunity
3. Political empowerment
4. Educational attainment
5. Health and well-being

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The gender gap in each dimension is then quantified using two types of recent available data: a) published national statistics and data from international organizations, and b) survey data of a qualitative nature from the annual Executive Opinion Survey of the World Economic Forum. Following, is a brief description of each of the five categories and the rationale behind them. Details of the specific variables examined and their sources may be found in the Appendix.

The **economic participation** of women—their presence in the workforce in quantitative terms—is important not only for lowering the disproportionate levels of poverty among women, but also as an important step toward raising household income and encouraging economic development in countries as a whole.

Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help, and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly buttressed by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.¹² Economic participation concerns not only the actual numbers of women participating in the labour force, but also their remuneration on an equal basis. Worldwide, outside of the agricultural sector, in both developed and developing countries, women are still averaging slightly less than 78% of the wages given to men for the same work, a gap which refuses to close in even the most developed countries.¹³

While globalization has generated opportunities for local producers and entrepreneurs to reach international markets, it has at times intensified existing inequalities and insecurities for many poor women, who already represent two-thirds of the world's poorest people.¹⁴ Since the gains of globalization are often concentrated in the hands of those with higher education—those who own resources and have access to capital—poor women are usually the least able to seize the longer-term opportunities offered. Instead, as demonstrated in East Asia in the 1990s, it is all too often the case that women are only able to secure employment during rapid expansions, employment that is usually transitory and insecure, and performed under harsh conditions.¹⁵

Globalization has dramatically changed the conditions under which the struggle for gender equality must be carried out, especially in developing countries. One of the important tools of gender mainstreaming, aimed principally at poverty reduction, has been the

concept of “gender budgeting,” i.e. focusing attention in the process of budget formulation within a given country in order to assess whether a particular fiscal measure will increase or decrease gender equality, or leave it unchanged.¹⁶ Gender budget initiatives (GBIs) not only identify targeted expenditures, or allocate more money to women, but also aim to “break down and identify the differentiated impact and incidence of general public revenue and expenditure on women and men...[and] significantly contribute to overall objectives like equity, equality, efficiency, transparency, the realization of social, economic and cultural rights, and good governance,”¹⁷ thus offering a practical way of evaluating government action (or inaction). Close monitoring and analysis of gender effects has become a mechanism for holding policy-makers increasingly accountable for the impact of policies on the lives of both women and men, so that the large percentage of women who participate economically in the informal sector, and who in some parts of the world provide upwards of 70% of agricultural labour, and produce over 90% of the food—yet are nowhere represented in budget deliberations—can be taken into account in the economic adjustment measures which might directly affect their welfare.

The present study attempts to capture the gap between men and women in terms of economic participation by comparing unemployment levels, the levels of economic activity and remuneration for equal work.

Economic opportunity concerns the *quality* of women's economic involvement, beyond their mere presence as workers. This is a particularly serious problem in developed countries, where women may gain employment with relative ease, but where their employment is either concentrated in poorly paid or unskilled job “ghettos,” characterized by the absence of upward mobility and opportunity. This is most commonly the result of negative or obstructive attitudes, and of legal and social systems which use maternity laws and benefits to penalize women economically for childbirth and child care responsibilities, and discourage—or actively prevent—men from sharing family responsibilities.

The ghettoization of female labour is a phenomenon which crosses all cultural boundaries, and professions, affecting women in virtually all countries. Internationally, women are most often concentrated in “feminized” professions, such as nursing and teaching, office work, care of the elderly and disabled—termed “horizontal occupational segregation”—where they tend to remain in lower job categories than men. Typically, because

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these functions are carried out by women, they are the lowest paid, in addition to offering limited or no opportunity for advancement. The term “feminization of poverty” is often used to illustrate the fact that the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on US\$1 a day or less are women and that the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has not lessened, but may well have widened in the past decade.¹⁸

At the other end of the spectrum, advancement within professions, such as law, medicine and engineering, in which women are increasingly well represented in developed countries, is of great concern. One survey of graduates carried out by Yale Law Women points to the growing numbers of women attorneys (25-35%), only a small number of whom are partners in firms (5-15%), and to the importance of what they call “family-friendly” and “female-friendly” practices in the profession.¹⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) figures indicate that the vast majority of the world's countries offer paid maternity leave, often with a guaranteed wage of 50-100% of salary. Interestingly, the United States offers women 12 weeks, but with no pay whatsoever, putting it in league with Lesotho, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea.²⁰

Although, as of 2000, women are wage-employed in roughly equal numbers with men worldwide, the number of women represented in managerial positions is much smaller. Women have made slow and uneven progress in obtaining a share of managerial positions, which, according to 2002 statistics of the ILO, ranged between 20-40% in 48 out of 63 countries.²¹ In addition, women who are in managerial positions often need to make a painful choice between a successful career and family. A study in the United States has found 49% of high-achieving women to be childless, as compared with only 19% of their male colleagues.²²

In this study, we use data on the duration of maternity leave, the percentage of wages paid during the covered period and the number of women in managerial positions to capture the variation between the economic opportunities available to women in different countries. In addition, we have included a unique dataset on qualitative elements such as the availability of government-provided childcare, the impact of maternity laws on the hiring of women, and wage inequalities between men and women for private sector employment. These data, obtained from the World

Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey, are particularly useful in quantifying “ground-level” realities. Very often there are discrepancies between the *de jure* environment and the *de facto* situation. By quantifying the perceptions of business leaders in the 58 countries these anomalies can be identified.

Political empowerment refers to the equitable representation of women in decision-making structures, both formal and informal, and their voice in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The Inter-Parliamentary Union reports a world average of only 15.6% in combined houses of parliament. The statistics by region offer few surprises, ranging from 6.8% in the Arab States to 18.6% in the Americas, and 39.7% in the Nordic states.²³ While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, they are rarer still in the upper echelons of decision-making. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national, regional and local priorities—i.e. how resources are allocated—are typically defined without meaningful input from women, whose life experience gives them a different awareness of the community's needs, concerns and interests from that of men. For example, a study in three widely differing countries (Bolivia, Cameroon and Malaysia) showed that, were women to have a greater say in spending priorities, they would be far more likely to spend family and community resources for improving health, education, community infrastructure and the eradication of poverty, as opposed to the military, alcohol or gambling.²⁴ Indeed, the demand for changed priorities is heard from virtually all women's organizations, from the most advanced and politically savvy in developed countries, to fledgling women's NGOs in the developing world. However, in order for spending and development priorities to change, there must be at least a critical mass of women represented, who are learning the rules, using the rules and changing the rules of the decision-making “game,” and thus having an impact on discourse and decisions at all levels, from the family, to the nation, to the international community.

Here, we have measured the dimension of political empowerment by using data on the number of female ministers, seats in parliament held by women, women holding senior, legislative and managerial positions and the number of years a female has been head of state (president or prime minister) in each of the 58 countries.

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Educational attainment is, without doubt, the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society, for without education of comparable quality and content to that given to boys and men, and relevant to existing knowledge and real needs, women are unable to access well-paid, formal sector jobs, advance within them, participate in, and be represented in government and gain political influence. Moreover, the risk increases for society as a whole that the next generation of children will be similarly ill-prepared. If, as a broad body of empirical work has shown, education and literacy reduce mortality rates of children—including the bias toward female child mortality—and help reduce fertility rates,²⁵ the importance of literacy for women is all the greater, considering that women still constitute two-thirds of the world's illiterate population.²⁶ Although the ECOSOC statistics show that girls actually outnumber boys in tertiary level education in a very few countries—most notably in some of the Middle East and former Soviet bloc countries—an obvious gender gap in education tends to appear early in most countries, and, on average, grows more severe with each year of education. In addition, the number of women represented among tertiary level educators is lower than among primary level educators.²⁷ However, if the content of the educational curriculum and the attitudes of teachers serve merely to reinforce prevalent stereotypes and injustices, then the mere fact of literacy and education does not, in and of itself, close the gender gap; schooling as a catalyst for change in gender relations will be more effective only if appropriate attention is also given to curriculum content and the retraining of those who deliver it.

Information and communication technologies, which have become a potent driving force of the development process, represent yet another dimension in which a knowledge gap has emerged between women and men: a gender-based digital divide. A study by the USAID has found that countless women in the developing world are further removed from the information age because of their lower levels of education and deeply ingrained negative attitudes towards other forms of achievement.²⁸ “Without access to information technology, an understanding of its significance and the ability to use it for social and economic gain, women in the developing world will be further marginalized from the mainstream of their communities, their countries and the world.”²⁹

In the present study, gender disparities in educational attainment are captured using data on literacy rates, enrolment rates for primary, secondary and tertiary education and average years of schooling across the population. In this way, we are able to illustrate not only the current levels of women's empowerment through education, but also the potential of future generations of women in a particular nation.

Health and well-being is a concept related to the substantial differences between women and men in their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities, and to issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organization, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.³⁰ The Planned Parenthood Federation of America quotes estimates that of the annual 46 million abortions worldwide, some 20 million are performed unsafely, resulting in the deaths of 80,000 women from complications, accounting for at least 13% of global maternal mortality, and causing a wide range of long-term health problems.³¹

Women's particular vulnerability to violence is perhaps the most obvious aspect of reduced physical security and integrity of person, but one which is perhaps the least amenable to accurate statistics. Even Sweden, long recognized as a leader in the area of gender equality was recently called to task by Amnesty International, which stated that “the prevalence of gender-biased violence shatters many people's image of Sweden as being the most gender equal country in the world”. A recent front-page article in the International Herald Tribune also noted that the implementation of violence-related laws in Sweden was marred by “spotty prosecutions, vague statistics, old-fashioned judges and unresponsive governments”.³² The complexity of the social and cultural issues, combined with the stigma and fear of disclosure lead to a situation where only a small proportion of the crimes of sexual assault, child abuse, wife battering and gun-related violence are ever reported³³, making accurate data extremely difficult to obtain. Indeed, it is difficult to measure the true extent of violence against women as most incidences of domestic violence and sexual assault go unreported.³⁴ It is typical for women themselves to be blamed for “provoking” the violence perpetrated against them by men—often those closest to them. The victims of such violence are then frequently stigmatized and isolated in society, even

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forced into marriage with their violators, with little or no control over their own persons. Each year an estimated two million girls, usually aged 4 to 8, are forcibly subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM),³⁵ which routinely leads to death, chronic infection and bleeding, nerve tumours, obstructed childbirth, painful scarring, etc. Although most prevalent in Africa and the Middle East, the practice of some form of FGM has been reported among immigrant communities in parts of Asia and the Pacific, North and South America and Europe.³⁶

While we lack reliable data on violence against women, we have incorporated several other variables related to the dimension of health and well-being. Since women are often the majority of the victims of poverty, we have included data from the Executive Opinion Survey on the effectiveness of governments' efforts to reduce poverty and inequality. In addition, we include the adolescent fertility rate as an indicator of health risks among women aged 15 to 19 years, and as an indicator of the lack of other choices available to young women. Finally, we include reproductive health data, such as the percentage of births attended by skilled health staff, and maternal and infant mortality ratios. Since these variables are particularly affected by the level of poverty in a given nation, i.e. poor health facilities in general as opposed to poor *reproductive* health facilities, we have adjusted these data by the number of physicians available per 1,000 people, as an indicator of the quality of the country's health system in general. In this way, we do not penalize developing countries in particular, but all those nations that provide poor reproductive health facilities to women, given the existing health infrastructure.

Calculating the Scores

The goal of our methodology is to provide cross-country comparisons, a broadly comprehensive assessment of the extent to which countries are capitalizing on the full potential of their societies. This is obtained by combining raw figures on the national economy, politics and education with the perceptions of the business community on the employment of women in their respective countries. We have attempted to consolidate in one index several dimensions of gender equality, including those that form part of the prominent indexes currently present in the literature, most notably the political factors that enter the UNDP Gender Empowerment Measure, and the literacy and health-

related factors that form part of the Gender-Related Development Index. In addition, we provide a measurement of the participation *per se* of women in economic activity, as contrasted with the opportunities available to them once they become participants in the labour force.

The ranking of the 58 countries in our study is by no means inclusive of all the issues that affect women. There are other approaches to prioritizing global gender inequality in the current literature, such as that of the United Nations Millennium Project's Task Force on Gender Equality, where it is defined in terms of capabilities (education, health and nutrition), access to resources and opportunities (income, employment, property) and security (vulnerability to violence). However, since our work is exclusively quantitative, data availability has imposed limitations on our choice of variables. For example, insufficient global data on violence against women prevented us from including this variable in the "health and well-being" dimension, but does not negate the importance of this factor in capturing gender equality. Nevertheless, the index provides valuable comparisons across countries in economic, political, health and educational realms.

The set of 58 countries covered in the current study includes all 30 OECD countries and 28 others from the "emerging market" world. Overall, the set of countries covers much of Europe and North America, in addition to providing relevant examples from Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. The existence of reliable data has been the main consideration in our choice of countries, and lack of such data has necessitated omitting many countries from the developing world.

The data used in this study come from publicly available sources, including the *World Development Indicators* of the World Bank, and the *Human Development Report* of UNDP, as well as the annual *Executive Opinion Survey* of the World Economic Forum. In 2004, the *Executive Opinion Survey* recorded the opinions of nearly 9,000 business leaders in 104 countries. Respondents were asked to record their views on the importance of a broad range of factors central to creating a sound business environment, including the quality of fiscal management, labour practices, the quality of the country's infrastructure and its educational institutions. For example, one of the variables included in the Economic Opportunity category (see Appendix), the "impact of maternity laws

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on the hiring of women", was derived directly from the following Survey question:

In your country, maternity laws:

1= impede the hiring of women

7= are not a hindrance for hiring women

As described earlier, the questions from the Executive Opinion Survey included in this study have a similar format and use a 1 to 7 scale. The mean response of all respondents in a particular country is the final score reported for that country on the relevant variable. Clearly, the "hard" data taken from other international organizations is reported on different scales or units. To make all data comparable, hard data was normalized to a 1 to 7 scale, with the best value in each category being allotted a 7, and the worst value a 1. For example, out of the 58 countries covered by the study, Egypt had the shortest maternity leave allowed (approximately 7 weeks) and therefore Egypt was allotted a 1, while Sweden had the longest leave (52 weeks) and was therefore allotted a 7. All other countries were assigned a value between 1 and 7.³⁷

Similar methods for normalizing hard data have been used in several previous reports of the Forum's Global Competitiveness Programme. Once both survey and hard data are on the same scale, the scores for each country are calculated by taking the unweighted mean of all the variables within a particular category. Finally, the overall scores for each country are calculated as an unweighted average of the scores obtained in each of the five categories.

Since all five of these dimensions are inextricably linked, it is essential, ultimately, that gender equality be achieved in all of them. For example, equal educational opportunities cannot be effective, if women are barred

entry into the workforce.³⁸ Entering the workforce, in and of itself, does not mean that women will not be ghettoized or encounter a "glass-ceiling;" having work of whatever kind may be immaterial, if the conditions under which it must be endured are intolerable or life-threatening, or if it must be sustained in the face of overwhelming additional burdens beyond the hours of paid labour. The disproportionate representation of elderly women among the poor means that economic participation may mean little, if the tax regime does not take into account income disparities and the differing capacities of women and men to contribute to an old age safety net. For these reasons, we have assigned equal weights to all five dimensions when calculating the final scores as well as within each dimension when adding the scores obtained on each variable.

Thus, however difficult comparisons may be, measuring the gender gap as well as possible, in each of these dimensions, both within and between countries, provides guidance to policy-makers as to where efforts must be made in each country.

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The Gender Gap Rankings

Country	Overall rank	Overall score*	Economic participation	Economic opportunity	Political empowerment	Educational attainment	Health and well-being
Sweden	1	5.53	5	12	8	1	1
Norway	2	5.39	13	2	3	6	9
Iceland	3	5.32	17	7	2	7	6
Denmark	4	5.27	6	1	20	5	2
Finland	5	5.19	12	17	4	10	4
New Zealand	6	4.89	16	47	1	11	26
Canada	7	4.87	7	27	11	12	14
United Kingdom	8	4.75	21	41	5	4	28
Germany	9	4.61	20	28	6	34	10
Australia	10	4.61	15	25	22	17	18
Latvia	11	4.60	4	6	10	24	48
Lithuania	12	4.58	10	11	13	19	44
France	13	4.49	31	9	14	31	17
Netherlands	14	4.48	32	16	7	42	8
Estonia	15	4.47	8	5	30	18	46
Ireland	16	4.40	37	51	12	9	12
United States	17	4.40	19	46	19	8	42
Costa Rica	18	4.36	49	30	9	14	30
Poland	19	4.36	25	19	18	20	38
Belgium	20	4.30	35	37	25	15	16
Slovak Republic	21	4.28	14	33	29	23	35
Slovenia	22	4.25	26	15	39	22	19
Portugal	23	4.21	27	18	31	36	20
Hungary	24	4.19	30	3	28	39	40
Czech Republic	25	4.19	24	4	43	25	23
Luxembourg	26	4.15	48	8	33	21	25
Spain	27	4.13	45	34	27	35	5
Austria	28	4.13	42	22	21	38	13
Bulgaria	29	4.06	11	14	23	50	55
Colombia	30	4.06	41	38	15	13	52

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The Gender Gap Rankings (cont'd)

Country	Overall rank	Overall score*	Economic participation	Economic opportunity	Political empowerment	Educational attainment	Health and well-being
Russian Federation	31	4.03	3	10	47	29	57
Uruguay	32	4.01	36	26	36	2	56
China	33	4.01	9	23	40	46	36
Switzerland	34	3.97	43	42	17	49	7
Argentina	35	3.97	55	29	26	3	54
South Africa	36	3.95	39	56	16	30	21
Israel	37	3.94	28	40	32	28	39
Japan	38	3.75	33	52	54	26	3
Bangladesh	39	3.74	18	53	42	37	37
Malaysia	40	3.70	40	36	51	32	15
Romania	41	3.70	23	31	35	51	47
Zimbabwe	42	3.66	2	57	34	52	41
Malta	43	3.65	56	43	45	16	24
Thailand	44	3.61	1	39	49	54	32
Italy	45	3.50	51	49	48	41	11
Indonesia	46	3.50	29	24	46	53	29
Peru	47	3.47	50	44	38	47	31
Chile	48	3.46	52	20	44	40	45
Venezuela	49	3.42	38	13	52	33	58
Greece	50	3.41	44	48	50	45	22
Brazil	51	3.29	46	21	57	27	53
Mexico	52	3.28	47	45	41	44	51
India	53	3.27	54	35	24	57	34
Korea	54	3.18	34	55	56	48	27
Jordan	55	2.96	58	32	58	43	43
Pakistan	56	2.90	53	54	37	58	33
Turkey	57	2.67	22	58	53	55	50
Egypt	58	2.38	57	50	55	56	49

* All scores are reported on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 representing maximum gender equality.

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The preceding table illustrates the overall rankings, as well as the scores obtained in the five dimensions surveyed. Scores for the developing and middle-income countries clearly demonstrate that even the most basic criteria for gender equality are unmet, especially those concerning maternal health and primary education. Moreover, while high income countries, such as those in the OECD, have made great progress over the past half century in removing some fundamental gender biases, they continue to display significant disparities in the opportunities presented to men and women in the workplace and in the political realm.

Not surprisingly, the top five places are occupied by Nordic countries, characterized by strongly liberal societies, protection of minority rights and comprehensive welfare systems. While women in these countries clearly have access to a wider spectrum of educational, political and work opportunities and enjoy a higher standard of living than women in other parts of the world, it is interesting to note that the rates of economic *participation* in some of these countries are not necessarily the highest in the world. For example, although Norway and Iceland occupy the second and third places in the overall ranking, they hold ranks of 13 and 17 in terms of economic participation. This is not necessarily the result of barriers to women's entry to the workforce, since it is certainly the case that women in some developed countries are in the fortunate position of being able to choose *not* to work outside their homes. It is a potential caveat of the economic participation methodology that it does not take into account those who may voluntarily choose not to participate. However, it should be noted that while some women may indeed have chosen to "opt out," that choice is usually made in a structure where work-family issues are seen as problems primarily facing women, while decision-making structures are dominated by men.³⁹

These are followed by a number of "woman-friendly" nations such as New Zealand, Canada, the UK, Germany and Australia. Several Eastern European and transition economies place well, appearing among the top 25. This is not too surprising, considering that these countries subscribed for long periods of time in recent history to a socialist ideology, which, however nominally, encouraged a "worker-woman" notion of equality, albeit one in which women had to do everything: all the work inside the home, while at the same time participating in industry and all the professions.⁴⁰ The most notable of these are Latvia

(11), Lithuania (12) and Estonia (15), the first two coming ahead of France (13) and all three appearing ahead of the United States (17). It should be noted, however, that while these nations perform well in terms of economic opportunity, economic participation and educational attainment, they lag far behind in terms of health and well-being, ranking 48, 44 and 46 respectively. The poor reproductive health statistics, despite the profusion of health professionals, indicate an inefficient use of health facilities in providing reproductive healthcare to women.

The United States (17) performs particularly well on educational attainment and only slightly less so on economic participation and political empowerment. However, the United States ranks poorly on the specific dimensions of economic opportunity and health and well-being, compromised by the meagre maternity leave, lack of maternity leave benefits and limited government-provided childcare. Moreover, the health and well-being rank of the United States is brought down, in comparison with other developed nations, by the large number of adolescents bearing children and by the high maternal mortality ratio—especially given the relatively high number of physicians available.

The four European nations Switzerland (34), Malta (43), Italy (45) and Greece (50) rank low overall, falling below Latin American nations such as Costa Rica (18), Colombia (30) and Uruguay (32), and (in the case of the latter three) below Asian countries such as Bangladesh (39) and Malaysia (40), a clear reflection of the shortcomings of these so-called "advanced" nations in implementing gender equality. Although Switzerland performs well on the health and well-being dimension (7), and relatively high on political empowerment (17)—a notable achievement for a country which gave women the right to vote and stand for national election only in 1971—the country lags behind not only in economic participation and economic opportunity, but also in educational attainment, being one of the very few developed nations where female enrolment rates are consistently lower than male rates. As is to be expected of countries notorious for their patriarchal cultures, Italy and Greece each perform particularly poorly on the economic participation and economic opportunity dimensions.

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While the rankings speak for themselves, they both confirm many commonly held beliefs, on the one hand, and dispel some prevailing myths, on the other. In the United States, for example, the low rank of 46 for economic opportunity appears to corroborate the much-discussed “glass ceiling.” And while American women have generally high levels of economic participation, they also appear to be subject to a lack of opportunity for advancement in their careers. Given China's labour policies, it will probably not surprise many that China ranks high in economic participation (9), but falls close to the bottom of the rankings in education (46) and political empowerment (40). With an overall rank of 33, the Chinese government's much-touted gender equality objective still falls far short of expectations. Nonetheless, China remains the highest ranking nation in Asia, followed by Japan (38). The Russia Federation (31) shows similar results to those of China, boosted in the rankings by a high economic participation (3), but compromised by low political empowerment (47) and health and well-being (57). Costa Rica (18) occupies first place in Latin America by a large margin, followed by Colombia (30), Uruguay (32) and Argentina (35). Peru (47), Chile (48), Venezuela (49), Brazil (51) and Mexico (52) all fare badly, due to poor performances on all five areas of this index, with the exception of the economic opportunity ranks of Venezuela (13), Chile (20) and Brazil (21). The problem here appears to be not in the lack of opportunity, once women have entered the workforce, but rather in giving them access to the educational training and basic rights, such as healthcare and political empowerment, that will enable them to join the workforce.

Out of the seven predominantly Muslim nations covered by the study, Bangladesh (39) and Malaysia (40) outperform Indonesia (46), while Jordan (55), Pakistan (56), Turkey (57) and Egypt (58) occupy the bottom four ranks. There is little doubt that traditional, deeply conservative attitudes regarding the role of women have made their integration into the world of public decision-making extremely difficult.⁴¹ As the newly-independent Arab governments of Egypt and Jordan focused on modernization more than half a century ago, they neglected the needs of women, one of their most important assets.⁴² In recent times however, some progress has evidently been made. Bangladesh performs relatively well on economic participation (18), Malaysia on health and well-being (15), Indonesia on economic opportunity (24) and Turkey on economic

participation (22), no doubt reflecting the economic freedoms that are increasingly available to women in Islamic countries. While it is encouraging that the countries of the Middle East and North Africa region have invested impressively in women's education in recent years, increasing their productive potential and earning capacity, it is clear from the low ranks of these countries on labour force participation—among the lowest in the world—that the region is not benefiting from the potential returns on this investment. Despite having ratified the Beijing Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, most of these nations lack a coherent strategy for empowering women. Such a strategy will be necessary for building on the achievements thus far, learning from past mistakes, and improving the future of women in these economies.

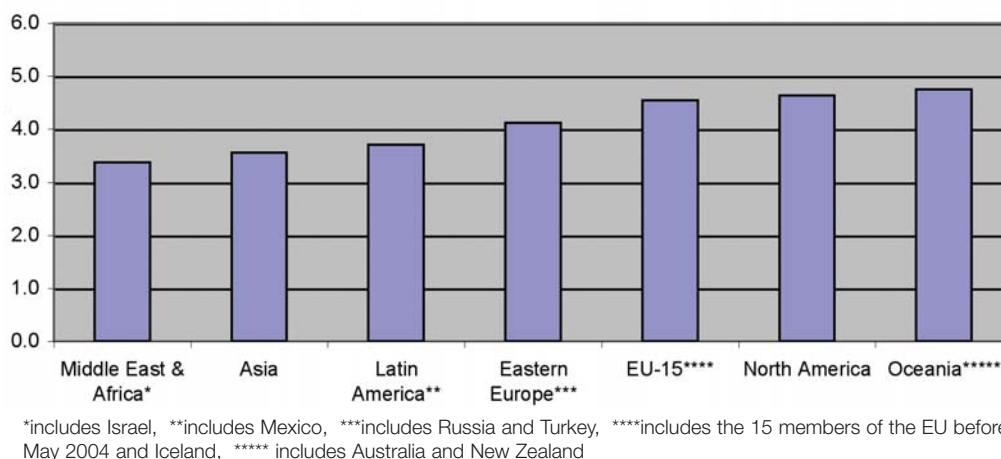
Regional and Country Performance

In this section, we present graphic illustrations of our findings. The first six charts below show the performance of each region on the overall index as well as the five components. This is followed by figures illustrating six selected cases: Sweden (1), the United Kingdom (8), the United States (17), China (33), Greece (50) and Egypt (58), showing the relative advantages and disadvantages within each nation. Finally, we provide two correlation plots: one showing the correlation between the Gender Gap Index ranks and the Growth Competitiveness Index ranks for 2004–2005 and the other showing the correlation between the Gender Gap Index ranks and the log of the GDP per capita. While correlation does not necessarily entail causation, these comparisons provide a preliminary indication of the link between women's empowerment and a nation's long-term growth potential.

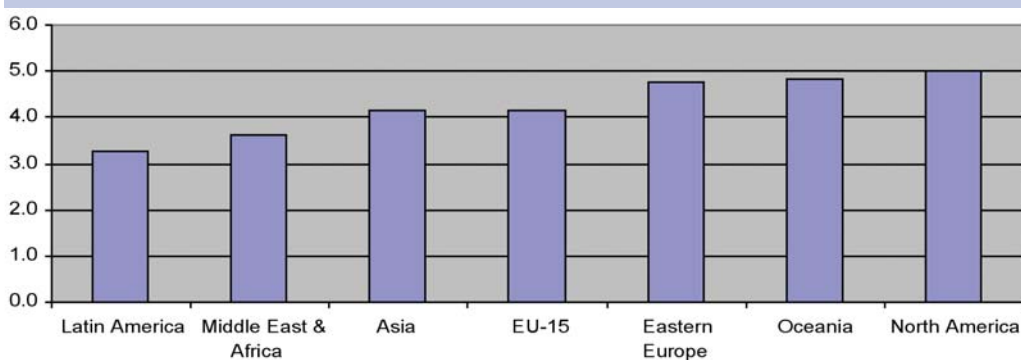
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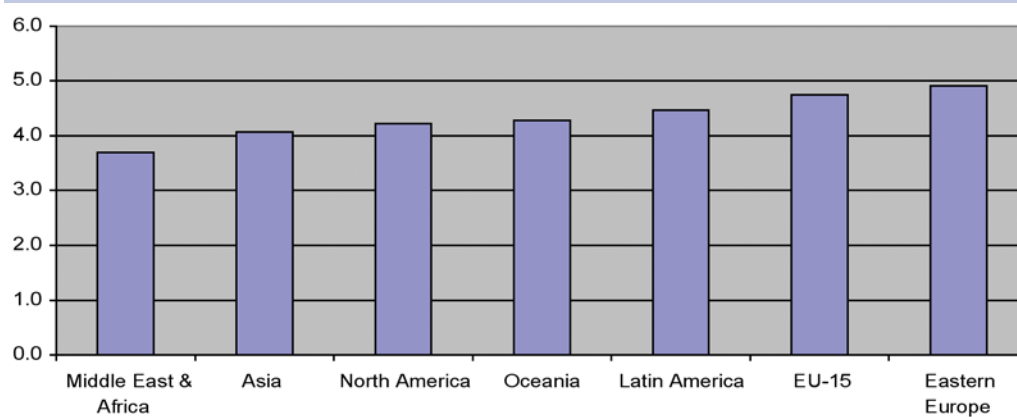
Average overall score by region



Economic participation

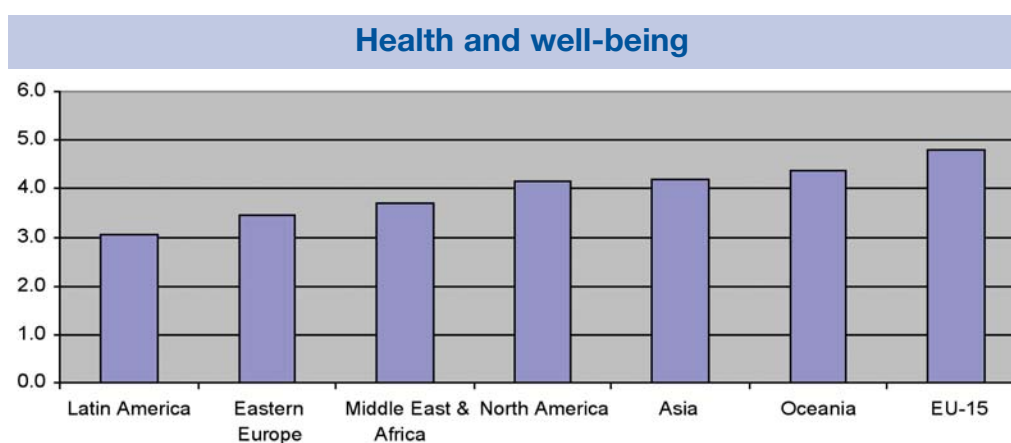
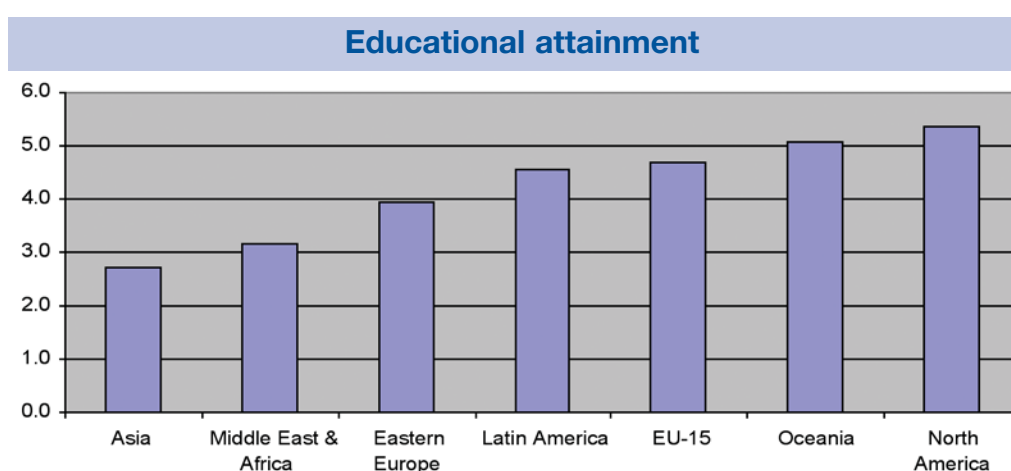
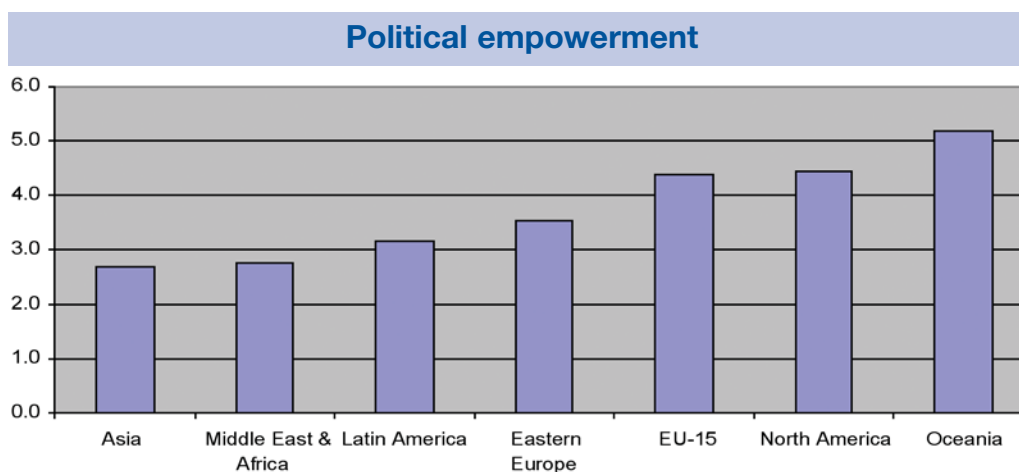


Economic opportunity



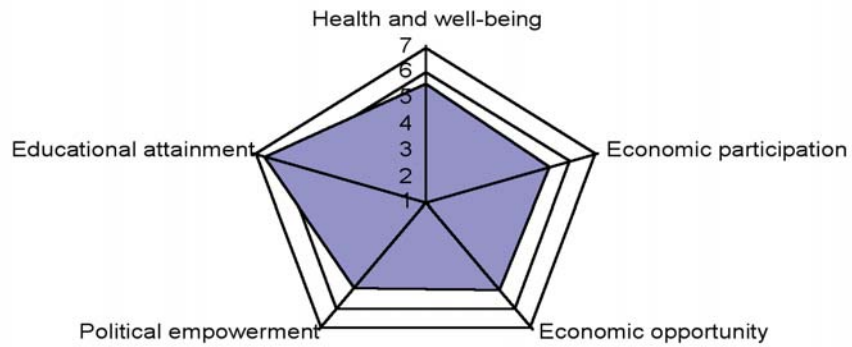
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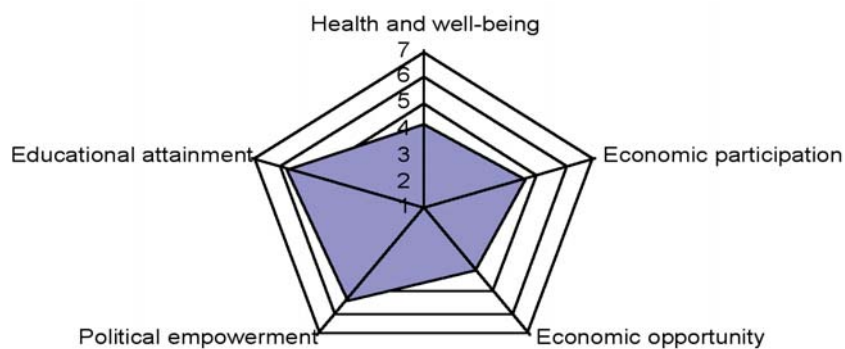


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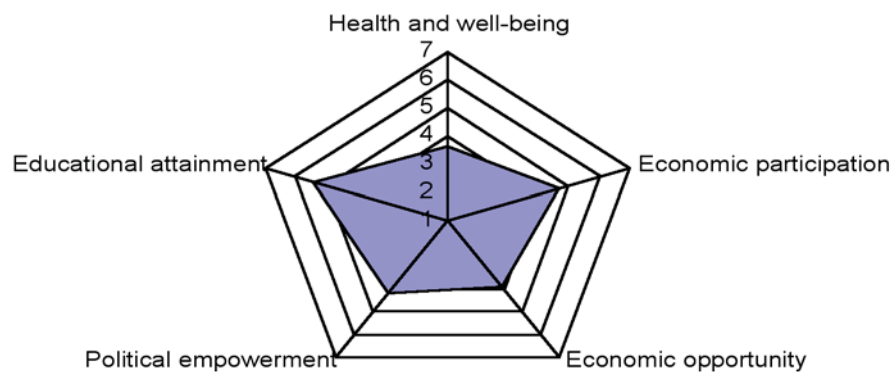
Sweden (1)



United Kingdom (8)

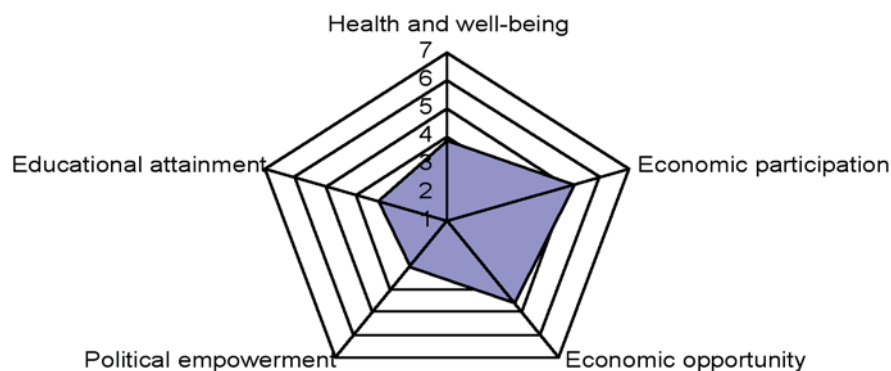


United States (17)

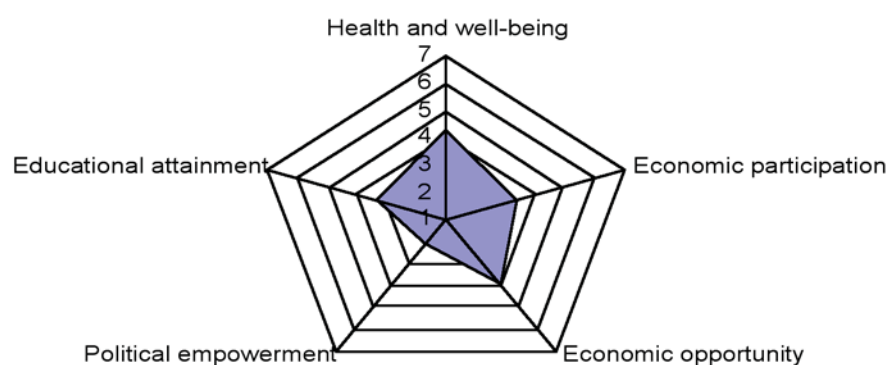


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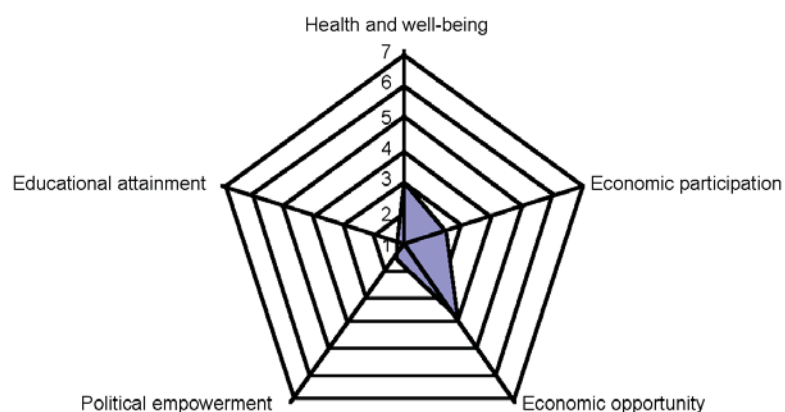
China (33)



Greece (50)

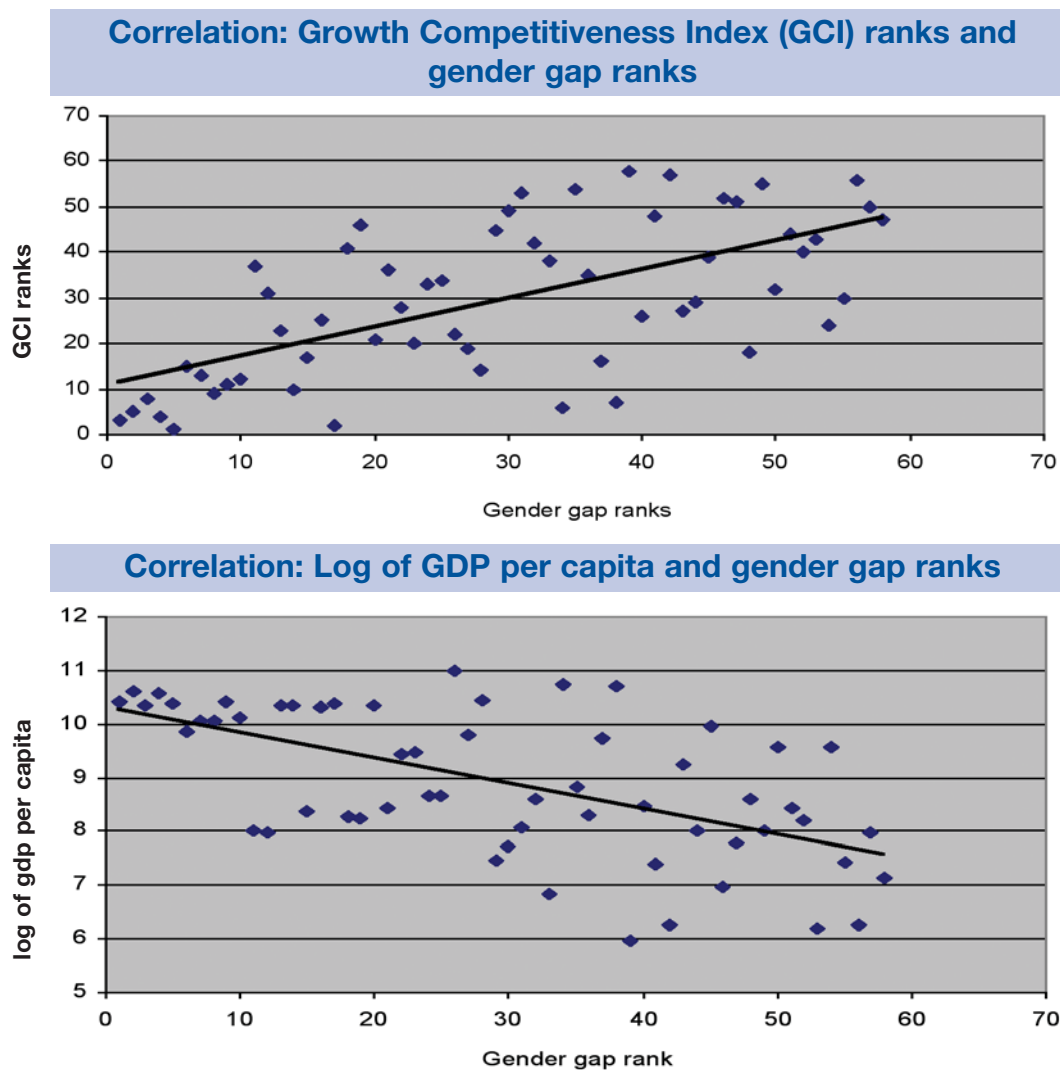


Egypt (58)



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Conclusions

True models of gender equality do not exist. Given the lamentable international picture, no one who studies the gender gap can doubt that no country in the world has yet managed to achieve it. True, the Nordic countries are getting closer, leading the way in providing women with a quality of life almost equal to that of men, with almost comparable levels of political participation, and with relatively equal educational and economic opportunity and participation. Yet, as this study indicates, other countries show wide variation, lagging far behind in particular areas, some across all five dimensions.

Aside from this general conclusion, and broad country comparisons, the data we have presented here shed light on the disparities within countries, in some cases either confirming information gathered in other ways, or, in others, countering prevailing assumptions.

By identifying and quantifying the gender gap, we hope to provide policy-makers with a tool offering direction and focus for the work of significantly improving the economic, political and social potential of all their citizens. In addition, we hope that this work provides the impetus for policy-makers to strengthen their commitment to the idea of women's empowerment, and to concentrate the political will, energy and resources, in concert with aid agencies and civil society organizations, to make gender equality a reality.

Appendix

Categories of the Gender Gap	Sources
Economic Participation	
Female unemployment (in female labour force) as percentage of male unemployment (in male labour force), 2002 or latest year available	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank)
Female youth unemployment (in female labour force aged 15-24) as percentage of male unemployment (in male labour force aged 15-24), 2002 or latest year available	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank)
Ratio of estimated female to male earned income	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP)
Female economic activity rate as percentage of male economic activity rate	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP)
Wage equality between women and men for similar work	Executive Opinion Survey, 2004 (World Economic Forum)
Economic Opportunity	
Weeks of paid maternity leave allowed per country	International Labour Organization, 1998
Maternity leave benefits (percentage of wages paid in covered period)	International Labour Organization, 1998
Female professional and technical workers (as percentage of total)	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP)
Availability of government provided childcare	Executive Opinion Survey, 2004 (World Economic Forum)
Impact of maternity laws on the hiring of women	Executive Opinion Survey, 2004 (World Economic Forum)
Equality between women and men for private sector employment	Executive Opinion Survey, 2004 (World Economic Forum)
Political Empowerment	
Number of years of a female president or prime minister in the last 50 years	Various national sources
Women in government at ministerial level (as percentage of total), 2002 or latest available	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP); various national sources
Seats in parliament held by women (as percentage of total), 2002 or latest available	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP)
Female legislators, senior officials and managers (as percentage of total), 2002 or latest available	Human Development Report, 2004 (UNDP)
Educational Attainment	
Average years of schooling, females as percentage of males, 2002 or latest year available	World Development Indicators, 2003 (World Bank)
Female to male ratio, gross primary level enrolment, 2002 or latest year available	UNDP Human Development Report, 2004
Female to male ratio, gross secondary level enrolment, 2002 or latest year available	UNDP Human Development Report, 2004
Female to male ratio, gross tertiary level enrolment, 2002 or latest year available	UNDP Human Development Report, 2004
Adult literacy, female rate as percentage of male rate, 2002 or latest year available	UNDP Human Development Report, 2004; various national sources
Health and Well-being	
Births attended by skilled health staff (percentage of total), 2002 or latest year available	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank); WHO Reproductive Health Database; various national sources
Adolescent fertility rate (births per woman, age 15-19), 2002 or latest year available, adjusted by number of physicians	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank); various national sources
Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births, 2002 or latest year available, adjusted by number of physicians	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank); WHO Reproductive Health Database; various national sources
Infant mortality rate, per 1,000 live births, adjusted by number of physicians	World Development Indicators, 2004 (World Bank)
Effectiveness of government efforts to reduce poverty and inequality	Executive Opinion Survey, 2004 (World Economic Forum)

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19 Yale Law Women, 2001.

20 International Labour Organization, 1997.

21 Wirth, 2004.

22 Hewlett, 2002.

23 Inter-Parliamentary Union, op.cit.

24 One Country, 1993.

25 World Bank, 1993.

26 See, for instance, Hill et al., 1995; Klasen, 2002; Summers, 1992.

27 Leach, 1998.

28 USAID, 2001.

29 USAID, 2001, page 3.

30 World Health Organization/UNICEF, 1996.

31 Planned Parenthood, 2000, citing Alan Guttmacher Institute findings, 1997.

32 International Herald Tribune, Wednesday, March 30, 2005.

33 National Organization for Women, 2005.

34 Parliament of Australia, 2002.

35 Amnesty International, 2004.

36 Ibid.

37 The standard formula used for converting each hard data variable to the 1 to 7 scale is: $6 \times (\text{country value} - \text{sample minimum}) / (\text{sample maximum} - \text{sample minimum}) + 1$

38 According to the World Bank's *World Development Indicators*, governments in the Middle East and North Africa region spent, on average, about 5.5% of GDP on education in 2000, higher than in any other region of the world, including the OECD. However, female labour force participation rates in these countries are the lowest in the world, suggesting that the region is not yet benefiting from the potential returns on this investment.

39 Kellerman et al.

40 Gray, 1990.

41 Ali-Riza, 2005.

42 Ibid.

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² United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues.

³ Sadler, 2004.

⁴ United Nations, 2001.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The National Crime Bureau of the Government of India reports up to 6,000 dowry deaths annually.

⁷ Feminist Women's Health Centre, 2004.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2004.

¹¹ For example, see the chapter by Artadi and Sala-i-Martin in *The Global Competitiveness Report 2004–2005*.

¹² See Sen, 1999.

¹³ UNIFEM, 2000. Figures of women's earnings for every US\$ 1 earned by men, in both the industrial and services and manufacturing sectors, are almost identical, and range from a low of 53 cents in Azerbaijan to 90 cents in Australia, but with very poor correlation between developed and developing countries.

¹⁴ Marcoux, 1998.

¹⁵ Ghosh, 1999.

¹⁶ Elson, 2004.

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