

Measuring inequity: the 2009 Gender Equity Index

Social Watch developed the Gender Equity Index (GEI) to make the gender inequities more visible and to monitor the evolution in the different countries of the world. The GEI is based on information available that can be compared internationally, and it makes it possible to classify countries and rank them in accordance with a selection of gender inequity indicators in three dimensions, education, economic participation and empowerment.

In most societies men and women are assigned different responsibilities, rights, benefits and opportunities in the activities they perform, in access to control of resources and in decision-making processes.

In order to measure inequities we have established the proportions or ratio between the sexes in different indicators. This is used as a basis for inferring the structure of opportunities and so countries can be compared in an agile way that is direct and intuitive. What the GEI measures is the gap between women and men, not their well-being. For example, a country in which young men and women have equal access to a university education receives a value of 100 on this particular indicator, and a country in which boys and girls are equally barred from completing primary education would also be awarded a value of 100. This does not mean that the quality of education does not need to be improved; it just establishes that, in this case, girls education is not inferior than that of boys.

The way the GEI is calculated is a response to the need to reflect all situations that are unfavourable to women. When there is a situation in which women are at a proportional disadvantage with respect to men, the GEI does not reach its maximum value of 100 points. The final value on the index depends on the degree of negative inequity for women prevailing in a given country or region regardless of whether there may also be inequities that are positive for women (that is to say negative for men).

In 2009 some 156 countries were classified on the GEI using the most recent available values in the three dimensions of gender equity estimation. This is done by comparing their 2009 values with those for 2005. The number of countries considered in each of these three dimensions was not the same because of lack of available data, which is not homogenous among all countries. A country for which no data is available in one of the dimensions can be integrated into the partial analysis of the other dimensions.