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Are Economic Gender Differences the Same Everywhere? Cross-Societal Comparisons in the Early 21st Century

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Invited Paper

***Are Economic Gender Differences the Same Everywhere?
Cross-Societal Comparisons in the Early 21st Century***

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ABSTRACT

Are gender differences in economic outcomes the same everywhere? Using the most recent available data (generally from the 2021–2023 period), I consider the patterns for these gender differences and provide an annotated list of statistical sources for students and researchers to use in exploring these differences. Overall, women still work less than men in paid work, work more than men in unpaid household work, and make less than men; however, these patterns have converged somewhat, with some narrowing of work and pay gaps relative to the last part of the 20th century, and with women rapidly closing the educational-attainment gap and even exceeding men's educational attainment in a large number of countries. Human development is correlated with reduction of gender differences even as regional disparities remain in both human development and gender differences.

KEY WORDS Gender Differences; International Gender Comparisons;
Gender Statistics

Are gender differences in economic outcomes the same everywhere? Using the most recent available data (generally from the 2021–2023 period), I consider recent patterns for these gender differences. This structure is partly based on the structure I developed in the context of my textbook, *The Economics of Gender*, through three editions (Wiley-Blackwell, most recent edition, 2007) and continue to update as needed for teaching purposes. This paper will hopefully serve as a useful pedagogical piece, both as a standalone resource and in the context of various university courses.

The second section of this paper considers those countries that I refer to as industrialized capitalist societies, which tend to operate as political democracies (with

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various levels of participation and democratic-ness). The third section addresses the question of how social and economic development processes affect gender differences as countries change over time in their levels of industrialization, capitalization, and democratic-ness. Herein, we look at the entire set of countries for which data are available and consider gender differences by development level and by region.

Data accessibility has greatly increased since I last updated my textbook, so students and researchers are now able to generate online results very quickly, often including formatted charts, graphs, and maps, for individual countries and sets of countries. I highlight important data sources that can be used to study gender differences within and across countries and give examples of their use. The annotated list of references in the fourth section of this paper gives the main online data sources for country-level data that can be used to analyze gender differences across countries.

In this paper, *society* is treated as being synonymous with *country*, although social groups exist within each country that may differ greatly from the majority of the population in terms of various social and economic indicators. For many countries, it is still difficult to obtain gender-disaggregated data by group within country, or even often by geographic area within country, and these data are not as readily available online; thus, there are still many levels to be studied across both time and space in answering the fundamental question that I have posed above, and the question remains a perennial one for students and researchers to consider.

GENDERED ECONOMIC PATTERNS IN INDUSTRIALIZED CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

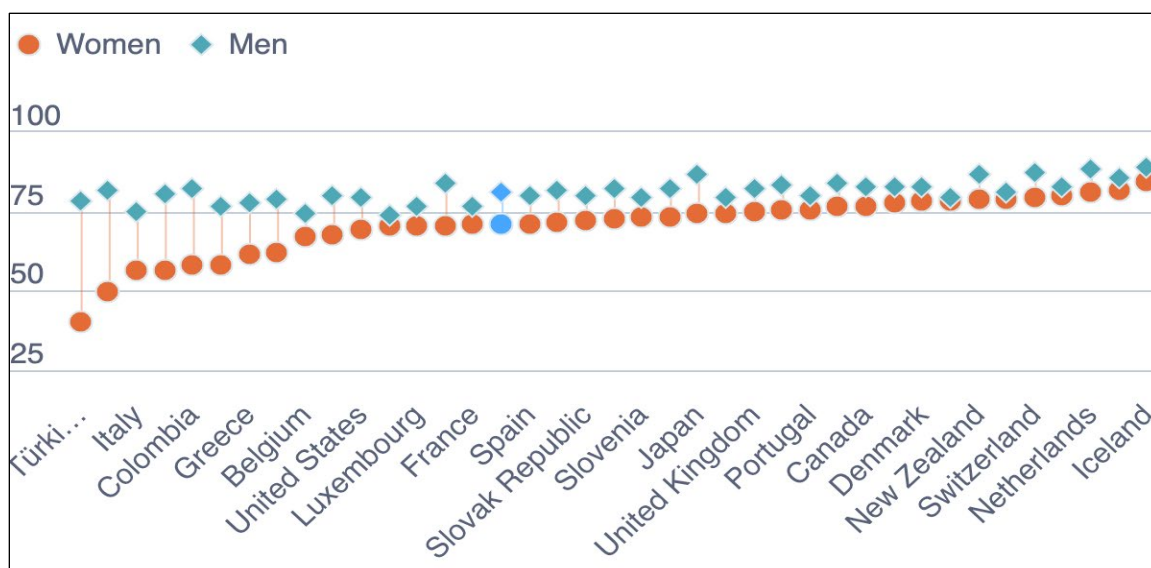
In this section, I use data for the 38 (as of mid-2024) member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This grouping is partly data-driven, as these countries have roughly comparable data collection and presentation methods, but also makes sense as these countries generally rank high on the United Nations' Human Development Index and other measures of relative well-being. Seven of these countries (Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia) were in the Eastern European socialist sphere prior to the early 1990s but have aligned with Western Europe, as did East Germany, and their outcomes now look very similar to those of the other OECD countries.

The fundamental comparisons to make are generally about work patterns, both paid and unpaid, and regarding compensation for paid work. Additional information about many other measures has become increasingly available, and I highlight two other measures of gender difference, in proportion of corporate board membership and in higher (tertiary) educational attainment, in this section. There is also more information readily available about legislation and executive orders affecting gender discrepancies, such as legal ramifications of sexual harassment, and in the third section, I show two such maps that can be generated to show which countries have more legislation addressing gender discrimination in employment, and sexual harassment.

Generally, the starting point in making gender comparisons is labor force participation rates by gender, where *labor force* implies people are working for pay or

actively looking for paid work (so will include persons who are currently unemployed). Such data generally refer only to the middle-age range of the population (generally, ages 15 or 16 to 64). Figure 1 presents the range of labor force participation rates for the OECD countries using the most recent available data.

Figure 1. Labor Force Participation Rate (%) among 15–64–Year-Olds, by Gender



Note: Created July 2024 with data from 2022 or latest available year.

Source: OECD (n.d.).

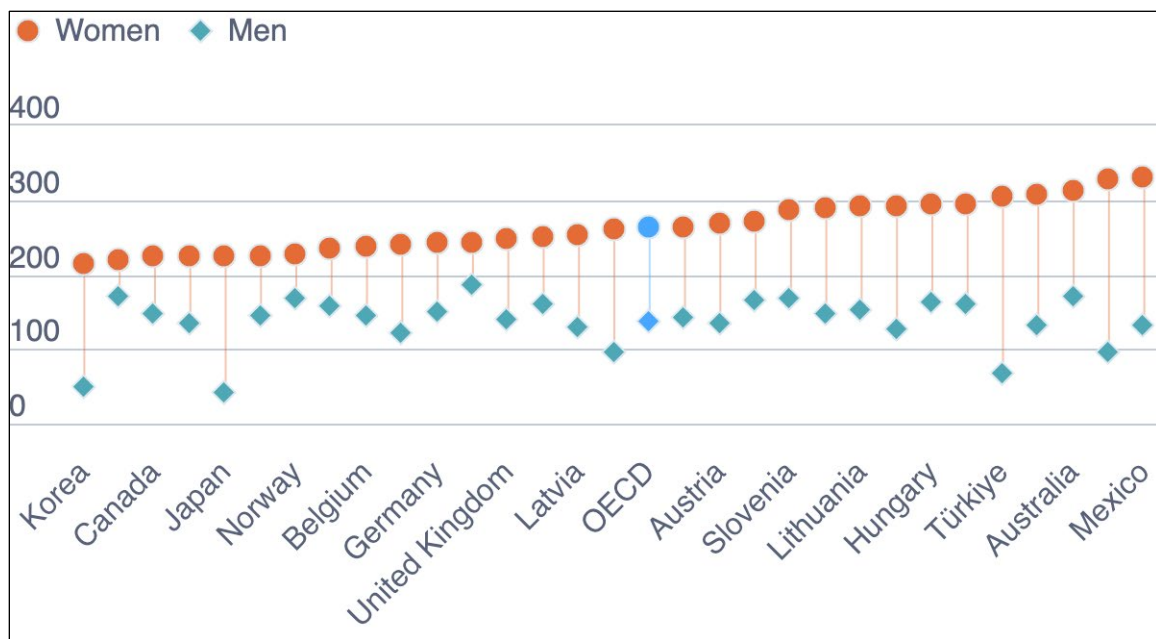
Note that all of these figures are better experienced online, as these print versions both suppress some of the country labels and lose their interactivity; in the online version, one can click on each dot and see the actual value associated with the dot. In these data, which are sorted in order of women’s participation rate, we can see that men have much less variation in their labor force participation than do women and that in all countries, men have a higher participation rate than women, although the rates are quite close in a number of countries. The range of values for women is from 40% (in Turkey) to 84% (in Iceland), with an OECD mean value of 71%; the lowest rate for European members of the OECD is Italy, at 56%. Meanwhile, the OECD average for men is 81%, ranging from a low of 74% in Israel to a high of 89% in Iceland. This represents a significant change for both women and men over the past fifty or so years: The rate in 1969 was 91% for men and 45% for women (Jacobsen 2007:Ch. 10), so women’s participation has risen much more than men’s has fallen; however, they are still not equal.

After the fall of the Soviet bloc and the dissolution of much of the socialist structure in those countries, women’s labor force participation generally dropped in eastern European countries. Meanwhile, most other countries have continued to log rises in formal

participation for women, with some exceptions, notably Afghanistan, where women’s work has decreased or stagnated. Much of the rise appears to be tied to the continuing process of increased urbanization in countries, which tends to bring both women and men increasingly into the formal employment sector and thus makes their labor more discoverable. Countries with continuing large agricultural sectors have less formal women’s participation as well.

Another fundamental comparison to make by gender is the amount of time spent in unpaid forms of labor. Figure 2 displays the gender gap in unpaid care and housework for the OECD countries, again using the most recently available data.

Figure 2. Gender Gap in Unpaid Care and Housework (Minutes per Day)



Note: Created July 2024 with data from 2021 or latest available year.

Source: OECD (n.d.).

These data are harder to track over time than formal work participation, as time-use data are not generally collected as regularly as labor force data and do not exist as readily for earlier periods; however, it is clear that women continue to do more household labor than do men in every country, with the most substantial gaps occurring in the non-European countries in the OECD. Women’s range of time spent in household labor is narrower than for men, ranging from 215 minutes in South Korea to 331 minutes in Mexico, while men’s time spent ranges from 41 minutes in Japan to 186 minutes in Denmark. It is notable that the amount of time spent in household labor by women does not appear to vary much with their labor force participation. At the OECD average, women spend 4 hours and 20 minutes

per day in unpaid labor, while men spend 2 hours and 15 minutes, so two hours a day more for women than for men; however, given that men work more for pay than do women, their total hours of work are not as different. The women and men experiencing the most time crunch are generally those who are working full-time for pay and raising children; they are likely those most in need of assistance, given their life-work–balance challenges.

In less developed societies, time diaries have been instructive regarding how much time women have to spend in basic tasks such as collecting water and firewood (Jacobsen 2007:Ch 12). Improvements in water availability and shifts to different fuel sources can free women from much of this physical labor but do not necessarily shift women's time into paid work (Jacobsen 2011). Technology thus can have effects on the time spent in different activities but does not always mean that people reduce the total amount of time spent in household work, as people can simply adjust what they do within the category. Interestingly, one of the biggest technology-driven time savers for both women and men has been the widespread adoption of the mobile phone. Phones allow information to be shared cheaply and quickly, often saving people long and useless trips if it turns out that there is a weather- or shipping-delay reason not to make a given trip. They also allow people to better balance supervision of children and other dependents because they can be just a phone call away and can respond quickly to challenging situations.

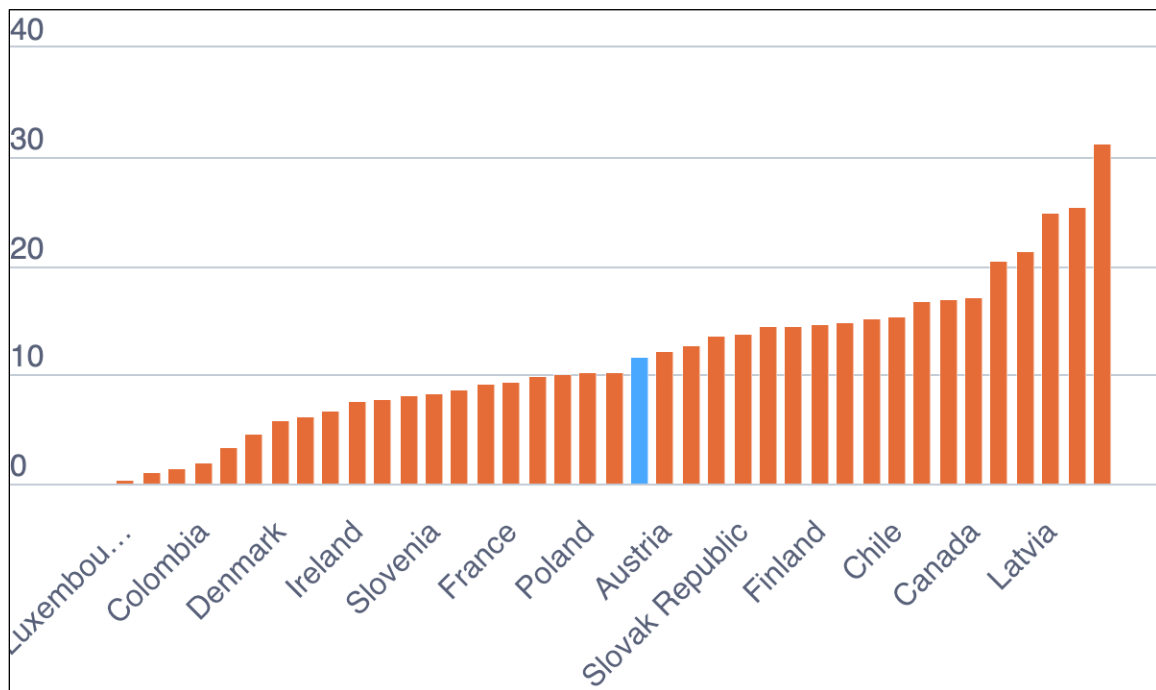
A third fundamental comparison is between women's and men's earnings. Earnings may differ both because women and men work different numbers of hours annually (with women having both higher rates of part-time work and lower rates of overtime work in general than men) and because they are paid at different rates for an hour of labor. Figure 3 shows the gender wage gap, measured at the median wage level as percentage of men's wages, again using the most recently available data.

These data display a wide range of gap sizes across the OECD countries, with Luxembourg at practically equal wages (just 0.4 percentage points short of equal) and South Korea on the other extreme, with a 31% differential. The mean difference in the OECD is 12 cents on the dollar (or Euro), so women make 88% as much as men on an hourly basis. This is a significant improvement over time, with much of the improvement occurring starting in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, the mean difference for these countries was about 24 cents on the dollar and Luxembourg was at 29 cents on the dollar (Jacobsen 2007:Ch. 10). South Korea has improved much less, however, as its differential in the early 2000s was 36 cents. In some countries, particularly where women are more likely to be found in manufacturing jobs and where many men are still in agricultural (and many women still not working for pay), it is possible for the recorded women's wage to be higher than the men's wage (Jacobsen 2007:Ch. 12, Table 12.3).

Why do we see these gender differences in pay? There are numerous causes, but one strong pattern is that women and men are still mostly found to be working in very different parts of the overall labor market. In particular, occupational gender segregation is still a very strong pattern across countries, both developed and developing (Carranza, Das, and Kotikula 2023). McCaughey (2023) notes that in the European Union, one-third of the workers are in male-dominated occupations, one-quarter are in female-dominated occupations (where women constitute more than 80% of the workers), and only a quarter are in mixed-gender occupations. Often within occupations, there is additional segregation

by subspecialty, such as different kinds of medical areas, or type of firm (Jacobsen 2007:Ch. 6).

Figure 3. Gender Wage Gap (% of Median Wages of Men)



Note: Created July 2024 with data from 2022 or latest available year.

Source: OECD (n.d.).

In one notable form of workplace segregation, women are still less likely to be found at the highest levels of management and control. Notably, McCaughey (2023) points out that two-thirds of workers in the European Union have a male boss. Figure 4 shows the share of women on large company boards in OECD countries.

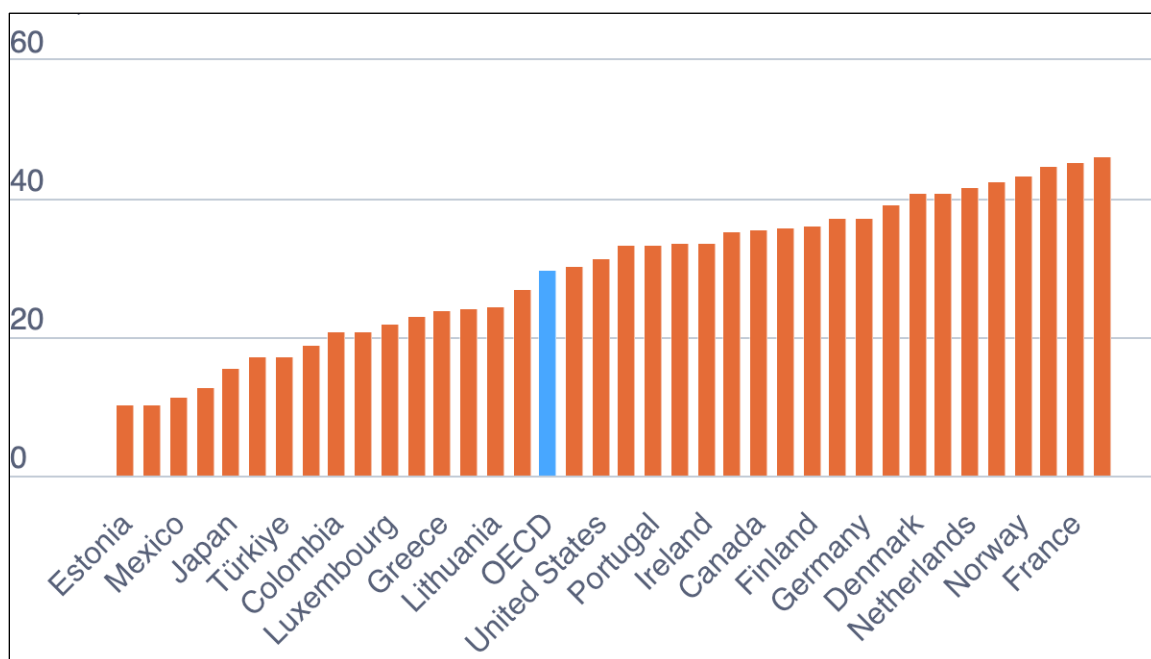
The share in these data for women ranges from Estonia, with 10% on the low end, up to New Zealand, with 46% on the high end, with an average of 30%—and no country at 50%. New Zealand has been actively working to increase women’s representation in politics and industry with notable effects, even though formal quotas have not been installed.

One of the most interesting trends over time has been the increase in women relative to men in educational attainment, including tertiary, or higher, education. Figure 5 shows the relative shares of working-age population by gender that have higher education.

This increase in formal education explains much of women’s increased earnings over the past fifty years, along with some increase in labor market experience. Without this

higher education/investment in human capital and the entry to higher-earning professions that this occasioned, women’s earnings might well have remained stagnant; nonetheless, increased education has not closed the earnings gap. Part of this appears to be because women and men continue to study different fields, with men often found in the more lucrative and still more male-dominated occupations and subfields within occupations. Carranza et al. (2023:Table 1) show that fields of study across a wide range of countries (more than 100 in their sample) are mainly either female- or male-dominated rather than neutral, with education, health and welfare, and humanities and arts being more likely to be female-dominated, engineering, manufacturing and construction, science and agriculture, and services being more male-dominated, and only the areas of social sciences, business, and law being more likely to be neutral rather than dominated by one or the other gender across the sample of countries. Women’s continued underrepresentation in the more-lucrative STEM areas, as well as in the more-lucrative business specialties such as finance and operations, continue to reduce their earnings potential relative to men’s. Whether this is by pure choice or by a combination of adherence to social norms by both students and their families, the more welcoming nature of some occupations relative to others for particular genders, outright discrimination, and the greater ability to combine some occupations with household and childcare duties, these patterns persist and make it rare that an occupation and every area within it is fully gender integrated.

Figure 4. Percentage of Women on Boards of the Largest Publicly Listed Companies

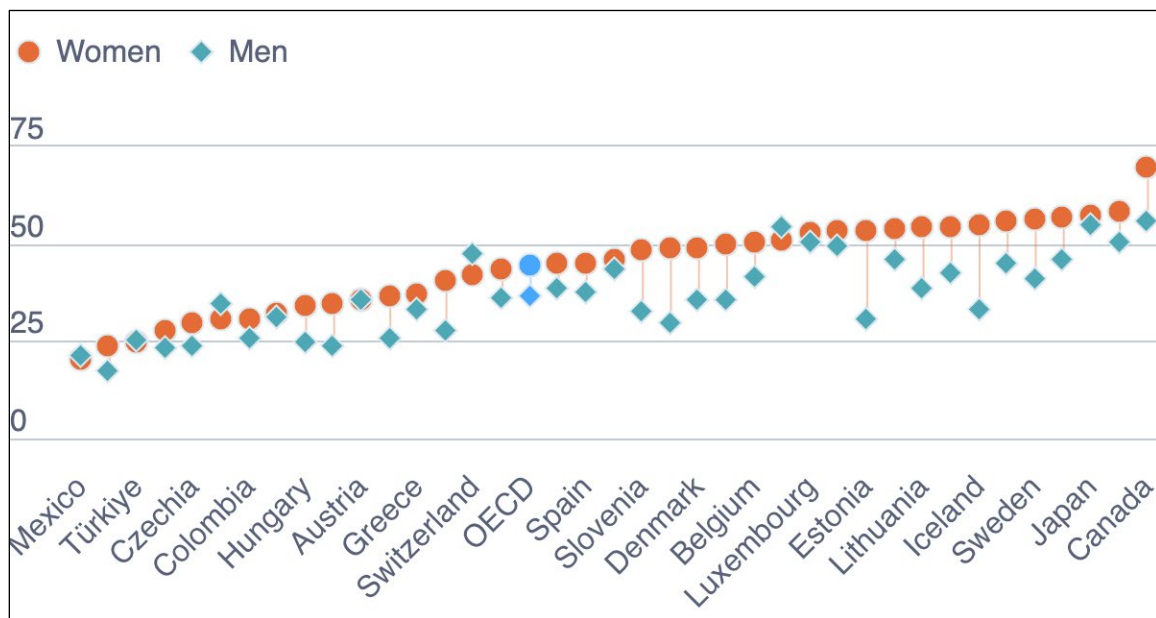


Note: Created July 2024 with data from 2022.

Source: OECD (n.d.).

Women’s tertiary educational attainment ranges from a low of 20% in Mexico to a high of almost 70% in Canada, while men’s attainment ranges from a low of 17% in Italy to a high of 56% in Canada. In only two countries (Switzerland and South Korea) is men’s attainment higher than women’s; meanwhile, the gaps are much larger and in the opposite direction in many countries, with the largest gap between the rates in Estonia (53.5% for women vs. 30.8% for men, for a percentage point gap of 22.7). The OECD means are 44% for women and 37% for men. This significant increase in women’s higher educational attainment is one of the most notable stories of the past 50 years, as few women (let alone men) had achieved higher education even by the middle of the 20th century. Much of this growth occurred starting in the 1980s and 1990s as a wider range of professional fields opened up to women and more masters’ degrees were developed so that even more women started going to postbachelor degree programs as well.

Figure 5. Share of Population (%) Aged 25–64 Who Attained Tertiary Education, by Gender



Note: Created July 2024 with data from 2022 or latest available year.

Source: OECD (n.d.).

Just as we have seen progress on a number of encouraging fronts, there remain barriers to full and equal participation by women and men in all walks of life. Even in the most advanced countries, gender differences persist. Let us turn now to considering a fuller set of countries to see how the level of human development and regional differences relate to gender differences on a set of development indicators.

EFFECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS ON GENDERED ECONOMIC PATTERNS

The implication of the previous section was that economic and social progress, including general increases in the standard of living and education for societies over time, have reduced gender differences but have not eradicated them. If this holds true over time for societies as they individually progress to higher standards of living, the implication is that societies, compared at the same point in time but at different stages of economic and social progress (including improved health measures as well as educational measures), would also demonstrate a relationship of greater gender equality for those countries at higher levels of human development. This proposition can be tested by seeing if the larger set of current world countries for which we have data on economic and social measures show such a relationship.

This exercise is performed regularly by various agencies, in particular the World Bank and the United Nations (UN). The UN Development Programme's Human Development Index (HDI), first developed in 1990, which includes measures of life expectancy, educational attainment, and per capita income, has been accompanied since 1995 by the Gender Development Index (GDI), which shows the difference when the human development index for a country is calculated separately by gender. The HDI and GDI were subsequently reformulated to include both expected years of schooling and mean years of schooling rather than adult literacy as the measure of educational attainment. The Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced in 2010, considers elements of reproductive health (maternal mortality and adolescent birth rate), empowerment (women's share of seats in parliament and secondary education attainment), and the labor market (labor force participation rate) and can also be calculated by level of HDI even though the two do not contain the same elements.

Table 1 contains the value of the HDI and GDI at different levels of human development and for different world regions, including the OECD group and the world overall. Countries are divided into four human development groups: very high, high, medium, and low. There is a clear relationship between higher (better) values of the HDI and higher (better) values of the GDI, although the big break occurs between high and medium human development. Across world regions, the GDI is lower in South Asia and the Arab States, while sub-Saharan Africa, even though it has the lowest HDI values of all the regions, is in the middle, with East Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean regions all higher (with Latin American and the Caribbean having the highest average value). The OECD average is comparable to the very high human development average, and the World average is in the middle of the range.

It is interesting to look also at the individual components of the GDI. Women have higher life expectancy than men in all human development categories and world regions. They have higher or equal expected years of schooling than men in all but the low human development category and across all regions except the Arab States, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, but their current mean years of schooling still lag behind men in all regions, partly as a function of older generations of women having received less education than men. The biggest difference is in the estimated gross national income per capita, where women have an average of 57% of men's income worldwide, 64% in the OECD, and lows

of 24% in the Arab States, 27% in South Asia, and 32% in medium human development countries. They do better relative to men in low human development countries, at 47% of men's income, and their highest relative earnings are in sub-Saharan Africa, at 69% of men's income. Both the low human development category and sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest values for men's income by far, so having relatively equal earnings when neither gender is earning much is not a happy situation; however, this pattern is indicative of the fact that once earnings start rising, gender-earnings inequality tends to increase.

Table 2 contains a similar analysis as in Table 1, for the GII. Here, lower values of the index indicate less gender inequality. There is a clear pattern of decreasing gender inequality as development level rises. Similar to Table 1, across regions, the areas of more concern for gender equality and development are the Arab States and South Asia, but here, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest index, indicating greatest concern. In looking at the components of the GII, it appears that the dismal health measures for sub-Saharan Africa are a big driver of this low outcome, as the maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rate in this region are both much higher than in the other regions, as is true for the low human development group. Share of seats in parliament is very similar across human development groups but lower in the Arab States and in South Asia. The percentage of the population with at least some secondary education shows a discrepancy favoring men in all development groups, with the biggest difference in the medium human development group. All regions except Latin America and the Caribbean (where the shares are almost equal by gender, with women slightly higher) also show this difference, with the largest differences in South Asia followed by sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, the labor force participation rate shows the usual discrepancy with men's rate being higher for all development groups and all regions, with the largest differences in the Arab States (50 percentage points), South Asia (48 percentage points), and the medium human development group (41.5 percentage points).

There are a number of critiques of both the GDI and GII measures on numerous grounds: what they signify, what is included and not included, and how they are constructed and weighted. The current GDI and the new GII both arose in response to critiques of earlier versions of measures but have received their own rounds of criticism (compare Berik 2022 and Klasen 2017). One of the main limitations on index construction is data availability, and indexes will always be subject to critique, as they must apply some reductive principle in order to collapse a complex set of factors into one number. Numerous other measures have been proposed by various individual researchers and a number of agencies and thinktanks, and no doubt, other measures will be used in the future as more data become available.

Table 1. Human and Gender Development Indexes and Constituent Parts, by Development Groups and Regions, for the OECD and the World Overall, 2022

	Gender Development Index value		Human Development Index value		Life expectancy at birth (years)		Expected years of schooling		Mean years of schooling		Estimated gross national income per capita (2017 PPP \$)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Human development groups												
Very high human development	0.988	0.906	0.895	0.906	82.3	76.4	17.1	16.1	12.2	12.3	34,726	55,442
High human development	0.962	0.777	0.747	0.777	78.0	72.5	14.8	14.2	8.3	9.0	10,904	20,011
Medium human development	0.870	0.675	0.587	0.675	69.9	66.1	12.3	12.3	5.8	7.6	3,127	9,638
Low human development	0.868	0.551	0.478	0.551	63.7	59.7	8.9	9.6	3.9	5.5	2,073	4,368
Regions												
Arab States	0.877	0.736	0.646	0.736	73.5	69.3	11.8	12.0	7.2	8.3	5,468	22,726
East Asia and the Pacific	0.962	0.779	0.749	0.779	79.0	73.6	14.8	14.2	7.8	8.7	11,939	20,216
Europe and Central Asia	0.963	0.815	0.785	0.815	77.0	70.2	15.5	15.5	10.4	10.8	13,573	26,631
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.991	0.765	0.758	0.765	76.9	70.6	15.3	14.2	9.0	8.9	11,503	18,823
South Asia	0.855	0.678	0.580	0.678	70.4	66.7	11.8	12.0	5.7	7.5	2,958	10,808
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.915	0.574	0.525	0.574	62.6	58.7	10.2	10.5	5.2	6.9	3,025	4,388
OECD	0.984	0.912	0.898	0.912	82.9	77.4	17.1	16.1	12.1	12.3	36,106	56,848
World	0.951	0.756	0.719	0.756	74.5	69.6	13.1	12.9	8.2	9.1	12,516	22,035

Source: UNDP (2024: Statistical Annex, Table 4).

Table 2. Gender Inequality Index and Constituent Parts, by Development Groups and Regions, for the OECD and the World Overall, 2022

	Gender Inequality Index value	Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	Adolescent birth rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older)		Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older)	
					Female	Male	Female	Male
Human development groups								
Very high human development	0.150	15	13.5	29.3	87.7	90.1	54.0	69.4
High human development	0.339	65	28.7	26.0	74.0	78.4	49.8	74.2
Medium human development	0.476	152	37.8	23.0	40.5	55.6	34.2	75.7
Low human development	0.579	497	88.3	24.0	21.3	31.9	50.8	77.5
Regions								
Arab States	0.523	128	44.2	18.3	51.0	57.4	19.9	70.2
East Asia and the Pacific	0.340	78	21.4	21.0	72.5	79.0	54.0	75.4
Europe and Central Asia	0.224	21	19.5	26.0	83.7	89.9	45.4	69.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.386	85	52.3	34.1	64.4	64.2	51.6	75.3
South Asia	0.478	132	27.9	17.9	40.9	55.7	28.1	76.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.565	516	99.3	26.4	30.9	42.0	63.9	76.4
OECD	0.194	21	18.5	32.7	86.7	89.3	53.0	68.7
World	0.462	215	41.9	26.2	64.1	71.0	46.8	73.9

Source: UNDP (2024:Statistical Annex, Table 5).

These data nevertheless tell a consistent story about which regions are moving toward greater gender equality, which ones are lagging, and that human development generally increases gender-specific development and gender equality. As countries become better off, however, while the health and education measures improve for women, the economic differences in terms of labor force participation and per capita income become more salient, impeding further progress in closing the gender inequality gap.

While the indicators included in the HDI/GDI and GII have been deemed to be the most useful in terms of the tradeoff between data availability and representation of areas of interest, numerous other indicators are tracked to monitor progress toward gender equality. An interesting alternative approach to measuring well-being is the World Happiness Report project, operating since 2012, wherein a worldwide sample of people is surveyed regarding their happiness. Here, the gender disparity is that men in low-income countries generally report lower happiness than do women, although the gap has narrowed following the pandemic, and girls in high-income countries report lower satisfaction than do boys, although there is no overall gender gap in high-income countries (Helliwell et al. 2024).

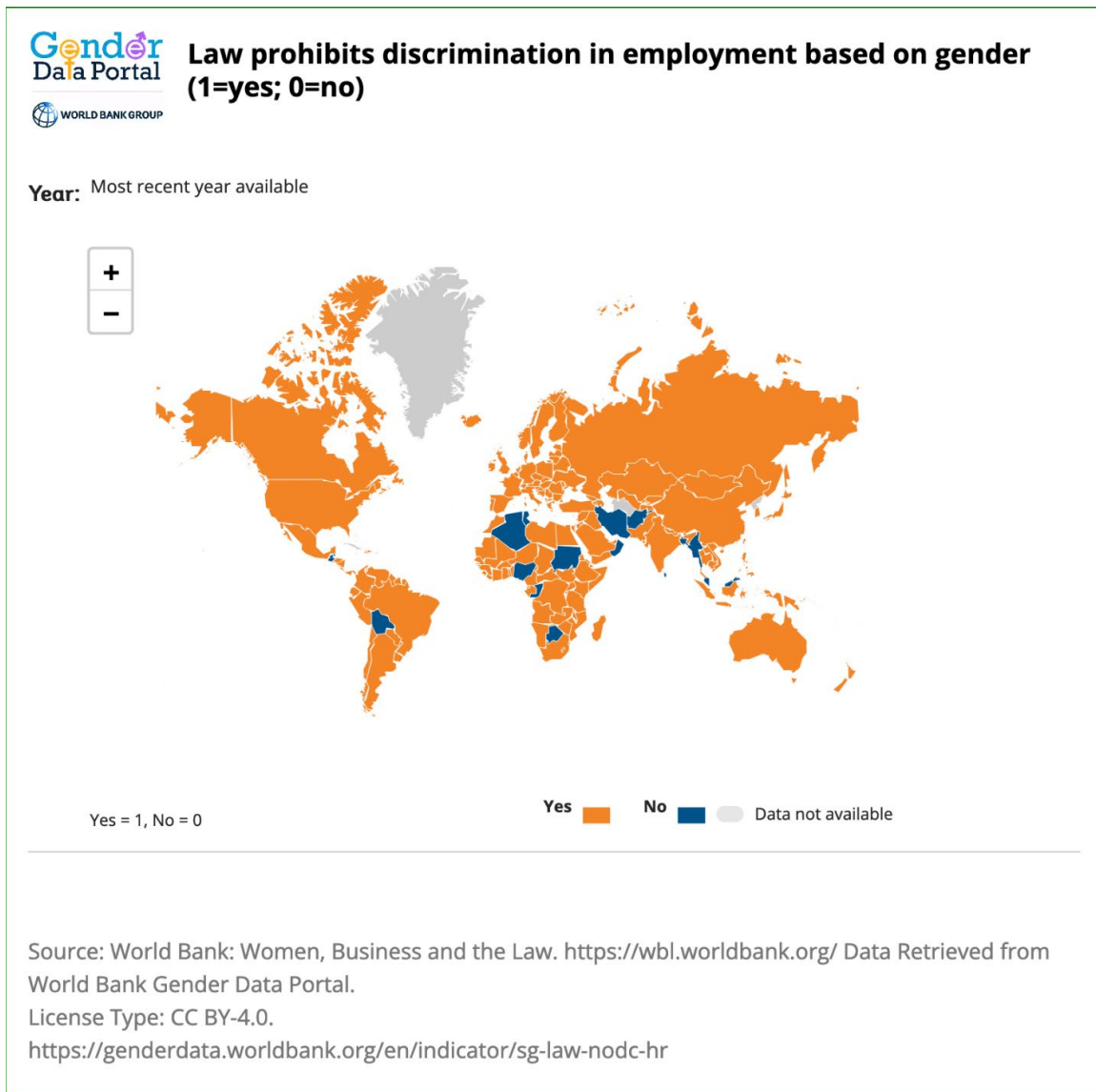
Overall, the very fact that many agencies, governments, and individuals now take gender equality as a societal goal as unassailable is a sign of great progress. Although there may be those who doubt that complete equality is attainable and also question whether equality of opportunity may not necessarily lead to equality of outcome, the cooperation of official groups in advocating for and increasing legal structures and policies that approve the concept of gender equality is crucial in countering social norms that push away from equality.

One element of progress toward gender equality has been the increased sign-on of many countries to antidiscrimination and anti-harassment policies and legislation as well as numerous other pro-gender-equality actions. For example, Figure 6 shows which countries have prohibitions against sex discrimination. Almost all countries have such laws on their books at this point, although there are notable outliers, such as Algeria and Iran.

Figure 7 shows which countries have legislated against sexual harassment in employment. The vast majority of countries, including most of the OECD group (except Japan) has passed such legislation, although not as many as have antidiscrimination laws on their books, and Russia is a notable outlier. Of course, having laws on the books and actively enforcing them are two different things. In the United States, legislation preceded active enforcement by about a decade and court backlogs can lead to long waits for legal action and preemptive settlements of antidiscrimination suits; nonetheless, the existence of such laws is a heartening official statement about societal intentions to move toward greater gender equality.

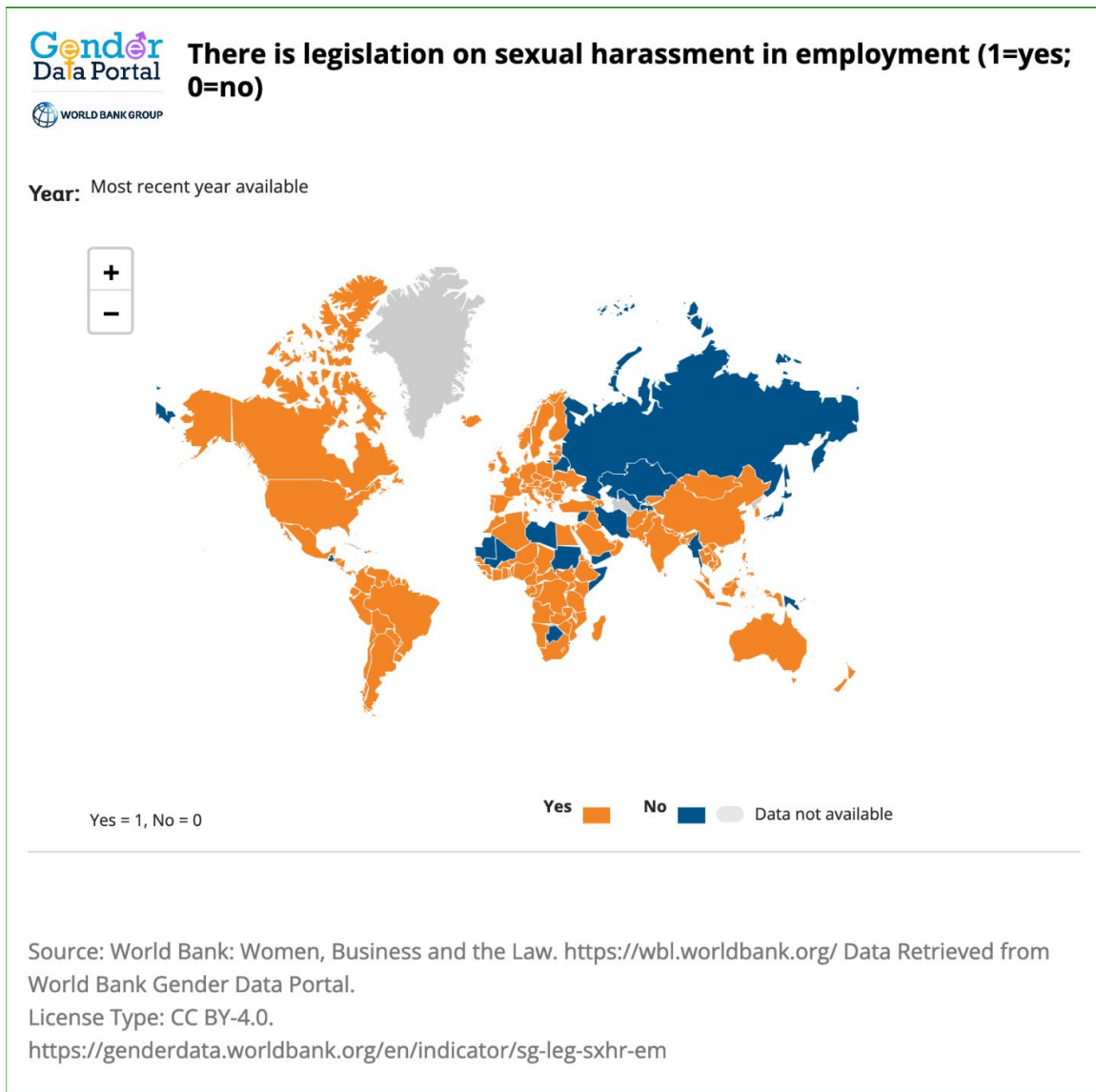
As countries continue their slow convergence toward common structures of law and market—albeit with many bumps, stalls, and retrogressions along the way—it appears that gender differences are not yet the same everywhere, as some areas still evince much larger differences; however, the correlation of reduced difference with increased human development, particularly in health outcomes for women across regions, leads to the hope that we will see continued progress in reducing these differences, although the intractability of fundamental economic differences by gender indicates that the road to complete gender equality is not certain and societal well-being does not lead automatically to income convergence in particular.

Figure 6. Countries Prohibiting Gender Discrimination in Employment



Additionally, more attention needs to be paid to gender differences within countries as well as between countries. Country-level data subsume many differences that can be found between rural and urban areas; between regions; and between racial, ethnic, and class groups within countries. Much remains to be both studied and addressed in the area of economic gender differences.

Figure 7. Countries with Legislation against Sexual Harassment in Employment



STATISTICAL SOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL DATA RELATED TO GENDER OUTCOMES

More data that are disaggregated by gender are being collected, and some countries (Sweden and the Philippines, among others) make a point of trying to disaggregate by gender as much as possible. This has made analysis of gender differences easier, although it may be hard to extend the analysis back in time. Almost no such data are available in systematic form before World War II, and routine collection of labor force and other data

did not start in general before the 1970s and were often not available in computer-readable form before then.

Data availability and quality vary substantially across countries. Many of the countries discussed in the second section have made great strides in regularizing their data collection, using common definitions for their data, and cooperating through agencies such as Eurostat and the OECD in sharing and aggregating their data. A number of other countries also take data collection seriously and run regular household and labor force surveys to collect data at standard intervals. Time-use data have also become more widely available, with several countries now collecting time-use data fairly regularly (e.g., the American Time Use Survey, ATUS, <https://www.bls.gov/tus/>); however, countries with fewer resources can struggle to collect data regularly and systematically, and civil war, invasions, and other forms of strife often disrupt data-collection efforts. Some data sites are clearer about labeling the relative reliability of the data; others, not so much. It is also often clear which countries are struggling to collect regular data, because they may be missing from the database or only have older years of data available. Other countries may suppress data because they do not want the information known. For instance, China suspended youth unemployment data in mid-2023 because it was so high, then changed the way youth unemployment was calculated when the data started to be released again in January 2024 (Soo 2024).

Most of the data on the pages listed below are collected by individual country statistical agencies, either from data reported to the government as part of another purpose (such as businesses reporting data for tax purposes) or as part of a survey done specifically to collect a sample of data. Many countries also perform censuses from time to time, attempting to collect data from everyone rather than from a random or specific sample of persons. For example, the United States collects census data once every decade but also collects labor force survey data monthly and has many other regular data-collection projects. A number of international agencies, such as the United Nations, have attempted to get countries to standardize their data definitions and collection systems or are sometimes able to reclassify data that they receive from countries into more standard formats. Some groups, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, also create their own projections of information for their own and other countries. A common projection would be to create an age-gender pyramid so as to project the number of women and men at different ages in a country. This can also be used, along with current and projected fertility rates, to project future population numbers for different countries.

Many other surveys exist for different countries and different subgroups within countries that are performed by researchers on a one-time or continuing basis; however, their more ephemeral and often time-delineated nature makes them of less use for cross-country and within-country comparisons over time. They are less likely to be standardized and also may contain qualitative information that is hard to code and compare across time and space. Some projects attempt to use such information systematically, however; the Human Relations Area Files (<https://hraf.yale.edu/>) is a depository that contains such information drawn from numerous ethnographic and other studies, and it contains interesting data on gender differences across societies.

Listed below are the main international statistical sites that students and researchers can use to get systematic cross-country data disaggregated by gender.

Eurostat. Eurostat (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>) is the statistical agency for the European Union (currently 27 countries) and has a general database site (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database>) as well as its own gender statistics site (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics).

International Labour Office (ILO). The ILO (www.ilo.org) collects statistics for the labor force by age and sex, employment and earnings statistics by sex, and proportion of women in management positions for all countries where data are available. The ILO maintains an online statistical database (<https://ilostat.ilo.org/>) and a labor document database (<http://labordoc.ilo.org/>).

International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF (<https://www.imf.org/>) doesn't itself generate that many statistics that are directly relevant to gender, but it does issue research reports related to gender (<https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/Gender>), and many of its stats can be useful for relating economic growth and financial data to gender outcomes (<https://www.imf.org/en/Data>).

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD (<https://www.oecd.org/>) has a data-explorer interface (<https://data-explorer.oecd.org/>); a Gender, Institutions, and Development database; and a social institutions and gender index that they calculate from these data for 140 countries (both of these can be accessed through the data explorer). They also have a dashboard on gender gaps for the OECD countries (<https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/gender-dashboard/comparison.html>).

United Nations (UN). The UN has a statistics division (<https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/>) with a gender section (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/index.cshtml>), as well as a subgroup, UNWomen (<https://www.unwomen.org/en>) with its own statistics site (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/>).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The UNDP (<https://www.undp.org/>) collects data yearly for the Human Development Report (<https://hdr.undp.org/>), the Human Development Index (<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>), and the associated Gender Development Index (<https://hdr.undp.org/gender-development-index#/indicies/GDI>) that are also available through its statistics site (<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center>). The UNDP has also developed the Gender Inequality Index (<https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality->

index#/indicies/GII) and the Gender Social Norms Index (<https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>).

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO (<https://www.unesco.org/en>) has an institute for statistics with data on education and literacy related to gender in its database (<https://uis.unesco.org/>) and has a site on gender equality in education (<https://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/gender-equality-education>).

United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA has a useful world factbook site (<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>) with country profiles including basic data separately by gender.

United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. The Census Bureau operates a useful international database of population estimates by gender and age for numerous countries (<https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/idb/#/dashboard>).

World Bank. The World Bank (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/home>) has a general data portal (<https://data.worldbank.org/>), a world development indicators site (<https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>), and a gender data portal (<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/home>) and publishes yearly World Development Reports (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr/wdr-archive>) focusing on different topics of interest each year.

World Happiness Report. The World Happiness Report (<https://worldhappiness.report/>) is a partnership of Gallup, the Oxford Wellbeing Research Centre, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and an editorial board. It is published annually and has a general data portal (<https://worldhappiness.report/data/>).

World Health Organization (WHO). The United Nations' WHO (<https://www.who.int/>) has a general data portal (<https://www.who.int/data>) and a site for gender and health (https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1).

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