

A UK sub-national gender equality index: challenges in developing a conceptual framework

Caitlin Schmid, Rose Cook and Laura Jones

This policy brief is the result of a collaboration between:

Global Institute for Women's Leadership, King's College London

Rose Cook, Laura Jones and Caitlin Schmid

Centre for Diversity Policy Research and Practice, Oxford Brookes University

Anne Laure Humbert

Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis, University College London

Jonathan Reades

University of Melbourne

Tania King and Victor Sojo Monzon

Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London

Louise Howard

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the King's Together Seed Fund for funding this project and George Murkin for designing this document. We are especially grateful to the experts who contributed invaluable insights during the November 2020 workshop: Aisha K. Gill (University of Roehampton), Andrew Bazeley (Fawcett Society), Anna Powell-Smith (Centre for Public Data), Caitlin Robinson (University of Liverpool), Catherine Fookes (Women's Equality Network Wales), Gregory Crouch (Equality and Human Rights Commission), Helen Norman, (University of Leeds), Jamie Heagerty (Government Equalities Office), Jill Rubery (University of Manchester), Klara Skrivankova (Trust for London), Laura Brown (University College London; Environment x Women's Health), Liz Hawkins (The Scottish Government), Lizzie Magnusson (Women's Aid), Natasha Codioli (Advance HE), Patricia Hamilton (University College London), Peter Main (King's College London), Polly Mackenzie (Demos), Rachel Cable (Oxfam Cymru), Sara Reis (Women's Budget Group), Sarah Ronan (Pregnant then Screwed), Shivonne Gates (Youth Futures Foundation), Sian Elliott (Trades Union Congress), Vishal Bhavsar (King's College London), and Vivienne Hayes (The Women's Resource Centre).

Introduction

Gender inequality remains a persistent problem in the UK, affecting multiple dimensions of women and men's lives. Mounting evidence of neighbourhood effects on socio-economic outcomes suggests that gender inequalities are experienced differently across local areas. For potential policy interventions to be effective, we need to understand the spatial variations in gender inequality in the UK.

To date, no sub-national measurement of gender equality exists for the UK. For this reason, the Global Institute for Women's Leadership (GIWL) is leading a project to develop a new index. This index will provide a benchmarking tool to compare levels of gender equality across local areas, aiding further research and targeted policy intervention.

In this context, GIWL organised a stakeholder workshop to consult experts and potential users on the conceptual framework of this new UK gender equality index. Participants were divided into focus groups reflecting six relevant domains of gender inequality, previously identified through a literature and policy review: Power & Participation, Educations & Skills, Economic resources, Unpaid work & Care, Health & Wellbeing, and Violence. This policy brief reports on the results of the workshop.

The brief first introduces the background of the project and the aims of the workshop in more detail. After this, the findings of the workshop are presented, starting with a discussion of the opportunities and challenges involved in the development of a UK gender equality index, as identified by participants. The five overlapping challenges relate to: intersectionality, data availability and quality, relative vs. absolute levels of equality, the level of measurement and the aggregation of scores. Following this, the policy brief presents the concrete measures to include within the index, as proposed by participants. On the basis of the findings, the paper finishes by formulating six guiding principles for the development of a UK sub-national gender equality index as a resource for policy makers, researchers and activists in the pursuit of gender equality across the UK.

Background

Gender inequality remains a persistent problem in the UK. Growing attention is being paid to the multiple ways it influences all our lives — from the gender pay gap, the prevalence of sexual harassment and gender-based violence, to disparities in health and life expectancy.

Mounting evidence of neighbourhood effects on socio-economic outcomes highlights the importance of capturing and understanding the multiple manifestations of gender inequality across local areas of the UK. Yet, measures of gender inequality mainly exist at the international level, hiding local-level differences and utilising indicators which may not be ideal for capturing the UK context. Moreover, where local level data does exist, it is often not harmonized across the UK or readily available in a form usable by stakeholders.

To understand how gender inequality varies across the UK, we need to be able to operationalise it as a measurable construct, requiring appropriate and accurate measurements. This will facilitate evaluation of campaigns and policy interventions addressing gender inequality as well as helping researchers investigate its relationship to other outcomes. Thus, there are sound policy and research-related motivations for developing a robust approach to conceptualising and measuring gender inequality.

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership is leading a project towards the development of a valuable and acceptable statistical index (see box below) measuring gender equality in local areas of the UK. The aim of the project is to:

- Pilot a methodology and create a data resource for measuring and mapping gender equality at the local area level in England and Wales (Scotland and Northern Ireland data permitting). This resource will combine data from surveys, administrative resources, and big data to measure how women and men's day-to-day experiences are structured in the areas they live in.
- Develop a statistical index based on this data resource.
- The index will provide a benchmarking tool to compare local area levels of gender equality to aid further research and targeted policy intervention.

What is an index?

An index is a statistical tool designed to capture a complex multi-dimensional phenomenon by combining multiple observable (i.e. measurable) indicators relating to the phenomenon in a single measure. Indices are commonly used by researchers to identify differences across local areas, countries or regions. Indices are increasingly important to the evidence-base for social policy and help target limited resources.

International gender equality indices do not allow regional variations within a country to be captured, as they compare country-level data for women and men. Examples include the [Global Gender Gap Index](#) by the World Economic Forum, the [Gender Equality Index](#) by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the [Gender Inequality Index](#) by the United Nations Development Programme.

In the UK, the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland allow for the identification of the most disadvantaged areas. However, the results are not disaggregated by sex and the domains are not necessarily appropriate for an analysis of gender inequalities.

In the spirit of the IMD, NatCen developed the [Women's Hour Index](#) in 2017 to identify the best places for women to live in Britain, mapping women's quality of life across different local authorities. Rather than comparing women and men, the index focuses exclusively on outcomes affecting women by age group.

In December 2020, the Scottish Government released [Scotland's Gender Equality Index](#), which will allow progress towards gender equality to be monitored over time. Although the choice of domains aligns with the [Gender Equality Index](#) by the EIGE, Scotland's Gender Equality Index is constructed using a distinct set of indicators pertinent to the Scottish context. It forms a critical step towards better understanding gender disparities in the UK. However, it is not designed to capture regional variation in gender equality levels across Scotland.

Two UK-specific scorecards measure aspects of gender equality without aggregating them into a final score. The [Feminist Scorecard](#), first produced by Oxfam Cymru and the Women's Equality Network Wales in 2019, assesses the Welsh Government's progress with regard to gender equality. However, this scorecard does not look at patterns of gender disparity below the national level either. In contrast, the [Pankhurst-Fawcett Scorecard](#), first issued in 2018 by GM4Women2028, focuses specifically on the gender equality context in Greater Manchester.

Although the above indices and scorecards are valuable instruments, a comprehensive index measuring and mapping gender equality across local areas in the UK is still missing. Filling this gap will help refine our understanding of gender disparities in the UK with the ultimate aim of promoting greater equality.

Towards this effort, GIWL organised a workshop on November 19, 2020 to consult experts on the development of a conceptual framework for measuring gender equality sub-nationally in the UK. The workshop offered the opportunity to:

1. Explore which aspects of gender inequalities are most significant in the UK context.
2. Involve potential users of the index in its development.
3. Discuss challenges in the development of a sub-national gender equality index.

24 academics, researchers, activists and policy practitioners from various disciplines across England, Wales and Scotland participated in the two-hour online session, contributing their expertise on gender inequality as well as their knowledge of regional inequalities in the UK.

Participants were informed that the project recognizes the importance of women's empowerment: promoting women's decision-making power, access to resources and opportunities, and increasing women's status and voice in the home and community. At the same time, there is ample evidence showing that men too suffer from patriarchal structures and that experiences can vary across different intersections. Therefore, in addition to considering women's experiences of inequality, participants were invited to discuss disadvantages faced by men and diverse manifestations of inequalities.

The experts were divided into focus groups and asked in a first session to identify ideal concepts for the measurement of gender equality at the local area level across six broad domains:

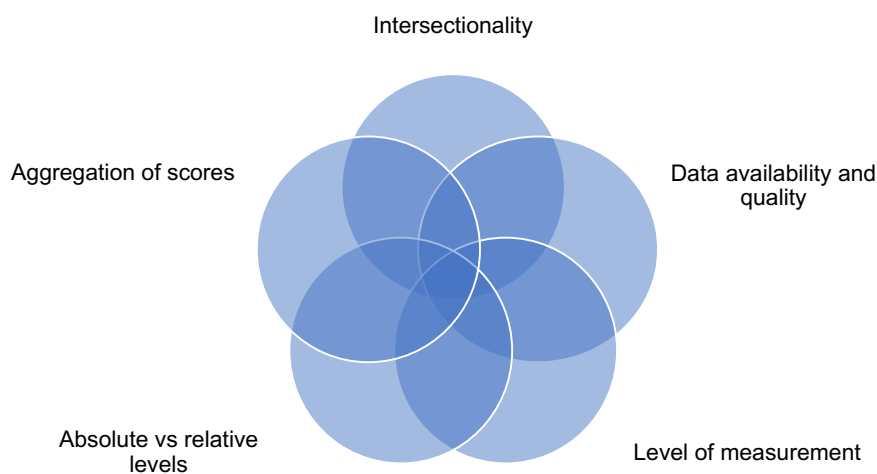
1. Power & Participation
2. Educations & Skills
3. Economic resources
4. Unpaid work & Care
5. Health & Wellbeing
6. Violence

As potential users of the index, participants were asked in the second session to assess the usefulness of the concepts identified in session one, and their potential impact on research, policy intervention and knowledge generation more generally.

Throughout both sessions, the participating experts contributed invaluable insights by highlighting key challenges for the development of a UK sub-national gender equality index. This policy brief summarises the outcome of the workshop by presenting these challenges and introducing the concrete measures of gender equality identified by each group.

Challenges for the development of a UK sub-national gender equality index

Through the process of identifying concrete measures, and capturing and assessing their usefulness, participants identified five overlapping challenges to intersectionality, data availability and quality, relative vs. absolute levels, the level of measurement and the aggregation of scores.



Intersectionality

The importance of adopting an intersectional approach was emphasised throughout the workshop. The Power & Participation groups cautioned against obscuring the multiple forms of inequality by placing a predominant focus on gender equality. Instead, exposing intersecting forms of inequality should be a central objective of the index.

The Education & Skills group deemed an intersectional approach to be central because patterns of educational outcomes vary significantly according to students' ethnic backgrounds and other factors, like socio-economic status.

Similarly, the Violence group argued that since violence against women and girls (VAWG) is linked to multiple forms of inequality, taking an intersectional approach is crucial for the index's ability to capture and understand the domain. To do so, however, requires the availability of data on all forms of VAWG disaggregated at least by sex, ethnicity and class.

Data availability and quality

To allow for an intersectional analysis of gender inequality, the index should ideally be able to draw on harmonized data disaggregated by regional level for each UK country and relevant protected characteristics (including sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity).

Concerns regarding the current availability of such data and their consistency across the four nations were raised. However, the Power & Participation group stressed how essential it is for the validity of the index to include all four nations. One suggestion for working around inconsistencies or lack of data availability was to develop different indices for each nation using the available indicators, similar to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.

Besides harmonization and disaggregation, the Violence group emphasised the need for caution regarding data sources. Data on VAWG for instance are often collected by the police, resulting in obvious limitations in data quality, for instance due to underreporting or differences in definitions.

Absolute and relative levels

The challenge of capturing multiple forms of inequality further points to the question of whether to measure relative or absolute levels of equality. The project set out to measure the differences between values for women and men (i.e. levels relative to each other, e.g. gender gaps). In some instances, however, the overall achievement levels for both women and men (i.e. absolute levels) in a particular region might prove more telling than gender differences.

An example would be gender employment gaps, which might be narrow in a particular region because employment rates are low for both women and men, since unemployment or inactivity is generally high. This would imply that women and men might perform similarly because they find themselves in equally unfavourable situations.

This exemplifies how measuring the differences between values for women and men poses challenges in instances where a whole region is disadvantaged. Further, it raises questions around defining a relevant gender equality benchmark for regions when the required policy strategy might necessitate fundamental socio-economic changes at the national level.

Level of measurement

The group discussions identified both benefits and drawbacks of focussing on the larger (i.e. national level) versus the fine-grained (i.e. local area level) picture of gender inequality. In either case, the accessibility of the final output of the project was argued to carry significant weight; the data must be easily accessible and interpretable.

The Economic Resources group questioned the benefits of going beneath the national level, especially since challenges arise in instances where individuals work in different areas from where they live. The Unpaid Work & Care group noted that changes are needed in both the workplace and the home, which makes a measurement at the local area level difficult. Further, policy solutions required to improve work-family balance and the gender division of labour do not operate at the local area level. Rather, these will take effect at the household, local authority, regional or national level – although the group did

note that differences in service provision might vary at the sub-local authority level with implications for the gender division of unpaid work. Still, a focus on the national level could help avoid the identified complications. To better understand gender inequalities in the UK therefore, it was argued that efforts should first be directed at improving data quality at the national level, before moving to lower levels of measurement.

The Education & Skills group also questioned the usefulness of measuring the index at the local area level, since pupils and students might study in different places to where they are raised or live. However, if indexed to the local authority level, the index could be used to benchmark performance by matching local authorities similar in size and profile but different in performance. This could help create a dialogue between local authorities, facilitating knowledge sharing of effective policy and gender equality campaigns. Additionally, by publishing scores at the local area level, the index could encourage action by raising media attention for different localities.

The Power & Participation group pointed out that in the context of devolution, the opportunity now arises to capture variation in different forms of inequality across the devolved nations. This would also involve improved data collection at the national level, in turn facilitating the assessment of devolution's potential for promoting women's empowerment. Going below the national level, the Power & Participation group pointed out that regional data can be very effective in helping local campaign groups frame the case for policy makers, although data at the constituency level might be more persuasive for parliamentary politicians. Unfortunately, under-utilisation of regional data was raised as a common issue; there is a lack of awareness of the availability of such data and they are often difficult to access. This strengthens the case for an easily accessible index which combines data that are disaggregated by region or constituency.

To the Violence group, data at the regional or local level could provide local women's organisations with a significant evidence base to support applications for government funding. Although the limitation might remain that in local areas, pockets of poverty which increase the incidences of violence might be averaged out. To capture these pockets, the household level would have to be drawn on.

The initial perception of the Health & Well-being group was that local authorities and public health teams would be interested in an index measuring data on the local authority level. This way, the index could be used as a broad strategic or diagnostic tool to understand how local areas perform in relation to gender equality. But unless the data were broadly accessible and sufficiently granular so that an analysis of the underlying factors can be conducted, it was argued that the use of the index to health teams may be compromised.

Aggregation of scores

Regarding the construction of the index, participants highlighted the advantages and uses of different levels of aggregation. It was argued that policy makers are often more convinced by the concrete indicators themselves than by aggregated index scores. Abstract scoring may be less directly engaging for policy makers and less useful in decision making, even if more popular for the

media due to the ability to rank areas. This would imply that it is essential for the project to make the index, domain scores and the underlying data easily accessible.

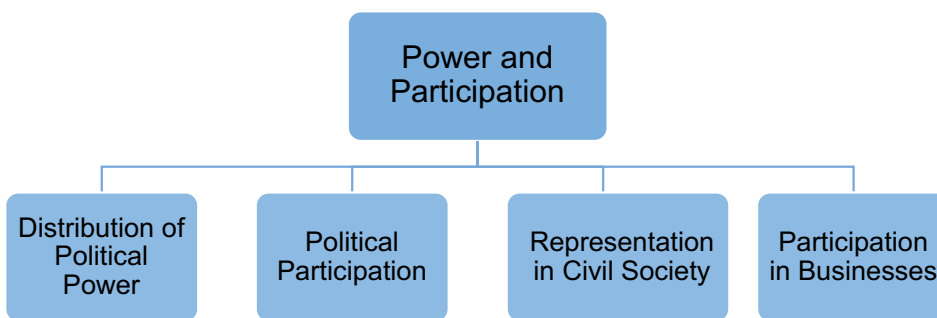
On the other hand, the Trust for London noted that their heatmaps combining poverty level scores of boroughs across a range of indicators had proven popular among both councillors and the media. However, any comparisons made must be meaningful. For instance, analysis should compare areas similar in size and profile and the index should be linked to concrete recommendations for action. These recommendations could be strengthened through collaboration with local campaign groups.

Concrete measures of gender equality across the six domains

In addition to highlighting key challenges in the development of the index, participants considered measures which should ideally be included, presented below. Their suggestions make clear that some gender equality domains are easier to translate into measures, for instance Education & Skills and Economic Resources. In contrast, domains like Violence and Health & Well-Being proved more complex to conceptualise and operationalise for use in a quantitative gender equality index.

Power & participation

The four key concepts of gender inequality discussed in the domain of Power & Participation relate to gender inequalities in the political sphere, in civil society and in business.



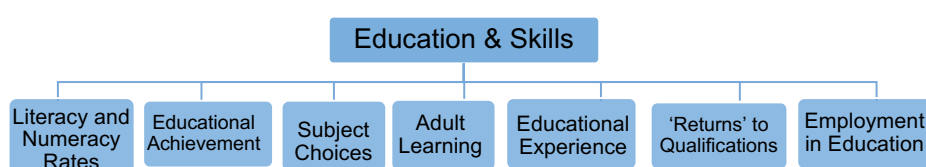
- 1. Equal distribution of political power** is a central feature of gender equality and should be included in the index. This requires diversity in both the candidate pool of individuals standing for election as well as equal outcomes amongst elected officials. Cutting through all levels of political representation, equal representation should be achieved amongst councillors up to members of parliament and extended to committee chairships, non-departmental body boards and school governorship.
- 2. Equal participation in politics** was further identified as a central concept to measure. Gender equality is required in day-to-day engagement with democracy, through voting, party membership, and engagement with political parties and organisations.
- 3. Equal representation in civil society** and the broader institutions that hold government to account should be measured to guarantee that institutions reflect the communities they serve. This requires diversity in senior leadership and trustee positions, public boards, health boards, magistrates or in the local judiciary. Further unelected but powerful roles to consider are at university or research bodies (e.g. vice chancellors) and in law enforcement agencies (e.g. police and crime commissioners, magistrates

and potentially probation officers). Crucially, diversity in civil society must go beyond gender parity to guarantee wider representation, reflecting diversity in socioeconomic status, ethnicity, disability and other protected characteristics.

- 4. Equal participation in businesses** should also be measured, for instance by capturing gender differences in leadership within commercial sectors (e.g. directorship of companies).

Education & skills

In this domain, seven aspects were identified as vital to contributing to our understanding of the drivers of gender inequality and regional variation. These concepts relate to individual-level outcomes for students, while also considering the links to the labour market.

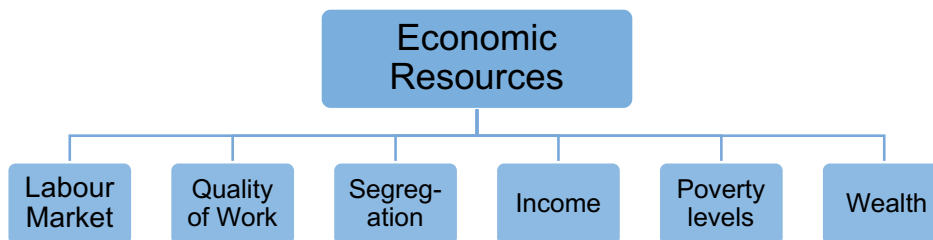


- 1. Gender differences in literacy and numeracy rates** should be measured.
- 2. Gender differences in educational achievement** at different levels (primary, secondary education) should be included and will likely exhibit regional differences.
- 3. Gender differences in subject choices**, across both academic and vocational education as well as apprenticeships, are necessary to include to address the segregation between subject areas where men predominate (e.g. STEM) and where women predominate (e.g. humanities, social care). Schools can be effective in tackling gender norms that lead to differences in subject choices, so pressure should be put on educational facilities to try and actively work against segregation and loss of talent; for instance by offering targeted programmes designed to improve gender-balanced participation in certain subject areas and make them more effectively tailored to their audience.
- 4. Gender differences in participation in adult learning** (formal and informal) is becoming increasingly important to document, especially in light of rapidly evolving technologies and the growing knowledge economy.
- 5. Gender differences in experiences of education** including students' wellbeing and relationships with other students and teachers is also a concept to consider capturing, as it could facilitate the creation of targets or benchmarks for schools to work towards to improve educational experiences.
- 6. Gender differences in the 'returns' to qualifications** could be measured using income level by educational attainment, to capture potential mismatches between qualifications and eventual labour market position. This could help establish where certain qualifications are unequally rewarded for certain groups.

- 7. Gender differences in employment in education** should also be taken into consideration. This covers both working conditions of primary and secondary teachers and academic staff, differences in teacher assessment, and access to leadership positions within educational institutions.

Economic resources

The Economic Resources group identified six concepts relating to gender inequalities in employment and financial resources.

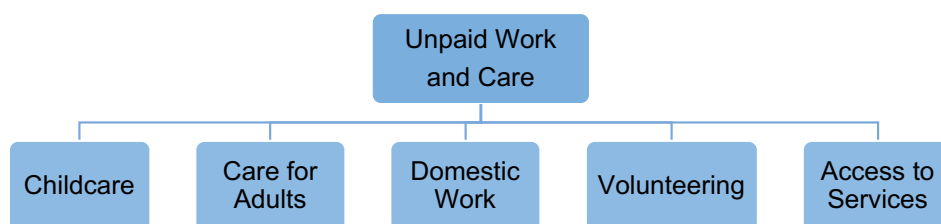


- 1. Gender differences in labour market participation** manifest themselves in multiple ways. To capture these, the index should look at differences in the rate of full-time employment, self-employment and underemployment. Additionally, economic ‘inactivity’ due to caring activities remains a persistent problem and should be captured.
- 2. Gender differences in quality of work** such as job security or precarity of contract (e.g. zero-hours) should be considered alongside access to flexible work arrangements and the take-up of parental leave. Outcomes of and policies around health and safety of workers would also be relevant.
- 3. Gendered segregation in employment**, both horizontal and vertical, are central concepts which should be measured. To cover the former measurement of the share of women in STEM occupations and in the care or creative sector should be included in the index. The share of female managers, directors and senior officials could contribute to capturing vertical segregation.
- 4. Gender differences in income** should be captured both in terms of average pay and by measuring the share of women receiving the national living wage. This is particularly important to consider in relation to occupational segregation; looking at the interaction between the industry where women are more likely to work and how that drives their income at different levels. In this context, it is important to look beyond wage income to capture the gender differences in benefit claims, such as Universal Credit.
- 5. Gender differences in poverty levels** are closely related to the previous concept and should be captured by looking at the share of women at risk of poverty, but also pension contributions. It would be relevant to capture household distribution of resources (i.e. how women and men use their money, and whether funds are pooled) although this will be difficult to measure.

6. **Gender differences in wealth** could be measured by looking into gender differences in home ownership or the share of women and men who have savings or pension funds.

Unpaid work & care

The Unpaid Work & Care group identified five areas which are known to exhibit gender inequalities, which will have further deepened due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, it was argued that while the measured gender differences in each of the identified areas might be small, their cumulative effects will carry significant weight and spill over to other important domains such as women's labour market participation. These cumulative effects might not be captured by the quantitative nature of the index, but it would still be relevant to emphasise in the analysis of the findings. The same goes for norms and expectations embedded in policies and practices. For instance, whether employers are more likely to offer flexible working arrangements to women rather than men, which would hinder men's greater involvement in parenting. Finally, participants emphasised the importance of avoiding a heteronormative framing of the gender division of unpaid work and care in the conceptualisation of the index.



1. **The gendered division of childcare** remains a persistent problem for gender inequality. The index should ideally capture gender differences in care involvement across different age groups of children as these might be affected by different policies. For instance, care for children under the age of 1 should be analysed to better understand gender differences in parental leave entitlement and take up. Further, gender differences in care for children of pre-school age (i.e. 2 to 5-year-olds) are relevant to capture, especially given the current difficulties of early years childcare providers. Similarly, the index should ideally measure differences in time spent caring for children of schoolage and children with special educational needs and disabilities. Gender differences in childcare will likely differ across local authorities, but to understand the variation it was argued to be nonetheless important to link the findings to developments on the regional and national level.
2. **The gendered division of care for other adults**, including eldercare and care for disabled relatives, should also be considered by the index. Again, gender differences in care for adults will likely differ substantially between local authorities.
3. **The gendered division of domestic labour** should also be included to measure gender differences in physical or practical labour such as DIY and household budgeting as well as everyday routine tasks like cooking and cleaning. Ideally differences in emotional labour (such as relationship

maintenance) should also be captured. Finally, cognitive labour was highlighted as an emerging concept with relevance for gender inequalities pertaining to differences in anticipating, identifying, and managing needs and family responsibilities.

4. **The gendered division in volunteering** and its effects on other areas, especially economic participation should be measured.
5. **Access to public services** such as pre-schools, nurseries or after school programmes and services in support of eldercare will affect the gender division of unpaid work and care. Access to services impacting health vary across local authorities and will have been affected considerably Covid-19.

Health & well-being

The Health & Well-being group pointed out that health is a challenging domain to incorporate as part of the gender equality index. Rather, it might make more sense to exclude it from the index so experts can instead analyse the relationship between gender equality and health outcomes.

Further, the group discussed whether the index should aim to measure women's empowerment, gender differences including disadvantages to men (such as suicide or cardiovascular disease) or quality of life more generally. The approach would result in distinctive measures. For instance, focussing on women's empowerment would allow gender-specific measures to be included, for example teenage pregnancy rates or maternal mortality. If the focus is on gender differences, the complexity of the health domain would lead to the index including indicators that do not necessarily have an equivalent for women (e.g. prostate cancer) or men (e.g. cervical cancer). In particular, the question was raised as to how the index could account for the health-survival paradox, i.e. the fact that women on average experience more health conditions but still live longer than men. One way to capture this would be to create an indicator defined as the differences between life expectancy and the number of healthy life years.

Despite the complexity of the health domain, the group identified seven measures that could be included:

1. Health risks vs prevalence of illness
2. Health status (e.g. Healthy life years)
3. Health behaviour (e.g. Smoking and physical activity)
4. Health care/service provision (e.g. Perinatal provision)
5. Service provision with regard to prevalence in area (i.e. Services meeting needs)
6. Access to health services (e.g. Unmet medical needs)
7. Access to health care for different disorders

Violence

Rather than identifying concrete measures, the discussions in the Violence group centred around the importance of capturing the structural and intersectional nature of gender-based violence and its effects on all other domains of gender inequality. The alarming effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were argued to make this effort all the more pertinent.

A central aim of the index should be to cover all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) to avoid the common fallacy of reducing the issue to domestic violence. A way forward would be for the index to adopt an approach which reflects the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. This declaration goes beyond domestic violence to include psychological and sexual violence in private and public life as well as stereotyping and also seeks to protect women who are more vulnerable to violence, for instance, migrant women. UK policy regularly falls short in acknowledging the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women by reducing VAWG to domestic violence. The recent Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-2021 was highlighted as an example of this tendency within the political sphere.

To better capture the structural and intersectional nature of VAWG and its multiple manifestations, the index could complement its quantitative approach with qualitative analyses to assess the adequacy of UK law and policy in protecting all women from violence. This would, for one, allow process indicators to be discussed in addition to the output variables included in the index. Secondly, additional qualitative analyses could further our understanding of the unintended consequences of, for instance, governmental inaction on VAWG or reductions in service provision. To assess institutional responses, measures relating to instances of hate speech, gender attitudes, or court judgements on VAWG could be considered.

The evidence base offered by the index would be useful to exert pressure and influence national policy change, which would be particularly effective if collaboration with women's organisations is established to develop policy briefs and recommendations. Further, if sufficient data could be collected at the regional or local level, women's organisations could draw on the results of the index to support applications for government funding.

Towards a UK sub-national gender equality index: summary of challenges, principles and opportunities

The results of the workshop indicate a general agreement regarding the relevant aspects of gender equality in the UK context. The discussions made evident that the gender equality domains Education & Skills, Economic Resources and Power & Participation are easier to operationalise. In contrast, the domains of Violence and Health & Well-Being proved more complex to translate into indicators for use in a quantitative gender equality index.

More generally, a difficulty that must be navigated in the development of a gender equality index is to avoid obscuring other forms of inequality when measuring gender differences. Adopting an intersectional approach to expose multiple forms of inequality would significantly increase the value and usefulness of the index. To do so, the index should ideally draw on harmonized data disaggregated by regional level for each UK country and protected characteristic (including sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity). However, such disaggregated data are still largely absent in the UK, making this aim challenging to fulfil.

Echoing the concern of obscuring other forms of inequality, the need to balance the importance of absolute versus relative levels of achievement was identified as a further challenge to the development of a gender equality index. If exclusively focusing on gender differences (i.e. relative levels), we might lose sight of changes required to improve both women and men's situation (i.e. absolute levels). Local area differences in achievement levels of both women and men can be identified more easily if the underlying data are easily accessible or the index does not aggregate the concrete indicators into an abstract overall score. Moreover, if the index is analysed alongside the Index of Multiple Deprivation, this risk may be further reduced.

Regarding the levels of measurement, trade-offs of focussing on the national versus local area level were identified. Challenges to applying the index to the local area level present themselves when considering that individuals may work or study in other areas from where they live. Further, policy solutions required to reduce the gender division of labour for instance would operate above the local area level, although quality of service provision might well vary on the sub-local authority level. Yet, local campaign groups might benefit considerably from the index measuring below the national level, as this could support cases for policy intervention and applications for government funding. In addition, it could help strengthen a dialogue between regions, local authorities or neighbourhoods, facilitating knowledge sharing of effective policy strategy and gender equality campaigns. By raising media attention around performance of local areas, pressure to increase efforts could be exerted on local government. Finally, looking below the national level would be relevant to capture the

effectiveness of the devolution strategy or regional policy initiatives for empowering women. In either case, the usefulness of the index is dependent on its accessibility: data and results must be easily accessible and interpretable for researchers, activists and policy makers.

Guiding principles

From the workshop, guiding principles for the development of an UK gender equality index can be drawn in conclusion:

1. Capturing differences on the local area level could refine the picture of gender inequalities across the UK and strengthen the evidence base for local campaign groups and policy makers. Yet, complex trade-offs between different definitions of 'local' were identified which depend on data availability, spatial variation, policy relevance and scope for actionability. These factors need to be examined further to identify the most appropriate and feasible level of measurement.
2. Relevant domains to include in the index are Power & Participation, Education & Skills, Economic Resources, Unpaid work & Care and Violence. Analysis of the relationship between gender inequality and health outcomes might be improved if Health & Well-being is excluded from the index.
3. Adapting an intersectional approach is crucial to shine light on the multiple manifestations of gender inequality and its intersection with other forms of inequality across the UK.
4. To guarantee conceptual adequacy and maximise usability of the index, the UK needs to increase efforts to collect reliable data that are disaggregated by protected characteristics on both the national as well as the local level.
5. Alongside gender differences (i.e. relative levels), the index should aim to capture regional variation in achievement levels of both women and men (i.e. absolute levels).
6. Whether the index combines the indicator values into an overall score for each local area or keeps them disaggregated, it is essential that the underlying data are easily accessible and interpretable. This will facilitate analysis of local area differences in absolute levels of achievement and increase the relevance and usefulness of the index for policy, research and activism purposes.

Opportunities of a gender equality index

If the above principles can be fulfilled, a UK sub-national gender equality index would offer a bespoke tool to measure gender inequality while also capturing its geographical variation. This index would fill an existing gap by combining gender-differentiated indicators across relevant dimensions of gender equality pertinent to the UK case. By offering an easily accessible index which combines data disaggregated by region or constituency, the problem of data underutilisation and inaccessibility could be overcome. Once disaggregated data can be drawn on more reliably and widely, the index can capture multiple manifestations of gender inequality and its intersection with other forms of inequality across the UK. As such, the index would offer a

valuable tool for analysing critical domains of gender inequality across the UK, refining and complementing the picture of inequality offered by existing instruments such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The data underlying the index would offer a critical data resource for mapping and measuring gender equality in the UK. The offered evidence base could benefit researchers and policy makers by adding a spatial dimension to gender equality analyses. Further, the index could facilitate the evaluation of policy intervention addressing gender inequalities as well as help target limited resources. The index may serve to add pressure for governmental action, which would be particularly effective if collaboration with campaign groups and organisations is sought to develop policy briefs and recommendations. Further, the evidence base could be used by local campaign groups and organisations in applications for government funding. Finally, the index could help strengthen a dialogue between regions, local authorities or neighbourhoods, facilitating knowledge sharing of effective policy strategy and gender equality campaigns which is of particular interest in the context of devolution.

Taken together, the multiple benefits signal that the development of a UK sub-national gender equality index following the above principles would offer a valuable resource to policy makers, researchers and activists in the pursuit of gender equality across the UK.

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London works towards a world in which women of all backgrounds have fair and equal access to leadership.

Chaired by Julia Gillard, the only woman to have served as Prime Minister of Australia, the institute brings together rigorous research, practice and advocacy to break down the barriers to women becoming leaders, while challenging ideas of what leadership looks like.

giwl.kcl.ac.uk
@GIWLkings
#womensleadership
giwl@kcl.ac.uk