ALiGN

Advancing Learning and
Innovation on Gender Norms

**The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI):
How can it help you in your work on gender norms?**

Contents

What is SIGI?

The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) is a tool for measuring gender-based discrimination. The SIGI looks at gaps that discriminatory legislation, social norms and practices create between women and men in terms of rights and opportunities.

The SIGI highlights the key role of social norms and institutions in determining outcomes for women and girls in areas as diverse as education, health, political representation and labour markets.

First launched in 2009, then updated in 2012, 2014 and 2019, the SIGI combines analysis of the legal and policy environment with data on practices and people's attitudes about what is acceptable (and not acceptable) for women and men in their specific context. Therefore, it reflects both the state of laws as well as the de facto situation on the ground.

The SIGI conceptual framework looks at women's rights in the family (e.g. child marriage), physical integrity (e.g. female genital mutilation, violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights), access to productive and financial assets (e.g. access to land, workplace rights) and civil rights (e.g. political representation). It focuses on how these institutions (be they formal or informal) play a pivotal role in limiting or enabling individual and collective agency and capabilities.

Box 1: What are discriminatory social institutions?

Social institutions influence the decisions, choices and behaviours of groups, communities and individuals. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights). The 'social' aspect of social institutions refers to the way in which formal and informal laws, social norms and practices influence social relations or human interactions.

Discriminatory social institutions are formal and informal laws, social norms and practices that reflect unequal gender norms that restrict women's and girls' rights, and their access to opportunities and resources.

This short paper explains what the SIGI is, how it can help you in your work, and how it is being used by governments, development partners, researchers, policy-makers, civil society groups and advocacy organisations and networks. We include the main findings from the SIGI 2019 and from SIGI country studies in Uganda and Burkina Faso, to highlight just how useful it can be in progressing gender equality issues and priorities at both a global and a country level with policies and programmes.

Four main components of SIGI

The SIGI is comprised of four main components (see figure 1):

1. Country profiles with comprehensive information on legal, cultural and traditional laws and practices that discriminate against women and girls in 180 countries. The country profile describes the information underlying the assessment – e.g. the state of laws on domestic violence, the sources of data on its prevalence – and provides broader context such as whether and how domestic violence is reported, how it is typically responded to and the actions a government has taken to address the issue;

2. The Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB), comprising cross-national indicators on gender discrimination in social institutions (both indicators used in the SIGI index and others for which country coverage is too low);

3. The cross-country ranking, which classifies 120 countries (low, middle- and high-income countries) according to the level of discrimination of their social institutions;

4. A policy simulator allowing policy makers to scope out reform options and asses their likely effects in social institutions.

Figure 1: The composition of the SIGI 2019

Source: https://www.genderindex.org/
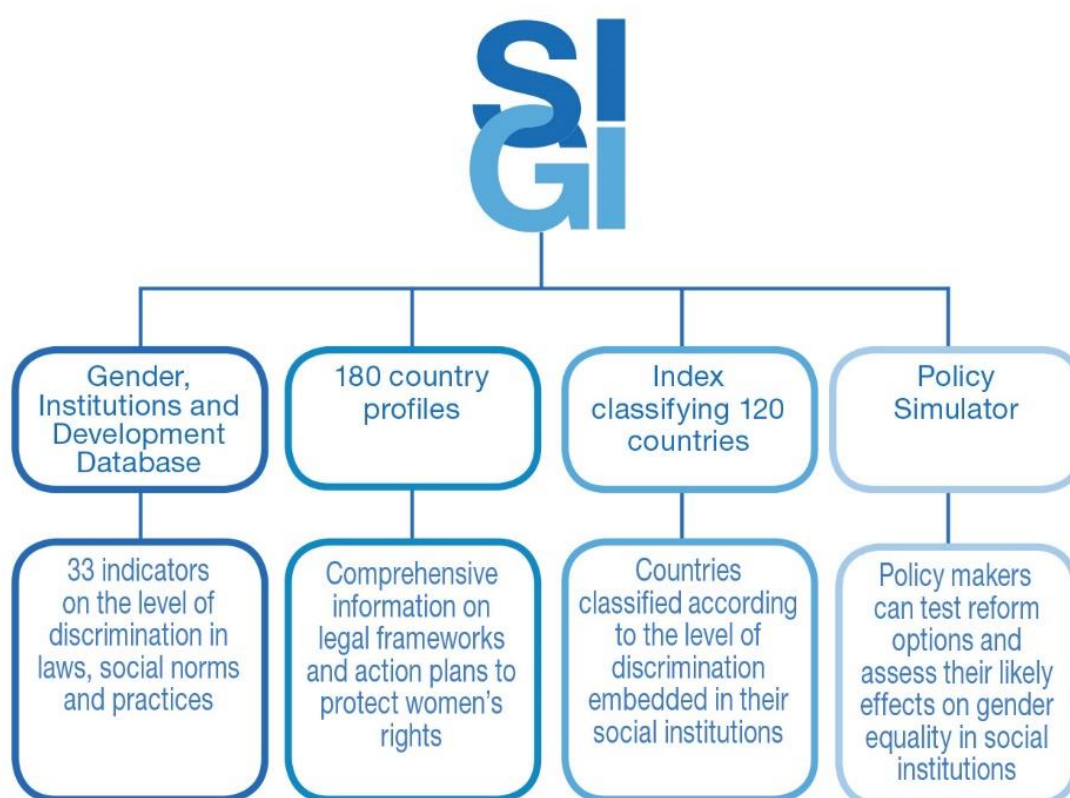
The SIGI was updated in 2012 (*Understanding the drivers of gender inequality*), with some revised variables, some new ones, and a scoring framework. The SIGI country scores and rankings were complemented with detailed country notes. The third version (2014) broke new ground by including Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries in its analysis, bringing coverage up to 160 country profiles. Since the launch of the SIGI in 2009, data sources on discriminatory social institutions have been gradually improving. For example, there is now more data on attitudes.

The SIGI 2014 demonstrated the universality of gender issues. The coverage and analysis on discriminatory social institutions was extended to OECD member countries. This revealed the universal challenge of violence against women, women's political participation, unpaid care work and women's economic rights. The GID-DB included information on gender disparities in unpaid care work, divorce and land rights. Because the index has evolved with each update, the indices should not be compared over time; rather each iteration gives insights into how countries compare with one another at a particular point in time.

The SIGI 2019 was launched in December 2018. New additions and developments included the extension of the country coverage to 180 countries, new indicators such as workplace discrimination and access to justice, a revised conceptual and methodological framework and updated country profiles and data in order to offer more comprehensive information to the development community.

The four key SIGI components are complemented by in-depth country studies (so far, conducted in Uganda and Burkina Faso, forthcoming in Tanzania) which adapt the framework to national contexts and give insights into subnational disparities in discriminatory social institutions.

How does SIGI work?

The SIGI index has four dimensions and 16 indicators (see figure 2). The 16 indicators, in turn, are made up of 33 variables. The composite index provides the big picture on levels of gender-based discrimination in national social institutions. The **dimension** (e.g. restricted physical integrity), **indicators** (e.g. violence against women) and **variables** (e.g. level of legal protection, prevalence and attitudes towards domestic violence) offer in-depth analysis of the challenge's women face in their daily lives in a given country or region. The dimensions are aggregated in a way that penalises inequality in each dimension and allows only partial substitution between them. Therefore, very high levels of women's deprivations in one dimension, indicator or variable cannot be fully compensated by equality in another aspect.

Capturing the gender differences in these key dimensions within a given country provides a much clearer picture of how social institutions shape women's lives. To do this, the SIGI combines qualitative information on legally based discrimination (which is coded quantitatively through a

categorical variable)[1] with quantitative information on the prevalence of, and attitudes towards, discriminatory practices (continuous variable)[2].

The composite index is a valuable instrument for capturing gender-based discrimination across different areas of women's lives, helping to draw attention to the challenges women face. The SIGI and its sub-indices ranges between 0% and 100% measuring the level of discrimination: higher value, higher level of discrimination. The SIGI is only computed for those countries that have values for each of the dimensions. However, those interested in scores for each dimension, indicator and variable can access the relevant cross-national data from the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB), whereas you can access country-specific data and learn more about the information that informed the quantitative assessment and the broader institutional context from the country profiles.

Figure 2: SIGI's four dimensions and 16 indicators

Source: https://www.genderindex.org/

---

[1] A categorical variable can take on a fixed number of possible values. Each value represents a level of discrimination that could be 0%, 25%, 50%, 75% or 100%.
[2] A continuous variable can take on an infinity of values usually comprises between 0 and 100% (share of women in parliaments).

Let's use the example of violence against women perpetrated by intimate partners to show the insights SIGI provides. Violence against women is a sub-index of the SIGI under the 'restricted physical integrity' dimension, and domestic violence is one of the types of violence that it covers (alongside rape and sexual harassment). The SIGI provides three quantitative data points for a given country:

1. *Legal framework:* The levels of protection provided by the legal framework against violence against women is measured using a categorical variable that estimates the level of legal discrimination:

   – 0%: The legal framework protects women from violence including intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment, without any legal exceptions and in a comprehensive approach.
   – 25%: The legal framework protects women from violence including intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment, without any legal exceptions. However, the approach is not comprehensive.
   – 50%: The legal framework protects women from violence including intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment. However, some legal exceptions occur.
   – 75%: The legal framework protects women from some forms of violence including intimate partner violence, rape or sexual harassment but not all.
   – 100%: The legal framework does not protect women from violence nor intimate partner violence nor rape and sexual harassment.

2. *Social norms:* Attitudinal data captures whether domestic violence against women is socially acceptable – for example, the proportion of women within a country who report that a man is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances.

3. *Practice:* Prevalence is measured using the proportion of women who report having experienced intimate partner and/or sexual abuse in their lifetime.

How does SIGI classify countries?
SIGI classifies countries into one of five categories by level of discrimination (figure 3):

1. **Very low levels of gender discrimination in social institutions: (SIGI<20%)**
   o Robust legal frameworks and measures that provide equal rights to women and men and reflect international criteria of comprehensive approaches.
   o Social norms favour gender equality and women's rights, leading to sound implementation of gender-sensitive laws and policies.

2. **Low levels of gender discrimination in social institutions: (20%<SIGI≤30%)**
   o Strong laws providing equal rights for women and men – but some international standards are not fully included in national approaches.

3. **Medium levels of gender discrimination in social institutions: (30%<SIGI≤40%)**
   o Inconsistent or conflicting legal frameworks due to discriminatory informal laws.
   o Social norms that perpetuate discriminatory practices.

4. **High levels of gender discrimination in social institutions: (40%<SIGI≤50%)**
   o Discrimination embedded in customary laws, social norms and practices.
   o Inappropriate legal protections against gender discrimination in all dimensions of social institutions.

5. **Very high levels of gender discrimination in social institutions: (SIGI>50%)**
   o Lack of protection of women's rights.
   o Very high levels of discrimination in legal frameworks, social norms and practices.

Figure 3: Classification of countries according to the SIGI 2019
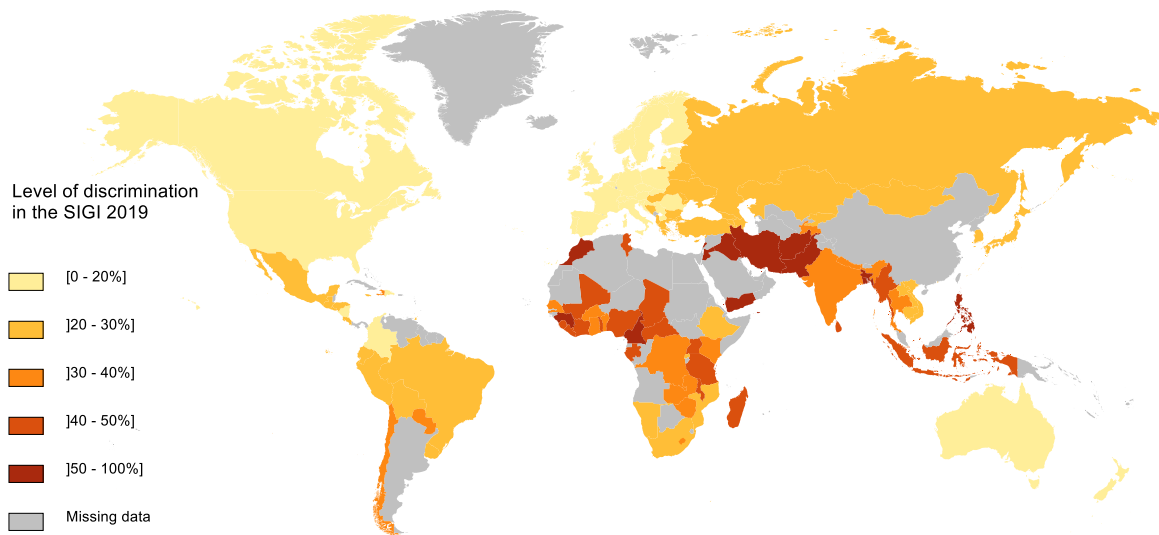
Note: Higher SIGI values indicate higher inequality: the SIGI ranges from 0% for no discrimination to 100% for absolute discrimination.

Source: OECD (2019), https://oe.cd/ds/GIDDB2019

An example of a country in the first category (very low gender discrimination) is Serbia – where the scores on 'restricted physical integrity' and 'restricted civil liberties' show particularly low inequality. The profile describes a strong legal framework that criminalises domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment, as well as institutions which provide for gender quotas in national and local elections and allow for equal access to public space (though it qualifies that Roma women and those from other ethnic minorities may face restrictions in this respect).

Conversely, a country with very high gender inequality in its social institutions is Mali – where discrimination is assessed to be one of the highest in terms of 'restricted physical integrity' and 'restricted access to productive and financial resources'. An absence of laws prohibiting domestic violence, spousal rape or sexual harassment contribute to this evaluation as does the fact that 73% of women consider a husband to be justified in beating his wife if she burns food or refuses sexual relations. In addition, the existence of customary law limits women's access to land and bank loans.

How can it help you?

Whether you're a researcher, policy-maker, development partner, representative of civil society group or advocacy organisation, or another type of work that involves tackling gender norms, how can you leverage SIGI and the wealth of data and analysis it offers?

SIGI can help you in your work, whether you are interested in **national, regional or international** analyses. Its primary contribution is to give insights into the root causes of gendered inequalities, and show which are more and which are less prominent within and across countries and regions. This can inform research aiming to better understand how variations in gendered outcomes arise, sharpen the efforts of advocacy campaigns, and enable policymakers to design appropriate preventative and corrective policies. For development partners or others interested in international comparison, the rankings can illustrate which countries have social institutions that are more and less conducive to gender inequality – both overall and in specific dimensions – which is important information for targeting resources and other support, and for monitoring change over time.

The SIGI's focus on social institutions complements other measures and indices – such as the [Gender Empowerment Measure](#) (GEM), [Gender Development Index](#) (GDI) and [Gender Inequality Index](#) (GII) – all of which are focused on outcomes and giving insights into the factors that drive these outcomes. Moreover, it provides a holistic, life-cycle approach that explores gaps between women and men in terms of rights and opportunities, as reflected in legislation, societal attitudes and practices.

The SIGI has an important role to play in the monitoring of [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), in casting light on the various structural barriers that may impede progress along the range of outcomes under Goal 5, focused on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls – notably violence against girls and women, child marriage, women's political leadership, access to sexual and reproductive health services and economic empowerment. It has also been identified as an official data source for monitoring Target 5.1 on ending discrimination against all women and girls, namely, measuring 'whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex' (Indicator 5.1.1).

The SIGI country studies can give us a deeper understanding of how discrimination against women is experienced within a country, reflecting, for example, disparities based on wealth, rural/urban residence, ethnicity, level of education, etc., highlighting variations that national averages often hide, and which policies can tackle head-on. These studies thereby provide crucial information for advancing the gender-related SDG targets, with local partners playing a key role in identifying discriminatory institutions at a national level, and tracking and monitoring progress. The insights these studies provide into how social institutions within countries shape outcomes for different groups of women are also vital for progressing the commitment to 'leave no one behind' that underpins the Sustainable Development Goals.

Box 2: Who is using SIGI and how?

- **Bilateral aid agencies and development foundations** (for example, in the UK, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) are using the country profiles and database to identify and target geographic and thematic areas for their gender programmes and projects.

- **International banks and financial institutions** including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and UN Women are using SIGI as a key research tool to inform their strategies. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has used SIGI to inform investments in gender equality programmes, while the African Development Bank (AfDB) has used SIGI in its gender strategy, Results Measurement Framework and African Gender Index.

- **Civil society organisations (CSOs) and gender activist groups** such as the Landesa Rural Development Institute have also used the SIGI framework as a key advocacy tool. Landesa has used the SIGI data and analysis on land and marital property laws to understand better the rights for women and men and how to assert them. Landesa has designed effective and holistic approaches (e.g. rights enhancement, awareness and enforcement) to transform discriminatory social institutions in rural settings.

What are the main findings of the SIGI 2019 Global Report?

The latest publication "*SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*" provides an overview of the main outcomes worldwide of the SIGI. Some of its main findings include:

1. Since the last report released in 2014 **progress has been made towards greater gender equality, particularly through the legal framework**. New legislation that enhances equality and abolishes discriminatory laws has been enacted. In the last five years, 14 countries have criminalized domestic violence and 15 countries have strengthened their legal frameworks to delay age of first marriage by eliminating legal exceptions allowing girls to be married. Additionally, gender-sensitive programmes and policies have had a positive effect on certain discriminatory social norms making them less prominent. As such, social acceptance of domestic violence has decreased from 50% in 2012 to 27% in 2018.

2. Despite the progress made, **at the current pace it will take over 200 years, or 9 generations, to achieve gender equality**. Political commitments, legal reforms and gender-sensitive programmes in many countries are still not translated into real change; the number of girl marriage and women's labour participation has stagnated, and slow progress has been made in the prevalence of domestic violence and women's political participation.

3. Slow progress is due to existing legal discrimination and loopholes, the inadequacy of existing laws and programmes, the uneven implementation and enforcement of the law within and across countries, and the persistence of discriminatory customary laws and social norms.

4. In all regions of the world, **women face the highest levels of discrimination in their own household**, especially regarding their responsibilities at home. In some countries, laws and social norms governing family matters still consider a woman as a dependant household member subordinate to her husband's authority and even in Europe and the Americas, women's roles are confined to their traditional reproductive and caring responsibilities.

Why conduct a SIGI country study?

The SIGI framework has also been used as a point of departure for country studies which permit a more in-depth evaluation of discriminatory institutions and their effects on women's lives, considering both institutions that have been identified as important across countries as well as those deemed important in a national context.

Conducting a SIGI country study enables us to explore sub-national disparities (e.g. between urban and rural areas, between ethnic groups, or rooted in other context-specific differences). It also provides a unique opportunity to work closely with national governments to develop context-specific indicators on social institutions. This can foster ownership and commitment and can also build national capacity for statistical and analytical work on gender and social institutions. Benefits include the following (see also figure 4):

- Indicators are included in national surveys, which are critical for evidence-based policy-making.
- Key stakeholders apply a gender lens to national policies and measures promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Gender is mainstreamed in national development strategies, plans and budgets.
- Policymakers are urged to look beyond gendered outcomes to understand the structural barriers at their root.

Figure 4: What national SIGI studies can do?

Source: https://www.genderindex.org/country-studies
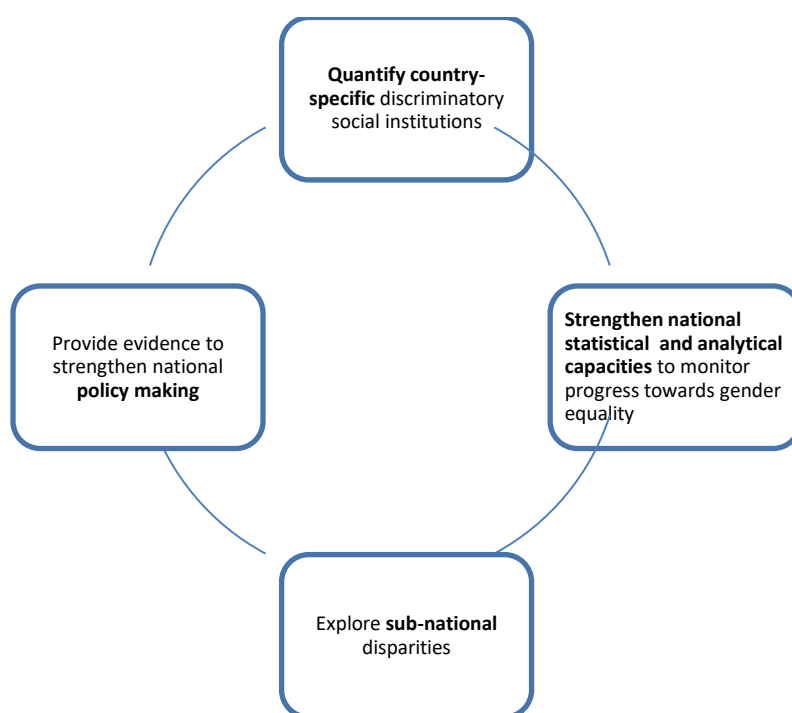
Two case studies: Uganda and Burkina Faso

Uganda

The OECD Development Centre and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) launched the first pilot of the SIGI in Uganda in 2013 to strengthen national policy-making to tackle the root causes of gender inequalities in the country. This gave policy-makers and the development community the first comprehensive evidence base on the impact of discriminatory social institutions on gender equality and development on women in different regions of the country. For example, while the Uganda-SIGI score indicated relatively low discrimination in Kampala, it was more than twice as high in the country's Mid-Northern and Southwest sub-regions. Whereas in Kampala, women benefited from better protection of their physical integrity and better status within the household, in the sub-regions with very high levels of discrimination, women's physical integrity was severely restricted, as evidenced in high levels of intimate partner violence and restricted access to sexual and reproductive health services. This has clear implications for the types of policy-support needed and where efforts should be concentrated.

The SIGI Uganda also showed that over the past two decades, the country has achieved solid progress due to comprehensive laws and policies designed to strengthen women's political participation and secure their right to land and other assets. However, it also highlighted that some gaps and challenges remain in key aspects of women's lives. Gaps between what people think and what people

do highlight the urgency of tackling discriminatory social norms through a whole-of-society approach including governments, men and women, community and religious leaders, teachers, and health and justice professionals among others. This is also essential in light of the many ways in which discriminatory social institutions interact to amplify gender inequalities – for example, women's limited ability to take decisions within households may be strongly influenced by norms that strongly favour boys. Therefore, ensuring policies tackle these interconnected barriers is vital to ensure their impact is mutually reinforcing.

Burkina Faso

The SIGI country study in Burkina Faso, launched in 2018, was the result of a two-year partnership between the government of Burkina Faso, the country's National Statistical Office, and the Austrian Development Cooperation. Through a series of consultations, workshops, in-depth research and field surveys, they adapted the methodology and conceptual framework of the global SIGI to fit the national context.

The results highlight how regional disparities are often hidden by national statistics, reinforcing the need to design policies that target local priorities and involve communities in finding solutions to the problems facing women and girls. The new data on discriminatory social institutions shows that it is vital to include social norms in policy approaches if they are to make serious inroads to empowering women and eliminating gender inequalities at the local and national levels.

The Burkina Faso government has taken steps to improve women's rights, particularly in education, health and political participation. It has also used SIGI to identify key challenges in designing and implementing gender equality policies. Its efforts have led to important changes, including in legislation (e.g. the new law on violence against women criminalises marital rape). But there remain substantial gaps and challenges in key areas of women's and girls' lives – as reflected in high levels of acceptance of early marriage for girls and intimate partner violence (which a larger share of women than men report being acceptable); a preference for sons which translates into inequalities in educational attainment; and unequal recourse to justice between women and men.

Taking the SIGI agenda forward

In this piece, we have shown that the SIGI offers rich quantitative and qualitative insights into the discriminatory social institutions that result in gender inequalities within and across countries. Moreover, its application at the country level has the potential to illuminate subnational variation in social institutions and how they affect girls' and women's lives. All of this can be an invaluable source of information for research, advocacy and policy design.

The index itself represents a compromise between those areas deemed to be cross-nationally important and the data available for their measurement (with successive versions of the SIGI reflecting advances in data). Important data gaps remain: social institutions are hard to measure, and

data is relatively lacking on women's unpaid care work, access to resources, and decision-making authority over land and assets, as well as on women's and men's attitudes toward these issues. However, ongoing international and national efforts to fill these gaps and harmonise statistical standards are promising. The current emphasis on producing better data to monitor the progress of Agenda 2030 within and across countries, alongside a renewed emphasis on social norms, should help to bolster our understanding of the critical role of discriminatory social institutions in constraining gender-related outcomes, as well as to how they can be reshaped to bring about tangible, measurable improvements in the lives of women and girls.

To find out more about SIGI 2019 country scores and rankings, including all 180 country profiles and analysis, go to: http://genderindex.org.

The OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB) is a new tool for researchers and policy-makers. Covering 180 countries, it has data on the institutional, legal and cultural practices that discriminate against women and girls.

The SIGI Simulator allows policy makers to scope out reform options and assess their likely effects on gender equality in social institutions. It enables users to compare a specific country with a range of other selected countries.

Wikigender is a global online collaborative platform linking policy-makers and experts from developed and developing countries to help them find solutions to advance gender equality. It focuses on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5.

Wikigender places the spotlight on gender data and statistics as a complement to the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB) and the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), both developed by the OECD Development Centre.

Wikigender is also:

- an online community
- an inclusive platform
- an informative and participatory platform dedicated to quality.

Key resources

Branisa, B., Klasen, S., Ziegler, M., Drechsler, D., & Jütting, J. (2014). The Institutional Basis of Gender Inequality: The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). *Feminist Economics*, *20*(2), 29–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2013.850523

Harper, C., Nowacka, K., Alder, H., & Ferrant, G. (2014). *Measuring women's empowerment and social transformation in the post-2015 agenda*. Retrieved from https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8838.pdf

North, D. C. (1991). *Institutions*. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (Vol. 5:1). Retrieved from http://kysq.org/docs/North_91_Institutions.pdf

OECD, Institut national de la statistique et de la demographie, & Ministere de la femme, de la solidarite national et de la famille. (2018). *Burkina Faso: Étude pays SIGI*. Paris. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/development/development-gender/ETUDE-PAYS-SIGI-BURKINA-FASO.pdf

OECD, & Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2015). *Uganda SIGI country report*. Retrieved from www.genderindex.org

OECD (2019) SIGI 2019 Global Report : Transforming Challenges into Opportunities, Social Institutions and Gender Index, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/bc56d212-en