

# Global gender gap: an uphill road

by Valentina Sorci and Rosita Zucaro

## 1. General Framework

The regular monitoring, regarding the measurement of the gender gap in the world, is provided annually by the Global Gender Gap Report benchmarks mainly based on a regional and national economic, political, education and health care achievements.

The Global Gender Gap Index, introduced by World Economic Forum in 2006, can be defined as a framework for capturing the magnitude and scope of gender-based disparities and tracking their progress. The rankings are designed to create greater awareness among a global audience of the challenges posed by gender gaps and the opportunities created by reducing them. The methodology behind the rankings is intended to serve as a basis for designing effective measures for reducing gender gaps.

Before focusing on the results that emerge from the report, it is important to note that the Global Gender Gap underlies three basic concepts. First, it focuses on measuring gaps rather than levels. Second, it captures gaps in outcome variables rather than gaps in means or input variables. Third, it ranks 135 countries according to gender equality rather than women's empowerment.

Having this in mind, the report shows that Europe has closed 70% of the gender gap and is second only to North America on the overall Global Gender Gap Index 2012 scores. The region ranks third in the health and survival (98% of gender gap closed) and educational attainment (99% of gender gap closed) sub-indexes. Europe ranks second on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index, behind North America, and second on the political empowerment sub-index behind Asian and the Pacific. In the overall Index, seven European countries rank among the top 10; and 14 countries rank among the top 20. Four out of the nine countries that have closed both their educational attainment and health and survival gender gaps are from this region.

Particularly this edition reveals the trends observed in the data over the past seven years and seeks to call attention to the need for more rapid progress in closing gender gaps. Out of the 111 countries covered in 2006–2012, 88% have improved their performance, while 12% have widening gaps. In some countries, progress is occurring in a relatively short time, regardless of whether they are starting out near the top or the bottom of the rankings, and independent of their income. Countries such as Iceland, Bolivia, Switzerland, Saudi Arabia, Lesotho, Yemen and others have made much progress relative to their own situation in 2006. While some countries are relatively high-ranking countries such as Sweden and Sri Lanka, there has also been significant deterioration in countries such as Mali, Jordan, Kuwait and Zambia, which were already at the lower end of the rankings. The Index points to potential role models by revealing those countries that—within their region or their income group—are leaders in having divided resources more equitably between women and men than other countries have, regardless of the overall level of resources available. The Index continues

to track the strong correlation between a country's gender gap and its national competitiveness, income and development. A country's competitiveness depends on its human talent: the skills, education and productivity of its workforce. Because women account for one-half of a country's potential talent base, a nation's competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilizes its women. Four broad groups of countries are evident in the Index: (1) countries that are generally closing education gaps and show high levels of women's economic participation, (2) countries that are generally closing education gaps but show low levels of women's economic participation, (3) countries that have large education gaps as well as large gaps in women's economic participation and (4) countries that have large education gaps but display small gaps in women's economic participation. This Report highlights the message to policy-makers that, in order to maximize competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality—that is, should give women the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men. The Index does not seek to set priorities for countries but rather to provide a comprehensive set of data and a clear method for tracking gaps on critical indicators so that countries may set priorities within their own economic, political and cultural contexts. It is important and useful that the information contained in the Global Gender Gap Report series will also serve as a basis for further research that will facilitate a clearer understanding of the policies that are successful and those that are not, particularly as increasing numbers of policy-makers, employers and civil society seek out best practices and role models to incorporate gender equality into their practices and policies.

On average, over 96% of the gap in health outcomes, 93% of the gap in educational attainment, 60% of the gap in economic participation and 20% of the gap in political empowerment has been closed. No country in the world has achieved gender equality. The four highest ranked countries—Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden—have closed between 80 and 86% of their gender gaps, while the lowest ranked country—Yemen—has closed a little over half of its gender gap. About this result Saadia Zahidi, one of the author, says: “It continues to be interesting to me that the Nordic countries have consistently been in the top 10, but the reason this occurs is because they have completely closed the gaps in health and education—but the region continues to be No. 1 in political empowerment and economic participation as well.”

In fact, the list also analyzes national policies that the country implements examined to facilitate the participation of women in the labor force, and the result is almost obvious: where political commitment is greater, the gap is smaller, and the economy take advantage of it. A concrete example is, as mentioned, the fact that 88% of the nations which are in the top positions of the ranking, have passed specific laws against gender discrimination in the workplace, which have taken measures to ensure that women have equal access to political and economic participation.

## **2. Italian Case**

With regard to Italy, the report shows a given disheartening. In fact, Italy has a sharp deterioration compared to 2011, ranking in the 80<sup>th</sup> place, losing as many as 6 positions. The best result obtained by Italy is in reference to the level of education, ranking 64<sup>th</sup> place while the worst result is about economic participation where stop at a disappointing 101<sup>th</sup> place, worsening the position because in 2011 was to 90. Topping the list is positioned Europe with countries such as Norway, Finland and Sweden, which offset more than 80 percent of gender inequality, and it is little consolation "but the Scandinavian countries are another story" because Italy is preceded by far ranked also. From the

tables below, built through the data extrapolated from the relationship, you can do a small focus of Italian frame of reference with respect to the ranking of 135 countries. From these and other findings from the report it appears that, in order to approach the levels of the first three countries in the way that our country must travel is still very long countries such as Mozambique (23), Burundi (24) and Uganda (28).

#### GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2012: ITALIAN RANKING ON 135 COUNTRIES

	OVERALL	ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITY	EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	HEALTH AND SURVIVAL	POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT
ITALY 2012	80	101	65	76	71

#### GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX 2012 RANKING COMPARISONS FROM 2011 TO 2006

ITALY	RANK
2012	80
2011	74
2010	74
2009	72
2008	67
2007	84
2006	77

Data processing ADAPT; Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2012; Tables by Valentina Sorci and Rosita Zucaro

The result is that our country has a female employment rate among the lowest in Europe. Although as noted in the EU, the European Commission adopted in 2010 a strategy called Europe 2020 that aims at reducing disparities between the sexes by promoting, inter alia, female entrepreneurship, equality of wages for equal work and other important initiatives in order to achieve the goal set for the 2020, an employment rate of 20-64 years old is equal to 75% for both men and women. At present, the average of the European Union for 2010 amounted to 68.6%, 6.4 percentage points lower than the target set. It is, however, a result that synthesizes wide disparities between Member States: four countries (Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark and Cyprus) have already achieved the 75% target for 2020, but are well 15 countries with indicator values below 70%, including Italy. In our country, in reference to the year 2010, the value of the indicator is equal to 61.1%, namely below 13.9 percentage points away from the finish line, placing it in fact the penultimate place among the 27 Member States (followed only by Malta and Hungary), to which is added the large gender imbalance of workers employed: 72.8% for men and 49.5% for women, values that mark a distance of 12.6 percentage points between the rate of female employment and the Italian EU compared with 2.3 points for men. The female employment rate, even as the Italian said to 49.5%, positions itself

even to the penultimate place in the European rankings, followed by Malta with a marker value equal to 41.6%, while in the head of the ranking we find instead the usual Northern European countries: Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, all with higher values to, and then already coming to Europe 2020 targets.

So unfortunately the Global Gender Gap report shows that the road to gender equality is still long that seeks coordinated actions of the social and development actors.

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