

## 41. The Individual Deprivation Measure

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### Effective policy making for poverty reduction requires information reflecting the different dimensions of poverty

Poverty data are incomplete. For example, despite increased recognition of the gender–poverty nexus within global development discourse, the conceptualisation and measurement of poverty remains insensitive to gender. The extensive evidence that speaks to the gendered nature of poverty is not yet reflected in global or comparable national data. UN Women's *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* report noted that while “women's socio-economic disadvantage is reflected in pervasive gender inequalities in earned income, property ownership, access to services and time use ... [t]he absence of sex disaggregated data makes it difficult to establish if women are, across the board, more likely to live in poverty than men” (UN Women, 2015, p. 44<sub>[1]</sub>). It remains a challenge to turn evidence from the lived experience of individuals into the kind of information required at key decision-making tables, such as government budget committees. In allocating finite resources for greatest impact, decision makers require information that clearly captures and conveys:

- Who is poor, in what ways, and to what extent;
- How factors such as gender, age, ability/disability and rural/urban location influence circumstances; and
- How these aspects interact to deepen deprivation.

Current poverty measures are limited in their ability to provide this information. A number of factors influence this, including the predominant focus on income or consumption and measurement at the household level. When multidimensional measures move beyond income, they still tend to be centred on a limited range of dimensions, such as health or education, and remain focused at the household level. These limitations matter because estimates indicate that around one-third of all inequality is within rather than between households (Kanbur, 2016<sub>[2]</sub>). While money is important, participatory research with people living in poverty indicates there are many other dimensions of life (social, environmental, etc.) that keep them poor and that should be included in a measure of multidimensional poverty (Wisor et al., 2014<sub>[3]</sub>).

Analyses of available household-level data offer important additional insights but are insufficient. Goal 1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “To end poverty in all its forms everywhere”, and the overall commitment of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind”, requires multidimensional poverty data about individuals to enable policy-relevant analysis of intersectional disadvantage.

## A measure of poverty at an individual level enabling disaggregation and analysis of intersections between different disadvantages

The Australian Government is funding the further development of the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM)<sup>1</sup> through a partnership between the Australian National University and the International Women’s Development Agency. The Measure assesses 15 dimensions of poverty at the individual level, enabling disaggregation by sex, age, disability and geography (Figure 41.1). It also enables an analysis of intersections to reveal overlapping disadvantages. The IDM collects primary data to show how individuals in a household experience deprivation or poverty, including deprivation in access to food, health, shelter, education and decision making, and experience of violence. Dimension selection was informed by participatory research with people living in poverty.

The IDM also offers new insights into the intensity of poverty, by measuring it on a 0–4 scale. This scale along with measures across 15 dimensions provide a more nuanced picture, which is gender-sensitive and enables disaggregation by disability. The measure can enable more effective targeting and monitoring of the impact of policies and programmes.

The IDM comprises three main technical elements:

1. A validated survey tool;
2. A data collection method in which multiple adults in a household are asked the same questions, enabling analysis of within-household differences across the IDM’s 15 dimensions;
3. A standardised system of indicator coding, dimension scoring and composite index construction, enabling comparative analysis.

## Strong engagement with experts across different disciplines and strong testing as a key to success

Participatory research across six countries and close engagement with poverty measurement, feminist, and gender and development debates ensured the IDM’s strong conceptual foundation as a gender-sensitive, multidimensional measure. Early piloting demonstrated its feasibility and potential to reveal intersections of demographic factors, and between dimensions. Early use also raised various technical issues and questions, highlighting the importance of further refinement and testing as progress is made towards scale up.

Development of the IDM has confirmed the importance of cross-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder partnerships, mixed method research, and sustained engagement by champions across the innovation cycle. These factors have supported IDM partners to develop the measure while maintaining coherence with the foundational, participatory research and focus on credibility, robustness, resourcing and pathways to use.

Other key lessons so far include: building a measure that overcomes the limitations of current, gender-blind poverty measurement is technically demanding; constructing a composite index comprising economic, social and environmental dimensions is challenging; and we need to move from a focus on disaggregating to measuring what matters to tackle poverty and inequality.

## Next steps

The Individual Deprivation Measure is being tested in a range of contexts to be ready to be scaled up for global use by 2020. Investment in technology, visualisation, curriculum development and training will support IDM data collection and use by a range of actors. By engaging with other initiatives and institutions there will be scope to align with other measures and to enable data interoperability. The IDM partners continue to work with diverse stakeholders so that they can contribute to realising the SDGs, and the commitment to leave no one behind.

**Figure 41.1. The fifteen dimensions of the Individual Deprivation Measure**



Source: The Individual Deprivation Measure's website: <http://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org/idm/methodology/>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See [Individualdeprivationmeasure.org](http://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org).

## References

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**From:**

## **Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind**

A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report 2018

**Access the complete publication at:**

<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264309333-en>

### **Please cite this chapter as:**

OECD (2018), "The Individual Deprivation Measure", in *Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind: A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264309333-43-en>

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