



# The Long Road to Equality:

## Taking stock of the situation of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific for Beijing+25

A synthesis report

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# **The Long Road to Equality:**

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**A synthesis report**



## Preface



Sawan Panthaisong, a food Vendor at Sukhumvit Soi 20, Bangkok, Thailand.  
Photo: UN Women/Ploy Phutpheng.

With the clarion call of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, addressing gender inequality is fundamental for achieving a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all. 2020 marks a series of converging global milestones: the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; and the five-year milestone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. Together, these offer an opportunity to take stock of progress and persisting challenges and identify and accelerate actions to make gender equality and the empowerment of women a reality for all women and girls in Asia and the Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review was convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in late 2019 to review progress on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. More than 600 participants from 54 countries and 166 civil society organizations attended the conference, which culminated in the adoption of the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. It offers a comprehensive set of commitments and actions on region-specific issues to move forward the gender equality agenda over the next five years.

Within this context, ESCAP and UN Women conducted a study of the progress made and gaps that remain in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This synthesis report is the result of an analytical review drawing from national review reports of ESCAP members and associate members on Beijing+25, SDG data and secondary literature.

Asia and the Pacific has made good progress in terms of the empowerment of women and girls over the last 25 years, but much work remains. Gains are currently threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, with gendered effects that are in large part attributable to the social and economic inequalities women have long faced.

At the regional level, governments highlighted progress in some key areas, including the expansion of social protection programmes that put resources into women's hands, women's greater educational attainment, increased economic empowerment and participation in public life, and improvements in health outcomes, including the halving of the region's maternal mortality rate since 2000.

Alongside these achievements, governments also identified common challenges. These comprised limited government coordination and collaboration, and weak or insufficient implementation of relevant laws and initiatives. Discriminatory social norms continue to limit women's and girls' abilities to exercise and enjoy the full scope of their rights and available protections. Persistent gaps in gender data hinder effective policies and programmes.

Governments also noted that, in spite of progress, further efforts will be needed to end violence against women and girls; increase women's political participation and leadership; enhance women's economic participation; improve women's and girls' health; and address environmental issues, such as climate change and natural resource management, as ongoing challenges to the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment.

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**Asia and the Pacific has made good progress in terms of the empowerment of women and girls over the last 25 years, but much work remains. Gains are currently threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, with gendered effects that are in large part attributable to the social and economic inequalities women have long faced.**

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To further advance gender equality in the region in the coming five years, governments indicated that eliminating violence against women and girls, promoting women's political participation and enhancing women's access to decent work are top priorities. Additional investments are needed in key areas as diverse as social protection, inclusive digital access and skills building, and sustainable infrastructure.

Across these areas, and many more, there is a critical need for concerted collective, collaborative and well-resourced action to empower all women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, and to realize gender equality for everyone, everywhere.

## Acknowledgements

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The report was developed through a collaboration between ESCAP and the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, under the overall direction and guidance of Srinivas Tata, Director of the Social Development Division, ESCAP, and Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director of the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

A technical team from the two organizations (Cai Cai, Chief of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Section, ESCAP; Channe Lindstrøm Oguzhan and Farzana Sharmin, Social Affairs Officers, ESCAP; Hulda Ouma, Planning and Coordination Specialist, UN Women; and Sara Duerto Valero, Regional Gender Statistics Specialist, UN Women) guided the development of the text.

The drafting team comprised Melissa Langworthy (Chapters 1, 2 and 4), Lorena Fuentes (Chapter 3), and Tara Patricia Cookson (substantive editor). Substantive reviews and valuable inputs were provided by colleagues at ESCAP (Sabine Henning, Marco Roncarati and Sudha Gooty) and UN Women (Melissa Alvarado, Lesli Davis, Maria Holtsberg, Inkar Kadyrzhanova and Carla Silbert).

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The report was edited by Gretchen Luchsinger and designed by Alike Creative.

## Acronyms

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BPfA</b>	Beijing Platform for Action
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>DPR Korea</b>	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
<b>ESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>Lao PDR</b>	Lao People's Democratic Republic
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
<b>NEET</b>	Not in employment, education or training
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and vocational education and training
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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## Explanatory notes

The Asia and the Pacific region, unless otherwise specified, refers to the group of members and associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) that are within the Asia and the Pacific geographic region. Some countries are referred to by a shortened version of their official name in the figures, as indicated in brackets in the listing below.

Geographic subregions in this report are defined (unless otherwise specified), as follows:

**East and North-East Asia (ENEA):** China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia; Republic of Korea.

**North and Central Asia (NCA):** Armenia; Azerbaijan; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan.

**Pacific:** American Samoa; Australia; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu.

**South-East Asia (SEA):** Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR); Malaysia; Myanmar; Philippines; Singapore; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Viet Nam.

**South and South-West Asia (SSWA):** Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Islamic Republic of Iran; Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan; Sri Lanka; Turkey.

Least developed countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Nepal, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu. Samoa and Vanuatu were part of the group of least developed countries prior to their graduation in 2014 and 2020 respectively. Landlocked developing countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Small island developing States: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Developing Asia-Pacific: ESCAP region, excluding Australia, Japan and New Zealand. Developed or industrialized Asia-Pacific: Australia, Japan and New Zealand. The classification of countries into income groups is from the World Bank.

### Symbols and units



References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.



The dash (–) between dates signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years.

# Executive Summary

The Asia and the Pacific region is home to 60 per cent of the world's population. The state of gender equality and women's empowerment within and across the 53 member States and 9 associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is a significant piece of how women and girls globally are faring in today's rapidly changing world. Progress has been made in some key areas, such as the expansion of social protection programmes that put resources into women's hands, gains in women's educational attainment and participation in public life, as well as improvements in women's health outcomes, including the halving of the region's maternal mortality rate since 2000.

Across the region, common challenges to progress on gender equality and women's empowerment persist. These encompass limited government coordination and collaboration, and weak or insufficient implementation of relevant laws and initiatives. Discriminatory social norms continue to limit women's and girls' abilities to exercise and enjoy the full scope of their rights and available protections. Notably, persistent gaps remain in gender data needed to bolster effective policies and programmes.

It is against this backdrop that the world recently marked an important global milestone in gender equality and women's empowerment: 25 years of the Beijing Platform for Action. The year 2020 was also the twentieth anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security and the five-year anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Beijing+25 review presents the first opportunity to assess the Beijing Platform for Action in the context of the bold and ambitious vision of the 2030 Agenda. In particular, the 2030 Agenda's transformative commitment to "leave no one behind" marshals attention to population groups who experience complex and multidimensional forms of discrimination and deprivation.

## Key findings and recommendations



This synthesis report draws on three sources of data: national review reports on progress on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action between 2014 and 2019, available SDG data and secondary literature. Leaning on the parameters of the Beijing Platform for Action as a guiding framework for the types of policy actions or measures that align with transformative, inclusive and intersectional approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment, this report highlights areas of regional progress – as well as challenges – and spotlights promising practices at the country and regional levels. It also considers the extent to which national reports emphasized multistakeholder collaboration and partnerships, demonstrated clear political will, and provided evidence of data-driven decision- and policymaking.

### Legislative progress is a promising start, but more attention to implementation is needed

The analysis of national review reports submitted as part of the Beijing+25 regional review indicated that member States in Asia and the Pacific have prioritized legislative actions that introduce or strengthen frameworks to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Barriers to implementation remain, however, including a lack of institutional mainstreaming, capacity and resources, as well as persistent discriminatory social norms that sustain gender inequalities in practice, despite formal laws and related protections.

Indeed, progress in adopting or strengthening legislative frameworks has not catalysed a reversal of declining female labour force participation, high rates of violence against women, or low rates of women's political participation and representation. While significant regional progress has been made to close gender gaps in secondary education, the

school-to-work transition remains fragile for girls and young women. Many governments across the region have enacted legislative workplace protections, yet women's labour force participation remains low. Regional progress has also been made in passing new laws and strengthening existing statutes on violence against women and girls, but available data from the region highlight that more effective implementation is needed to protect women and girls. Women's access to and participation in political life is progressing unevenly, with discriminatory social norms impeding access even where legislative support exists.

### **Strengthening national machineries and building partnerships will bolster effective implementation**

The national review reports indicate that lack of political will, insufficient resources, and weak mainstreaming of gender considerations within government institutions and sectors continue to impede the efforts of national gender machineries in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and realizing the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda. Developing and strengthening partnerships and collaboration among government machineries, civil society including women's rights networks, academia, the private sector and United Nations entities is key to making further progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. This is especially the case when advancing beyond short-term measures that tackle discrete issues to those that push for structural and long-term change. Collaborative, multistakeholder partnerships hold promise for overcoming implementation bottlenecks and siloed approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment, and the national review reports indicate that such collaborations do exist, both within government departments and ministries, as well as among governments, civil society organizations, private sector actors and UN entities.

### **Unlocking progress requires recognition of women's multiple roles and contributions**

The national review reports indicate that the fewest actions were taken in strengthening women's digital, financial and technological inclusion; improving access to basic services and infrastructure for women and girls; and promoting women's participation in environmental processes. While progress at the subregional level is evident, these areas require renewed focus to ensure progress for women and girls, especially within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery.

While member States have expressed commitment to supporting women's entrepreneurship, further action is needed to ensure that the entrepreneurship promoted meets standards for decent work. Evidence from the reporting period suggests that the widespread regional emphasis on supporting poor and unemployed women through entrepreneurship programmes is not being complemented with comprehensive efforts to secure their access to social protection programmes, including income security, health care, maternity (or parental) and child benefits, and pension schemes. Addressing this gap will require concerted efforts to grow women's productive and financial access, expand access to online and offline marketplaces, and extend gender-responsive labour and social protections.

Supporting care work and those who perform it requires investments not only in high-quality health and care services, but also in sustainable public infrastructure such as electricity, clean water and sanitation services. As it currently stands, women's unpaid care and domestic work subsidizes formal health-care systems, ensuring that the routine needs of children, the sick, older persons, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable population groups are met. In addition to public infrastructure, more ambitious actions to achieve universal health coverage are warranted, including to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health services. Greater investments in child and eldercare services, and provision of decent work to caregivers will also be crucial to ensure that caregivers are adequately supported.



Woman beekeeper, Bhutan.  
Photo: UN Women/Vidura Jang Bahadur.

Women's vulnerability to climate change in the region is shaped by gender inequalities in access to resources, dependence on agricultural livelihoods, and unpaid care and domestic work. Member States' efforts to address the immediate impacts of climate change and environmental degradation must be complemented with efforts to reduce gender-based vulnerabilities over the long-term, and to invest in and support more gender-responsive environmental policies, strategies and actions.

### **Gender data must be strengthened in all domains**

The ability of governments in Asia and the Pacific to craft public policies that address gender inequalities and tackle the barriers to progress on women's empowerment is shaped by the availability of high-quality data and gender statistics. One central lesson gleaned from the national review reports is that lack of gender data and data capacities hinders member States' abilities to track progress on gender equality and women's empowerment indicators, towards informing evidence-based policies that promote sustainable development. Notable regional progress has been made on generating new gender data. Examples offered in the national review reports, however, often emerged as standalone efforts, rather than as connected to broader national strategies

to mainstream gender across data collection systems. Disconnects between data collection and data use need to also be addressed moving forward. In addition to bolstering investments in national statistics systems and data collection strategies across the region, member States need to prioritize actions to strengthen communication and collaboration between gender data producers and users, including national gender machineries and research organizations.

### **Accelerating Beijing Platform for Action implementation is key to building back better**

To ensure that progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific is not reversed in the coming years, member States must continue to prioritize eliminating violence against women, promote women's leadership across all areas as well as political participation, and ensure women's access to decent work opportunities. The COVID-19 crisis has brought into stark relief the need for member States to commit to enhancing women's access to digital and financial services, ensuring universal access to social protection, providing essential infrastructure and public services, and building gender-responsive policy environments.

A woman faces the devastation of floods, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Mohammad Rakibulhasan.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction



## Progress and challenges for women and girls in a diverse region

The Asia and the Pacific region is home to nearly 60 per cent of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> The state of gender equality and women's empowerment within and across the 53 member States and 9 associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is a significant piece of how women and girls globally are faring in today's rapidly changing world. Progress has been made in some key areas, such as the expansion of social protection programmes that put resources into women's hands, gains in women's educational attainment and participation in public life, and improvements in women's health outcomes, including halving the region's maternal mortality since 2000.<sup>2</sup>

Yet stark inequalities remain across a range of gender equality indicators. Too many women and girls have been, or are being, left behind. In 2019, the rate of female labour force participation, for example, was 66 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific and 25 per cent in South Asia, compared to a world average of 53 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Women in Asia and the Pacific work longer hours in paid, unpaid and domestic work than women (and men) in other regions. They work an average of 7.7 hours daily, of which 3.3 hours are paid, compared to 6.9 hours (5.8 hours paid) for men in the region, and the world average for women of 7.5 total hours (3.1 hours paid).<sup>4</sup>

Violence against women and girls, harmful social norms and limited protections during migration curtail women's safety and security. Between 9 and 48 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 years have experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months in the Pacific subregion (excluding Australia and New Zealand).<sup>5</sup> In South and South-West Asia, the prevalence of early, child and forced marriage remains high, with nearly 30 per cent (28.7 per cent) of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in a union before age 18, and 7.4 per cent by age 15.<sup>6</sup>

Growing disparities in income and wealth, as well as inequalities of opportunity, disproportionately affect women and other vulnerable groups in the region.<sup>7</sup> Some inequalities are being shaped by technological transformation and the climate crisis in ways that threaten to leave behind entire population groups.<sup>8</sup> Climate change and environmental degradation threaten to reverse critical development gains, particularly for the 500 million people living in poverty in areas at high disaster risk.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, hard-won advancements in gender equality and women's rights are challenged by a rise in precarious employment, extremist backlash, a breakdown of liberal leadership in times of extremism, and a retreat from global cooperation in the promotion and protection of human rights.<sup>10</sup>

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**Progress has been made in some key areas, such as the expansion of social protection programmes that put resources into women's hands.**

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The onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges to the achievement of gender equality, women's empowerment and the 2030 Agenda, in the region and beyond.<sup>11</sup> Women in Asia and the Pacific, including women migrant workers, are overrepresented in informal and vulnerable work as care providers, health-care workers and small entrepreneurs. These livelihoods are among the hardest hit by COVID-19, yet are often excluded from social protection and health-care coverage.<sup>12</sup> Initial assessments indicate that lockdown policies to curb the spread of the virus have simultaneously intensified women's already heightened vulnerability to domestic violence and exacerbated the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the introduction of emergency powers and security-driven measures have had a disproportionate impact on the rights of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings, where basic necessities like medical services are already scarce.<sup>14</sup>

It is against this backdrop that the world marks an important global milestone in gender equality and women's empowerment: 25 years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (subsequently referred to as the Beijing Platform for Action). The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995, heralded "[t]he full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women".<sup>15</sup> The Beijing Platform for Action enumerated 12 critical areas of concern: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, the media, the environment and the girl child. It was adopted by 189 United Nations member States committed to transforming the social and economic systems that create inequalities, and to building national systems that support women's human rights. The Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994) remain the "strongest universal endorsement of women's rights and gender equality to date".<sup>16</sup>

The year 2020 also marks the five-year anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, a Beijing+25 review presents the first opportunity to review the Beijing Platform for Action in light of the bold and ambitious vision of the 2030 Agenda. The latter carries forward the human rights-based approach of the Beijing Platform for Action and builds on existing gender equality commitments towards a world "in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social, and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed ...[and] the needs of the most vulnerable are met". The 2030 Agenda makes clear that sustainable development must have inclusion at its core. The transformative commitment to "leave no one behind" marshals attention to populations who experience complex and multidimensional forms of discrimination and deprivation.



Women's radio talkshow, Indonesia.  
Photo: UN Women Indonesia/Radhiska Anggiana.

At a global level, the analysis of 25 years of progress on the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action recognized that progress "has not been fast or deep enough".<sup>17</sup> How much further we need to go is evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Political will to address persistent inequalities and vulnerabilities is needed now more than ever. The health crisis has also underscored the need for quality and timely gender data that includes both gender statistics and qualitative evidence, and further disaggregation by age, income and residence.<sup>18</sup> Insufficient gender data on job losses, for example, or on shifts in unpaid care and domestic work<sup>19</sup> make it impossible to accurately monitor the full impact of COVID-19, and consequently ensure informed and evidence-based decision-making. The data that are available reaffirm the need for gender-responsive recovery plans to build in future resilience.

The remainder of this introductory chapter highlights synergies between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, and presents the conceptual framework used in this report.

## Frameworks for change: the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In November 2019, ESCAP member States reaffirmed their commitments to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (see Annex 3).<sup>20</sup> A number of synergies exist between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda; harnessing these is key to developing gender-responsive institutions and policy actions. First, both frameworks recognize gender equality as a fundamental human right. Second, both frameworks refer to the principle of gender equality as integral to all development efforts, and to tackling gender inequalities by transforming the underlying systems and institutions that perpetuate discrimination and threaten to leave women and girls behind. Third, both frameworks emphasize the need to monitor progress made by member States as primary duty-bearers, together with other duty-bearers.

Substantive and formal equality are both central to the human rights-based approach shared by the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda. Building on CEDAW, the implementation of both requires redressing women's socioeconomic disadvantages; overcoming stereotypes, stigmas and discriminatory social norms; and advancing women's agency and participation in economic, social and political life.<sup>21</sup> Efforts geared towards implementing the Beijing Platform for Action feed into the key pathways and policy actions for transformative change called for in the 2030 Agenda, including: changing social norms and removing discriminatory legal frameworks; strengthening the gender responsiveness of institutions, including by mainstreaming gender across all policy sectors; increasing financing and investment in gender equality goals; enhancing the production, analysis and use of gender data and statistics; and ensuring women's participation, representation and leadership at all levels.<sup>22</sup> In recognizing the need for integrated approaches to achieving gender

equality and women's empowerment, both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda emphasize meaningful partnerships to tackle complex and overlapping issues.

Twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action was groundbreaking in calling for systemic changes to promote women's empowerment and gender equality across social, economic, political, cultural and environmental domains. The theory of change anchoring its vision suggested that progress would not be achieved by simply "adding and stirring" women into unjust systems. Rather, it was necessary to transform underlying power relations, address discriminatory social norms, and consider women's multiple and intersecting identities. The mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all aspects of society, as advocated by the Beijing Platform for Action, is critical to the success of the 2030 Agenda and all of the 17 SDGs. As a map for the Agenda's ambitious and inclusive vision, the SDGs include standalone goals for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (SDG 5) and reducing inequalities (SDG 10), and references under multiple other goals to marginalized and vulnerable groups, especially migrant, indigenous and rural populations.

Progress on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is monitored through voluntary reporting by member States every five years. The current reporting period, culminating in Beijing+25, is the first time that all member States have had access to a common indicator framework that can be used to monitor progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs. This report uses these indicators to analyse progress in Asia and the Pacific.



## Analysing progress across and within Asia and the Pacific: Methodology and conceptual framework

This synthesis report draws on three sources of information: member State national review reports on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, SDG indicator data and secondary literature. Forty-five of the 58 ESCAP members invited to complete the Beijing+25 regional survey did so (a 78 per cent response rate).<sup>23</sup> In order to bridge information gaps in some reports (only 33 per cent of the submitted reports answered all questions), and to generate a robust regional picture, this synthesis report also draws on available SDG indicator data, data produced by UN entities, and other peer-reviewed studies and policy reports.<sup>24</sup> Member States reported on their priorities and actions between 2014 and 2019, meaning that this report synthesizes progress on gender equality and women's empowerment as it stood prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 4 situates the main findings from this analysis within the context of COVID-19 response and recovery.

The chapters that follow reflect a synthesis of member State actions to implement the Beijing Platform for Action; identify areas where significant progress has been made on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as where challenges persist; and track statistical trends for relevant SDG indicators and other available data, especially in terms of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting inequalities, in line with the clarion call of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind". The chapters also highlight gaps in the availability of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics, and the implications of these gaps for the realization of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Recommendations promote promising practices in the region and identify areas where member State actions can be enhanced. The recommendations are also intended to support gender equality stakeholders, particularly civil

society organizations, including women's rights organizations, academia and the private sector, in establishing strengthened partnerships with governments. As such, the recommendations highlight areas where productive steps can and should be taken. They do not reflect any order or hierarchy in terms of priority, immediacy or performance.

The analytical framework for this report is informed by the Beijing Platform for Action's vision of gender equality and women's empowerment, and the 2030 Agenda's commitment to "leave no one behind". The analysis of progress and the identification of promising practices is based on the parameters of **transformative policies** and **gender-responsive, inclusive and intersectional approaches**. It also considers the extent to which the national reports emphasized **multistakeholder collaborations and partnerships**, demonstrated **clear political will** to take action, and indicated **data- and evidence-based decision-making**.

### 1. Transformative potential of policies and programmes

Policies and programmes that aim to address the underlying drivers of gender inequality, especially discriminatory social norms, are considered **transformative**. This report has identified promising practices through which member States have laid a foundation for countering discriminatory gender norms and practices, and making possible transformations in the future. For example, actions to promote work-life conciliation that pay direct attention to reforming the culture of work have the potential to transform discriminatory social norms that assign unpaid care responsibilities to women. As such, policies that promote the capacity for balancing unpaid care work for both male and female workers reduce discriminatory expectations that only women bear the burden of balancing work and family, and help to redistribute these responsibilities within the household.

## 2. Use of gender-responsive, inclusive and intersectional approaches

Policies and programmes with a **gender-responsive, inclusive and intersectional** approach consider gender alongside other identity categories (e.g., age, geography, socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic group, ability, gender identity, etc.) in their design and implementation.<sup>25</sup> A programme targeting environmental conservation, for example, is considered gender responsive, inclusive and intersectional if planning processes have been utilized to address differential impacts on women, remote and rural populations, and indigenous groups. They may depend on targeted ecosystems for livelihoods or other resources such as household water and fuel, the collection of which are often central tasks in women's unpaid domestic labour.

## 3. Emphasis on multistakeholder collaborations and partnerships

Government engagement of **multistakeholder collaborations and partnerships** are highlighted, especially those with civil society organizations, academia, the private sector and United Nations entities that can enhance programme and policy implementation, and promote participatory processes. For example, the actions that member States took to ensure the meaningful engagement and participation of women and girls in their national review provides one indicator of their relationship with external stakeholders.

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**This report has identified promising practices through which member States have laid a foundation for countering discriminatory gender norms and practices, and making possible transformations in the future.**

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## 4. Demonstration of a clear and high level of political will

Actions supported by a **clear and high level of political will**, such as through coordinated and joint management by multiple government ministries or departments (e.g., the national gender machinery and the national agricultural development and trade machineries), are also highlighted. Such an approach indicates an attempt to address cross-sectoral challenges that hinder the efforts of national gender machineries, including the failure to mainstream gender equality considerations through the work of other government institutions in a meaningful way, and misconceptions, backlash and gender fatigue among policymakers.<sup>26</sup> Such initiatives also promote holistic and comprehensive strategies, consistent efforts across sectors and the leveraging of resources.

## 5. Use of data and evidence-based policymaking

Finally, actions that promote a government's use of **gender data and evidence-based policymaking** were also highlighted as promising practices. Considering the limited availability of gender data in many key areas, efforts to use survey data or promote regular tracking of gender-sensitive issues by national statistical offices were singled out for emphasis.

# Megatrends shaping the lives of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific

Asia and the Pacific is influenced by shifts in demographic trends, and social and cultural norms, along with an increasingly integrated global and regional economy. Key trends affecting women and girls include inequalities among and within countries, population ageing in some countries paired with a youth bubble in others, rapid urbanization, international migration, high rates of informal employment, increasing acts of violence and extremism, and greater frequency of extreme weather events, disasters, and environmental degradation.<sup>27</sup>

While each trend warrants thoughtful examination and action, this review focuses on four related trends from 2014 to 2019.

## 1. Rising inequality within and among countries

Inequalities at the individual, household and country levels threaten progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Women and girls continue to be overrepresented among those living in poverty, with high rates of economic growth failing to translate into inclusive growth. Within countries, the gap between the bottom 40 per cent of income earners and the top 60 per cent is growing.<sup>28</sup> Women and girls are more likely to live in households below the poverty line especially during their reproductive years.<sup>29</sup> Globally, 104 girls and women lived in poor households for every 100 men in 2019; for women aged 25 to 34 years, the ratio jumps to 119.<sup>30</sup> This gap varies among countries. For example, 117 women and girls (of all ages) are in poverty for every 100 men in Tajikistan, compared with 85 women and girls for every 100 men in Armenia.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Increasing sources of regional insecurity

Conflict, climate change and environmental degradation threaten to slow progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Insecurity is increasingly driven by internal actors. In many countries, extremist political forces promote backlash against gender equality and seek to strengthen patriarchal gender ideologies.<sup>32</sup> Environmental insecurity, fueled by climate change and environmental degradation, has disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Regionally, women and girls are more reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods, have less access to assets that would help them deal with insecurity, and are more likely to suffer violence and be exposed to early, child, and forced marriages as insecurity rises.<sup>33</sup>

## 3. Declining female labour force participation and high rates of vulnerable, informal and non-standard employment

Between 1990 and 2018, women's labour force participation rates dropped from 66 per cent to 59 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, and from 29 to 23 per cent in South Asia.<sup>34</sup> Across Asia and the Pacific as a whole, discriminatory social norms continue to constrict women's access to decent work, earned income and social protection. An estimated 64 per cent of women workers are employed in the informal sector.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work limits full participation in productive activities. Living with a partner and children decreases female labour force participation by 39 per cent in Central and Southern Asia and by 21 per cent in South-East Asia, compared to women living alone. For men in these regions, labour force participation increases by 6 per cent and 2 per cent, respectively, when they live with a partner and children.<sup>36</sup>

## 4. Persistent and variegated violence against women and girls

Women in the region experience some of the highest (and lowest) prevalence rates of violence globally.<sup>37</sup> Worldwide, approximately one in three women on average have experienced sexual and/or physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives.<sup>38</sup> In Asia and the Pacific, the incidence ranges from 15 per cent in Bhutan, Japan, Lao PDR and the Philippines, to 64 per cent in Fiji and the Solomon Islands.<sup>39</sup> This trend constrains progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in all areas of life and across the SDGs.

The review of national reports and secondary data reveals trends in progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs, as well as some challenges that emerge at the subregional level. Below is a brief overview of **subregional trends in government approaches to advance gender equality**. These issues will be further discussed in this report.<sup>40</sup>

## 1. Empowering women to build climate resilience and reduce disaster risk

The Pacific subregion is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters and environmental shocks. Five of the nine Asia and the Pacific countries identified as most "at-risk of natural disasters" are in the Pacific.<sup>41</sup> Gender-differentiated vulnerabilities to climate-related hazards in the Pacific are related to women's dependency on natural resources; gendered social responsibilities in procuring water, food and energy; limited power in decision-making processes, and increased exposure to risks during disasters and severe weather crises.<sup>42</sup> As a result of their acute exposure to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, Pacific countries are implementing two thirds of environmental sustainability efforts in the region, in addition to leading in the implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction policies and planning.

## 2. Creating inclusive workplaces

The region is the only one globally where the gender gap in labour force participation is increasing.<sup>43</sup> East and North-East Asian countries have the lowest gender gap at 14 per cent,<sup>44</sup> and have been actively pursuing transformative policies aimed at diminishing discriminatory social norms, including through efforts to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work burdens.

## 3. Addressing women's access to basic infrastructure, services and technologies.

Enhancing access is central to reducing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and promoting access to education and employment. Access to reliable and clean water, energy and transportation services further enhances women's livelihoods. Increasing feminization of agriculture in response to male outmigration<sup>45</sup> is intensifying women's existing reliance on natural resource livelihoods compared to men.<sup>46</sup> South and South-West Asian countries report supporting initiatives backing women's right to work, such as through promoting entrepreneurship, particularly in agriculture, and access to land, housing, technologies and agricultural extension services.

## 4. Promoting women's access to political leadership and representation.

Despite gains in most countries in Asia and the Pacific, women's political participation remains below 20 per cent of seats in national parliaments of most countries.<sup>47</sup> South and South-West Asian and Pacific countries are employing transformational, gender-sensitive and intersectional approaches to increasing women's roles in public life. The national review reports from these subregions shed light on government approaches and actions that combine constitutional and/or legislative guarantees with capacity-building initiatives, with a targeted focus on minority and young women.

## Report structure

This report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 discusses progress made by countries in each of six cluster areas. These were conceptualized to explore progress across the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 priority areas, and to highlight alignment between the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

The six clusters, elaborated further in Annex 2, include:



**1.**  
**Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work**



**2.**  
**Poverty eradication, social protection and social services**



**3.**  
**Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes**



**4.**  
**Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions**



**5.**  
**Peaceful and inclusive societies**



**6.**  
**Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation**

The six areas, their composition and their ordering reflect the Beijing+25 questionnaire circulated to member States. The synthesis in Chapter 2 adheres to this format as well, with cluster analysis reflecting the topics of and responses to the questionnaire. Key areas where clusters overlap topically or have clear links are noted throughout the analysis and outlined in Annex 2.

Chapter 3 highlights key gaps in the availability of data disaggregated by sex and gender statistics

in the region, and links monitoring of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As with the six cluster analyses, this chapter draws on national review reports to identify areas of progress on gender data collection and use, as well as challenges. Chapter 4 focuses on the ways forward, including priorities for future action and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda throughout Asia and the Pacific.



1. ESCAP database, population size, total (thousand people), 2019. Accessed 10 September 2020.
2. ESCAP database, SDG 3.1.1, maternal mortality, 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020. In 2000, the ESCAP regional maternal mortality rate was 252 deaths per 100,000 live births. In 2017, the maternal mortality rate had fallen to 110 deaths per 100,000 live births.
3. World Bank database, based on data from the ILOSTAT database, labour force participation rate, total (percentage of the population aged 15 to 64, modelled ILO estimate), 2019. Accessed 9 November 2020. East Asia and the Pacific includes: American Samoa; Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Kiribati; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of ); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; the Philippines; Republic of Korea; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu and Viet Nam. The South Asia region includes Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
4. ESCAP 2019h.
5. UNFPA 2020.
6. ESCAP database, SDG 5.3.1, women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in a union before age 15 and 18 (percentage), 2019. Accessed 8 October 2020.
7. ESCAP 2018c.
8. UNDP 2019.
9. ESCAP 2017b.
10. UN Women 2019b.
11. UN Women 2020l.
12. UN Women 2020e.
13. UN Women 2020g.
14. UN Women 2020n.
15. United Nations General Assembly 1995.
16. Abou-Habib et al. 2020.
17. ECOSOC 2020.
18. Alon et al. 2020.
19. Buvinic, Noe and Swanson 2020.
20. ESCAP 2019a.
21. The vision of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda has been further bolstered by commitments made to women, peace and security in United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Paris Agreement on climate (2015), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015).
22. ADB and UN Women 2018.
23. While ESCAP has 53 Member States and 9 associate members, 58 were invited to submit progress reports based on the Beijing+25 questionnaire prepared by UN Women. States that submitted reports include: Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Cook Islands; Fiji; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran; Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of ); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Palau; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu and Viet Nam. Reports were not received from: American Samoa; Brunei Darussalam; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; French Polynesia; Guam; Hong Kong, China; Nauru; New Caledonia; Niue; Northern Mariana Islands; Papua New Guinea; Singapore and Sri Lanka. The subregional response rates were as follows: East and North-East Asia at 71 per cent, North and Central Asia at 100 per cent, the Pacific at 62 per cent, South-East Asia at 82 per cent, and South and South-West Asia at 90 per cent. This represents an improvement from the Beijing+20 review, where only 69 per cent of ESCAP members contributed reports.
24. See Annex 1 for further information on reports submitted.
25. ESCWA 2019. Intersectional approaches are those that address "the ways in which gender interacts with other social categories" to exacerbate existing inequalities, so that intersectionality is "not about gender, class, or race alone, but about patriarchy, capitalism, and racism".
26. UN Women 2019b.
27. ESCAP 2019a.
28. ESCAP 2019b.
29. Boudet et al. 2018.
30. UN Women 2020h.
31. Ibid.
32. UN Women 2019b.
33. Camey et al. 2020.
34. World Bank databank, ILOSTAT database. Labour force participation rate, female (percentage of female population ages 15 and above), modelled ILO estimate. Data retrieved 21 June 2020. East Asia and the Pacific in this statistic includes data from Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Malaysia; Mongolia; Myanmar; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Vanuatu and Viet Nam. South Asia includes data from Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; India; Maldives; Nepal; Pakistan and Sri Lanka..
35. ILO 2018f.
36. ILO and UN Women 2020. UN Women's Central and Southern Asia grouping includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The ILO grouping of South-East Asia includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
37. UNFPA 2020. Of the 32 Asia and the Pacific countries with data, 19 have a higher prevalence of intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence than the global average, including 12 out of 13 Pacific countries. Seven countries have less than 20 per cent prevalence, which is much lower than the global average.
38. WHO 2013.
39. UNFPA 2020.
40. These trends are based on aggregation of the national review report responses submitted to UN Women and ESCAP. The full methodology is presented in Annex 1.
41. RUB 2019.
42. Charan, Kaur and Singh 2016.
43. ILO 2018a.
44. Ibid. This is followed by 25 per cent in South-East Asia and Pacific countries, with South Asian countries seeing a gender gap of 51 per cent.
45. Pattnaik et al. 2017.
46. Yadav and Lal 2017.
47. ESCAP database, SDG 5.5.1, seats held by women in national parliaments (percentage of seats), 2019. Accessed 11 October 2020. In 2019, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments in ESCAP averaged 19.2 per cent, up from 18.1 per cent in 2015.

Women's march in Kyrgyzstan.  
Photo: UN Women/Meriza  
Emilbekova.



## Chapter 2

# Progress on the Beijing Platform for Action in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific

## Overview of progress

In the 25 years following the landmark Beijing Platform for Action, progress has been made on gender equality and women's empowerment in many areas of life in Asia and the Pacific. The national review reports indicated that ESCAP member States have made concerted efforts to advance women's access to decent work, such as through promoting entrepreneurship; to eliminate violence against women and harmful social norms; and to increase women's leadership in all spheres, including through political representation. Yet challenges persist. Women continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, and have unequal access to productive assets, basic services and infrastructure. Climate change and environmental degradation pose new threats where the full impacts are only beginning to emerge through data-driven assessments that outline the scope and gendered vulnerabilities. Changes in these diverse areas of life are the focus of this chapter.

The analysis of national review reports indicates that member States are taking action on these and other challenges. In particular, they have prioritized legislative actions to introduce or strengthen frameworks to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. The widespread implementation of these frameworks is incomplete, however, due to a lack of institutional gender mainstreaming, capacities and resources, as well as discriminatory social norms around gender that maintain de facto inequalities despite de jure rights and protections. Collaborative, multistakeholder partnerships hold promise for overcoming

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**The national review reports indicated that ESCAP member States have made concerted efforts to advance women's access to decent work, such as through promoting entrepreneurship; to eliminate violence against women and harmful social norms; and to increase women's leadership in all spheres.**

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implementation bottlenecks, and national review reports indicated that such collaborations do exist, both within government departments and ministries as well as among governments, civil society, academia, the private sector and United Nations entities.

This chapter discusses these trends, at both the regional and subregional levels, as they relate to the six cluster areas defined by UN Women, and based on the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern and the SDG framework (see "Progress and challenges for women and girls in a diverse region" in Chapter 1). The chapter begins by reviewing member State priorities as reported for the past five years and the next five years, and then highlights challenges.

## Member States' priorities for action: Past and future

In the national review reports, member States were asked to reflect on the priorities that drove action over the reporting period (2014 to 2019) and those that would guide their actions in the coming five years (2020 to 2024). The reports provide a picture of stated priorities, rather than actual spending or allocation of other resources. Overall, countries reported prioritizing actions focused on eliminating violence against women and girls, increasing women's political participation and representation, and increasing access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services. Notably, these priorities largely mirror the global priority areas of the past five years.<sup>48</sup>

**Eliminating violence against women** was the top stated priority of member States insofar as the highest number of reported state actions were in this area. In particular, governments reported taking action to strengthen and implement legal frameworks to enhance protections and criminalize violence. There is insufficient evidence to show that rates of violence against women and girls in the region have declined in recent years,<sup>49</sup> however, at least 21 countries have conducted or are currently conducting national surveys on violence against women to fill this data gap.<sup>50</sup> Discriminatory social norms that normalize violence and reduce reporting continue to constrain women's access to legal rights, protections and justice. This gap between action and impact warrants further investment of resources.

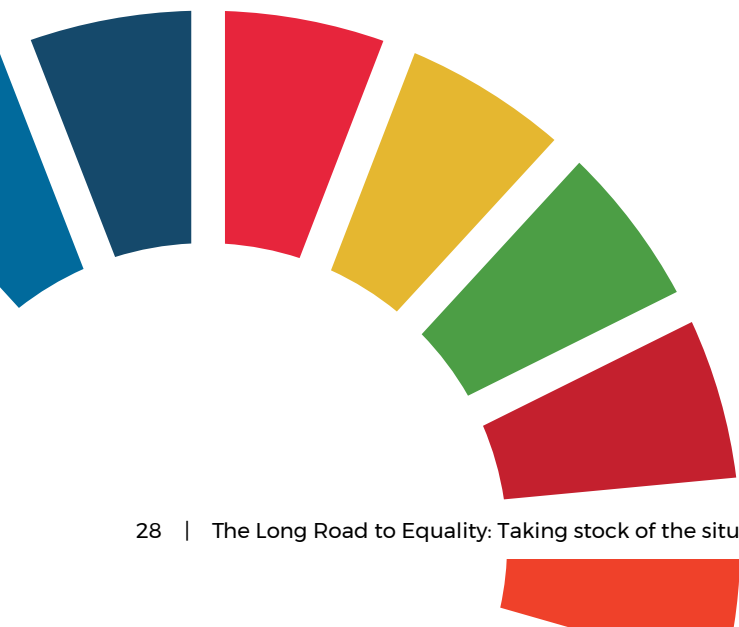
Progress in **women's political participation and representation** has been slow and uneven. While women's representation rates in national parliaments increased from 12.1 per cent in 1995 when the Beijing Platform for Action came into force to 19 per cent in 2019,<sup>51</sup> this progress has not been evenly distributed across the region. In 2019, 13 countries had 10 per cent or fewer women in national parliaments, while in 4 countries (Australia, Nepal, New Zealand and Timor-Leste), women's political representation surpassed 30 per cent (compared to the global average of 24 per cent).<sup>52</sup> Women who do enter public life often face harassment, owing in part to discriminatory social norms, and a lack of resources and a supportive political ecosystem.

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### Eliminating violence against women was the top stated priority of member States.

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Member States' prioritization of **increasing access to affordable and quality health care** is evident in the notable progress made in reducing maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates across the region. Since 2000, maternal mortality has more than halved, falling from 252 deaths per 100,000 live births to 110 in 2017.<sup>53</sup> Between 2000 and 2020, the adolescent fertility rate fell from 48 to 24 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years.<sup>54</sup> Despite these gains, substantial scope for expansion and improvement remains in terms of designing and delivering comprehensive and integrated universal quality sexual and reproductive health services. These should aim, for example, at further reducing maternal and child mortality through training skilled birth attendants and satisfying the unmet need for family planning.<sup>55</sup> Member States reported taking actions to extend health-care services to women in rural and remote areas. Given that access to health



care remains uneven for rural women,<sup>56</sup> refugees and internally displaced persons,<sup>57</sup> migrant and domestic workers,<sup>58</sup> and women with disabilities,<sup>59</sup> further efforts in this arena are greatly needed.

At the subregional level, important variations emerge. North and Central Asian member States lead in prioritizing actions to tackle discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes, while South-East Asian member States are notable for taking 50 per cent of actions to implement gender-responsive budgeting. The Pacific member States comprise 75 per cent of countries that prioritized gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience-building.

The national review reports suggested that the fewest state actions in the reporting period were in digital and financial inclusion for women, access to basic services and infrastructure (water, sanitation, energy, transport, etc.), and strengthening women's participation in ensuring environmental sustainability. Nearly every subregion reported no action in at least one of these areas, with some reporting no action across all three. This is concerning because access to digital and physical infrastructure is fundamental to women's abilities to enjoy other rights, and because climate change and environmental degradation are set to become one of this century's "wicked problems".<sup>60</sup>

The national review reports indicated that in the coming five years, countries in Asia and the Pacific will maintain a focus on eliminating violence against women and girls, increasing women's political participation and representation, and strengthening efforts around women's right to work and rights at work (e.g., gender pay gap, occupational segregation, career progression). According to the reports, actions to strengthen women's participation in environmental sustainability, enhance women's access to basic services and infrastructure, and expand digital and financial inclusion remain low on the list of priorities. Without diminishing important ongoing efforts, member States, in collaboration with the private sector and civil society, should direct greater attention and resources to these key areas.

## Challenges to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

The national review reports pointed to a number of common challenges that affect implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda across the region. These include the lack of intragovernmental coordination and collaboration, weak and limited implementation of existing gender equality policies, discriminatory social norms and a lack of gender data.

Member States reported that the **lack of coordination and collaboration within government agencies and between governments and other stakeholders** is an ongoing barrier to progress. Many of the national gender machineries described being siloed in their operations, underappreciated, and, crucially, underresourced, with some (such as the Cook Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) heavily dependent on international donor funding for their gender programming. The national review report from Vanuatu noted that the budget of the Department of Women's Affairs can only cover 5 per cent of programme costs, leaving it to procure the remaining financial resources through donor partnerships. As the subsequent cluster analysis makes clear, where gender equality principles are not mainstreamed across government institutions and processes, the potential for gender equality and women's empowerment policies and programming to catalyse positive change is compromised.

Governments recognized that policies and programmes are only as effective as their **implementation**. Indeed, given women's overrepresentation in informal sector employment in the region, policy advances in the formal sector may still leave many, if not most, women behind. Similar issues arise when dealing with violence against women and girls. Despite actions to improve women's formal rights and protections, their de facto experiences will not improve without rigorous and consistent implementation of such policies in public and private spaces, equally.

Implementation also requires focused attention on intersecting inequalities that threaten to leave marginalized groups behind. Trends indicate an urgent need to recognize and address intersecting inequalities in efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women. Implementation challenges begin with the limitations of available policy and programme efforts, which undercut effective actions to address intersecting inequalities.

The national review reports indicated that member States prioritized and/or enacted targeted programmes for women living in remote and rural areas (73 per cent), women living with disabilities (64 per cent) and young women (47 per cent). Rural populations, women and people living with disabilities remain the three most disadvantaged groups in Asia and the Pacific, however, with rural populations seeing more progress towards closing gaps than the other two groups.<sup>61</sup> Such categorizations are not exclusive, since intersecting inequalities take many forms.

- ! Women in rural areas are less likely to have access to skilled birth attendants, despite progress in decreasing maternal mortality in all Asia and the Pacific subregions.<sup>62</sup> Women with disabilities and older women are particularly impacted by a lack of appropriate services and equipment, limited specialized training and lack of accessible infrastructure. Additionally, practitioner bias restricts the availability of quality sexual and reproductive health services for women with disabilities.<sup>63</sup>
- ! Young women are at risk of child, early and forced marriage, with 13 countries in the region having rates higher than the global average.<sup>64</sup>
- ! Only 31 per cent of countries reported taking actions to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of older women, despite the expectation that the population of older people in the region will increase by 50 per cent by 2030.<sup>65</sup>
- ! Women in rural areas are less likely to take legal recourse in the event of violent experiences.

**Discriminatory social norms** underlie persistent inequalities that shape decision-making processes at the highest levels of policymaking and resource allocation. Social norms within communities continue to prevent women from claiming their legal rights when they are in opposition to societal expectations, or when individuals lack the information or knowledge to act.<sup>66</sup> This has undermined progress for women even after rights are legally recognized. The national review reports highlighted the fact that discriminatory social norms have limited women's access to reproductive health (e.g., in Tonga), political participation and public life (Kyrgyzstan), access to financial resources and property rights (Palau) and women's access to work (Turkmenistan). In response, governments have used mass media (Armenia) and promoted gender equality in children's books (Republic of Korea) and the educational curriculum (Thailand).

Policies can target social norms directly and be important tools for transforming entrenched gender roles and their attendant power relationships. As such, reports of gender fatigue (e.g., in Tuvalu) and lack of political will (Fiji, Mongolia, Vanuatu and Viet Nam) among policymakers signal a key barrier to progress. Gender fatigue indicates a range of behaviours – from backlash against gender equality to passive resistance – among institutions and individuals in response to ongoing heightened levels of feminist activity, in ways that impede progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.<sup>67</sup> In Tuvalu, for example, stakeholders indicated that the observed gender fatigue among government actors is the result of perceptions that gender issues have already been addressed and that women's empowerment concerns risk taking over and replacing cultural and traditional norms. The national review reports pointed to the lack of political will as especially problematic in areas with an emerging gender focus, such as environmental policies. In such areas, underdeveloped frameworks and the lack of gender data can influence political will, and ultimately, constrain successful implementation.

Finally, **the lack of SDG data in critical areas** in all clusters was highlighted as a challenge across the national review reports. Gender data gaps inhibit evidence-based decision-making; programme and policy design, implementation and monitoring; and the allocation of resources across a wide range of thematic areas (see Chapter 3). One central lesson is that limited gender data and data capacities are impeding the ability of member States to effectively operationalize and track progress on both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. With some exceptions, not enough gender data required for the SDG indicators are being collected regularly to enable analysis of national and regional trends. Where data do exist, they are often “snapshot” data (i.e., only one data point in time), which hampers efforts to identify if an issue is progressing or regressing, and stalls policymaking. Encouragingly, the national review reports suggested that there is acknowledgement within the region that gender data collection and use needs improvement, including through the regular production of sex-disaggregated statistics and strengthened capacity of national statistical offices. This requires sustained investment in national statistical systems and data collection strategies, as well as strengthened partnerships and collaboration between producers and users of gender data, including national gender machineries and research organizations.

## Cluster analyses

The remainder of this chapter presents in-depth analysis of progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment in each of the six cluster sections (detailed treatment of the composition of each cluster area is presented in Annex 2). Each cluster analysis contains:



**An overview of progress and the status of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls based on relevant data and expert analysis. Data are drawn primarily from available SDG data and secondary analyses.**



**A section on state policy responses drawn from the national review reports, and including aggregations and promising examples.**



**A “going further” section that critically identifies areas where progress is still needed and highlights areas where increased member State attention would be particularly warranted.**



**A brief conclusion with proposed recommendations for member States, civil society, the private sector and United Nations entities.**

48. ECOSOC 2019a.

49. UNFPA 2019.

50. UNFPA 2020. UNFPA’s Asia and the Pacific region includes 37 ESCAP member States. Those conducting surveys between 2014 and 2019 are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Maldives, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Viet Nam.

51. ESCAP database, SDG 5.5.1, seats held by women in national parliament (percentage of seats), 2019. Accessed 11 October 2020.

52. Ibid.

53. ESCAP database, SDG 3.1.1, maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births), 2000 and 2017.

54. ESCAP database, SDG 3.7.2, adolescent fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years), 2000 and 2020.

55. UNFPA 2019.

56. ESCAP 2018c.

57. WRC 2019.

58. ASEAN 2017.

59. World Bank 2020b.

60. Eden and Wagstaff 2020.

61. ESCAP 2019b.

62. ADB and UN Women 2018.

63. Lee et al. 2015.

64. ESCAP database, SDG 5.3.1, women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in a union before age 15 and 18, 2018. Accessed 10 September 2020.

65. ESCAP 2019e.

66. UNDP 2020b.

67. Kelan 2008, Williamson 2020.



# Cluster 1

Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Photos clockwise from top left: Woman in Tajikistan. Photo: UN Women/Janarbek Amankulov; Garment workers in China. Photo: UNDP China; Women and men electricians in training, Timor-Leste. Photo: UN Women/Betsy Davis.



## Overview

Asia and the Pacific boasts one of the highest economic growth rates in the world, with the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate reaching 3.3 per cent per annum in 2019, much higher than the global average of 2.3 per cent before the pre-COVID crisis.<sup>68</sup> The region is also home to more than half of the world's labour force.<sup>69</sup> A major gender gap remains in labour force participation, however.<sup>70</sup> Women's labour force participation ranges from a high of 72 per cent in South-East Asia to 29 per cent in Central and Southern Asia, while male labour force participation in these subregions is 95 per cent or higher.<sup>71</sup> In the coming years, this gap is projected to either remain static or even increase.<sup>72</sup>

Female labour force participation and access to decent work are shaped by a variety of conflicting factors, including a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, girls staying in school for more years<sup>73</sup> (see also Cluster 2), inadequate access to transportation and other infrastructure (discussed further in Cluster 6) and vulnerable working conditions.<sup>74</sup> When they do find work, women in the region remain overrepresented in vulnerable and informal employment, with limited labour and social protections. Women-owned enterprises are overwhelmingly informal, and clustered in sectors that are labour intensive and low in productivity.<sup>75</sup> Formal firm ownership and access to productive resources remain dominated by men. Furthermore, social norms, especially those entrenching women's unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities, continue to drive high gender pay gaps, occupational segregation, and women's limited career progression prospects in formal employment.

In response to these dynamics, member States have taken measures to strengthen legislative frameworks and workplace policies in support of gender equality, including the recognition,

reduction and redistribution of women's unpaid care and domestic work. They are investing in promoting women's entrepreneurship and expanded financial access, indicating a commitment to women's economic empowerment.

The Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes that progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in economic life (critical area of concern F) requires access to decent work. In order to meet SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work) by 2030, countries in Asia and the Pacific will also need to address the dynamics underpinning declining female labour force participation.<sup>76</sup> As member States reaffirmed in the 2019 Asia-Pacific Declaration (Annex 3), policy attention needs to focus on unpaid care and domestic work as well as on paid work, where enhancing women's access to formal employment and progression to managerial positions is key.<sup>77</sup>

This chapter will focus on promoting women's rights to full and productive employment, and women's rights at work, including in terms of non-discrimination and work-life balance. Section 1 provides an overview of women's access to decent work, including a discussion on women's overrepresentation in informal and vulnerable employment, the need for strengthened labour and labour-related social protections (analysis of additional social protection policies is presented in Cluster 2), and the continued impact of discriminatory social norms. Section 2 highlights trends around care responsibilities and how these are shared between women and men, as well as among families, the market and the State.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Section 3 discusses entrepreneurship and trends relevant to women-owned enterprises, including women's continued exclusion from the productive assets necessary for more substantial gains in economic empowerment and shared regional prosperity.

## Access to decent work

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines **decent work** as work that “is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men”.

Source: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>.

### Female labour force participation

Despite strong economic growth, female labour force participation is low and declining.<sup>79</sup> Between 2000 and 2017, the rate dropped from 53 per cent to 46 per cent, driven largely by decreases in East Asia and South Asia.<sup>80</sup> Rates capture the proportion of working-age women who are employed (including paid employment and self-employment) or unemployed (including without work but currently available for and/or seeking work).<sup>81</sup> Variations in measures of female labour force participation limit the comparability of data across countries, including due to different treatments of women in the informal sector and contributing family workers in some labour force surveys.<sup>82</sup> In 2020, male labour force participation rates are estimated to exceed female rates globally by 33.5 percentage points, an increase of 1.2 per cent since 2000.<sup>83</sup> Asia and the Pacific is seeing more drastic increases in the gender gap in labour force participation. The gender gap grew by 2.8 and 5.2 percentage points in East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia, respectively, between 2000 and 2020.<sup>84</sup>

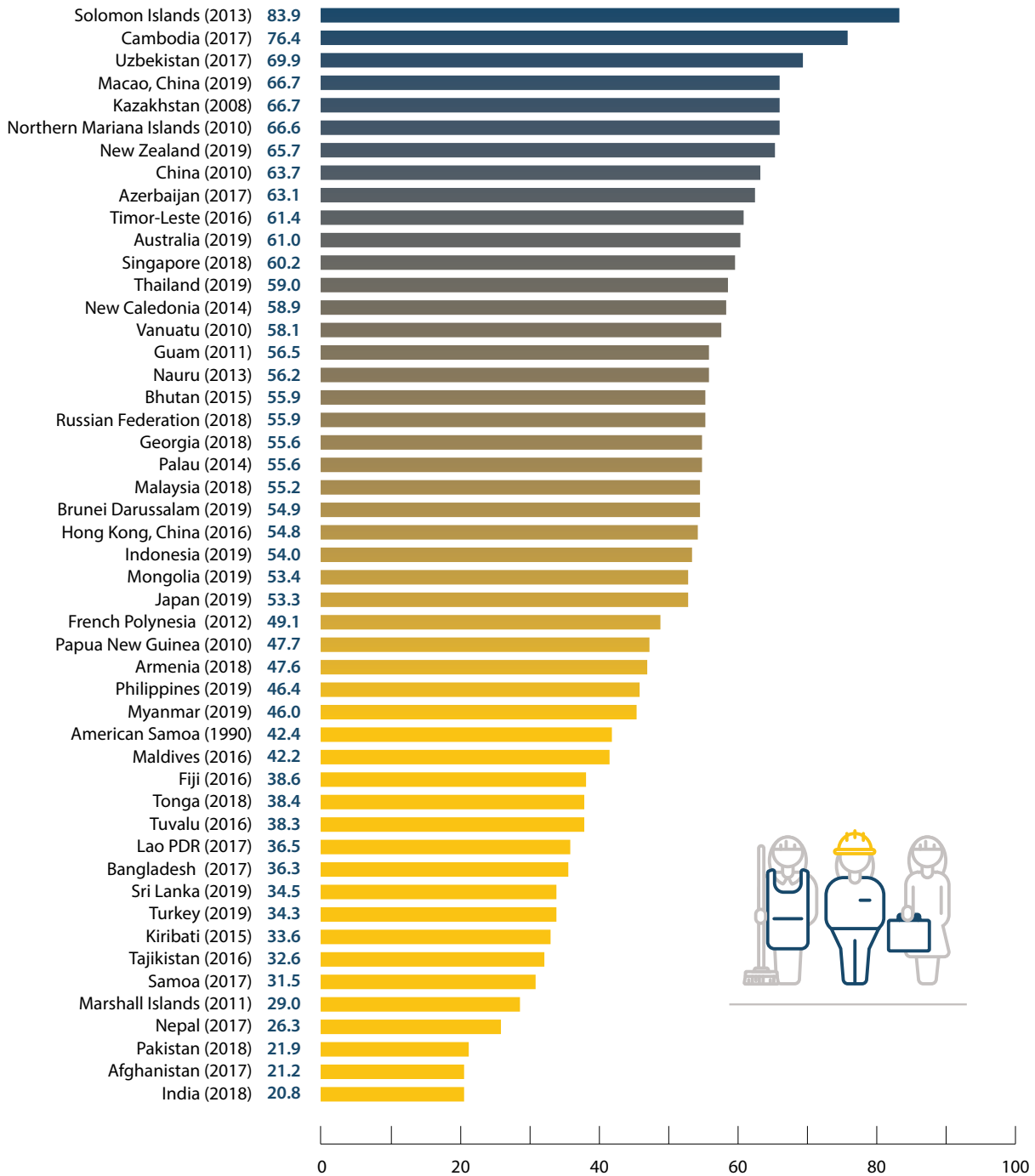
Variation in female labour force participation is notable across the region (see Figure 1.1). South and South-West Asian countries, for example, have on average the lowest female-to-male labour force

participation ratio in Asia and the Pacific (roughly 31 women in the labour force for every 100 men, down from 38 women per 100 men in 2005).<sup>85</sup> Changes in the agricultural sector may be behind low female labour force participation in the subregion, particularly due to the large proportion of informal employment in agricultural employment. In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, more than 99 per cent of female employment in agriculture is informal.<sup>86</sup> Recent research found that decreases in women’s labour force participation in India were largely driven by reductions in women’s agricultural work, caused in turn by decreasing farm sizes and shrinking demand for agricultural labourers. Rising school enrolments for women and girls, however, are also implicated in the downward trend in women agricultural workers.<sup>87</sup> With education a key factor influencing informal employment,<sup>88</sup> rural women and girls need enhanced educational completion (discussed further in Cluster 2), effective school-to-work transition,<sup>89</sup> and gender-responsive transportation and digital infrastructure between rural and urban areas, among others, to promote their access to decent work. The importance of strengthening this transition is supported by ILO research in nine countries in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>90</sup> It indicates that unemployed women are more likely to be first-time jobseekers than to be between jobs.<sup>91</sup>



**Occupational segregation is “endemic” in Asia and the Pacific, and women who work in non-traditional areas often have family support to enable them to overcome restrictive social norms.**

**Figure 1.1 Female labour force participation rate  
(female population ages 15 and over), most recent year**

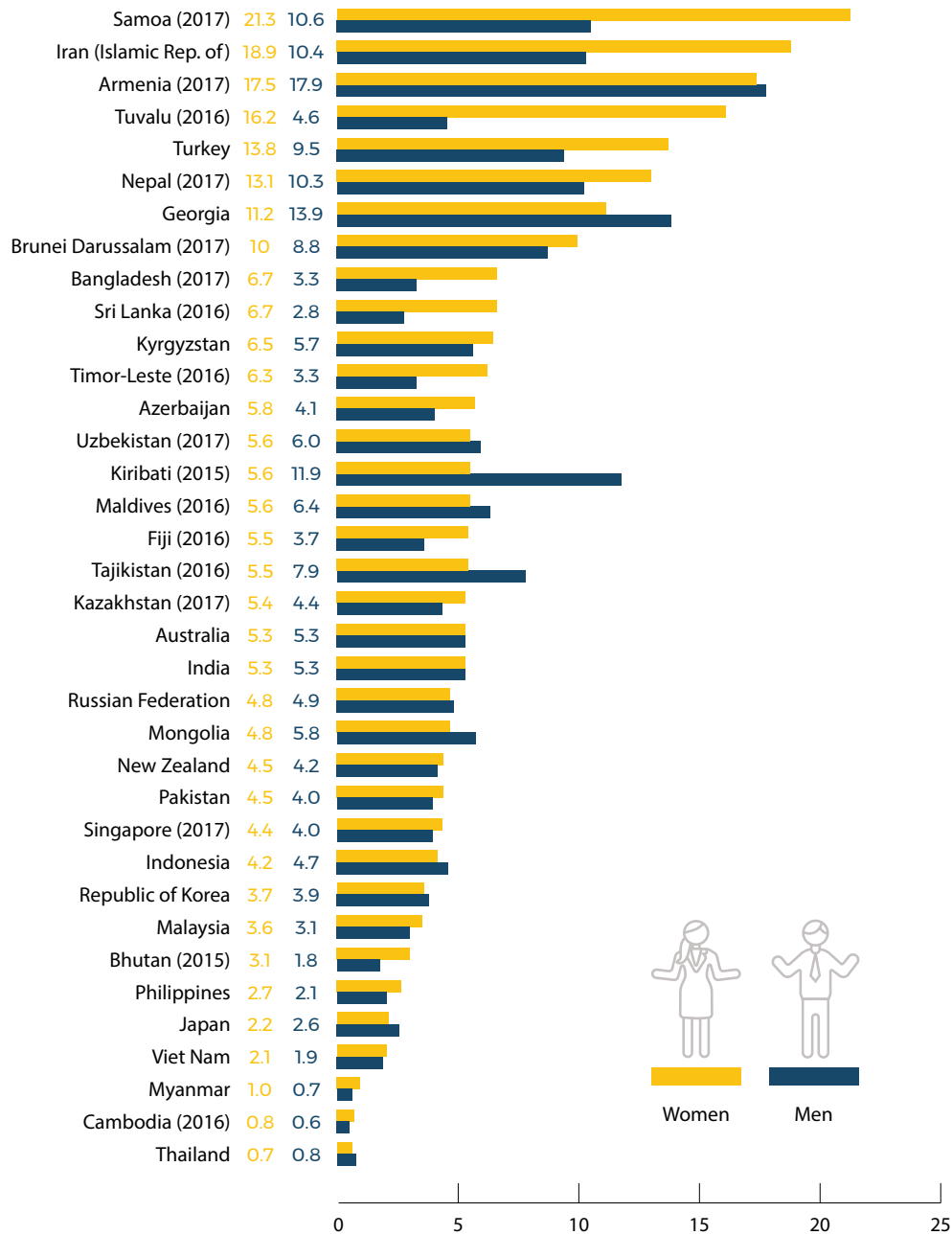


Source: World Bank databank, based on ILO data, labour force participation rate, female (percentage of female population aged 15 and over) (national estimate), most recent year. Accessed October 1, 2020.

Female unemployment is also higher than male unemployment in 22 of the 36 countries in the region with unemployment data available from 2014 to 2019 (see Figure 1.2). In four of these countries (Bangladesh, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Tuvalu), female unemployment rates were twice as high (or more) than male unemployment rates.<sup>92</sup> Several countries have made progress in decreasing women's unemployment rates since 2014, however, including Georgia (13.9

per cent to 11.2 per cent), Kyrgyzstan (9 per cent to 6.5 per cent), the Philippines (3.7 per cent to 2.7 per cent between 2014 and 2018) and New Zealand (5.8 per cent to 4.5 per cent).<sup>93</sup> A gender gap also exists in youth unemployment (15 to 24 years of age), with female youth unemployment rates approaching or exceeding 40 per cent of the total female youth labour force in Armenia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Samoa.<sup>94</sup>

**Figure 1.2 Unemployment rates, male and female, 2018 data or most recent year**



Source: ESCAP online database, based on ILO data, SDG 8.5.2, unemployment rate (15 years and over) (percentage of labour force), 2019. Accessed October 7 2020.

ESCAP analysis of access to decent work found that women were the most disadvantaged group in terms of access to decent work in 19 of 33 member States.<sup>95</sup> When women are employed in the region, they are overrepresented in informal jobs without access to social protection, and their wages tend to be lower than those of male colleagues.<sup>96</sup> This overarching “gender wage gap” reflects various factors, such as differences in type of employment and wage discrimination within sectors.<sup>97</sup> Gender wage gaps may be larger in the informal than the formal economy.<sup>98</sup> Among countries with available data, the Asian Development Bank and UN Women found that the gender wage gap (measured as the difference in average male and female monthly earnings expressed as a proportion of male monthly earnings) was highest in Azerbaijan and Pakistan, with women in these countries earning 49.6 per cent and 38.4 per cent, respectively, of what men earn.<sup>99</sup>

Variations in the size of the gender wage gap exist within and across countries. For example, factors such as rural and urban location, contract type and education can all impact the gender wage gap within a country. In India, the gender pay gap is 22 per cent for regular employees in urban areas, 39 per cent for temporary or irregular casual workers in urban areas, and 38 per cent for regular workers in rural areas.<sup>100</sup> In Pakistan, men earn 71 per cent more than women controlling for other factors. The gender pay gap is larger in low-paid jobs and decreases in occupations that require higher levels of education, including, for instance, among engineers (with a gender pay gap of 10 per cent) and medical practitioners (where the gender pay gap is 5 per cent).<sup>101</sup> Women in informal employment face a double wage penalty: On average, they earn less than men in informal employment in addition to the already lower pay compared with wage workers in the formal economy.<sup>102</sup> Such a double penalty also applies to female migrant workers, who earn less than nationals and male migrants for the same work.<sup>103</sup>

Discriminatory social norms influence the gender wage gap. UN Women found that large portions of populations in India, Japan, the Philippines and Turkey agreed or strongly agreed that men should be paid more than women for the same job. In India and the Philippines, 49 per cent and 46 per cent, respectively, of respondents agreed with this statement, despite overwhelmingly supporting women’s equal treatment in society more generally (87 per cent in India and 89 per cent in the

Philippines agreed or strongly agreed with this statement).<sup>104</sup> These findings indicate that a strong cultural adherence to the “male breadwinner bias” drives the expectation that men are the primary family providers, and that a woman’s income is only temporary or supplemental to a man’s within the household.<sup>105</sup>

Occupational segregation is “endemic” in Asia and the Pacific,<sup>106</sup> and women who work in non-traditional areas often have family support to enable them to overcome restrictive social norms.<sup>107</sup> Pervasive occupational segregation is also a major factor contributing to the gender wage gap. Feminized sectors of work are often linked to cultural notions of “appropriate” work for women, such as childcare, administrative services and education. These sectors are characterized by low pay and restricted access to social protection.<sup>108</sup> Through qualifying “men’s work” and “women’s work”, discriminatory social norms steer women and men into different occupations and further interact with gender wage gaps to devalue women’s economic contributions and reinforce unpaid care work for the lowest-earning household members.<sup>109</sup> Such occupational segregation leads to job queues and higher unemployment among women.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, compared to men, women in the region are less likely to enjoy career progression, with the share of women among legislators, senior officials and managers at around 25 per cent and declining since 2005.<sup>111</sup> As will be discussed further in Cluster 4, long working hours are an important barrier to women’s career progression, especially when they limit access to higher paid jobs and promotion opportunities.<sup>112</sup> Women’s unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, discriminatory labour codes (such as those permitting different retirement ages for women) and gender-biased institutional workplace cultures are all notable barriers to women’s career progression.<sup>113</sup>

### Women in informal and vulnerable employment

The informal economy is significant in scale as it includes domestic workers, farmworkers, garment workers, street vendors, home-based workers and undocumented migrant workers.<sup>114</sup> Informal employment is high in the region, with 64.1 per cent of employed women in informal work, relative to 70.5 per cent of men.<sup>115</sup>

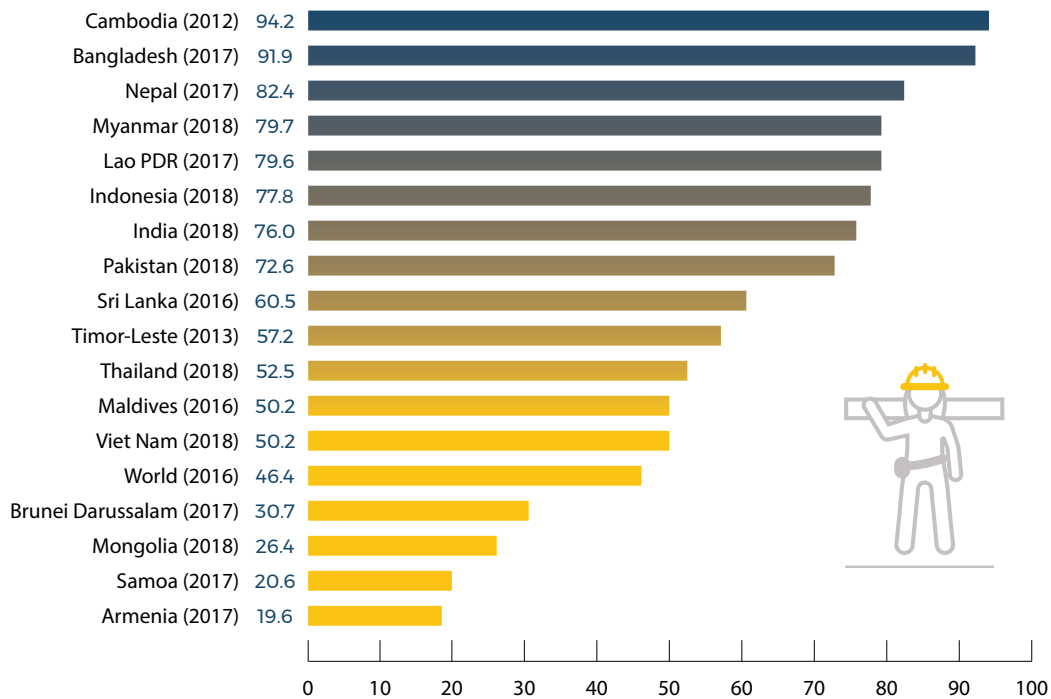
Wide variations exist in the size of the informal sector across countries in Asia and the Pacific. Of the 17 countries with available data, Bangladesh, Cambodia and India report informal employment comprising more than 85 per cent of total employment (94.7 per cent, 93.6 per cent and 88.6 per cent, respectively).<sup>116</sup> In comparison, about a fifth of total employment in Japan is in the informal sector.<sup>117</sup> Informal employment is also more common in rural areas than urban areas (85.2 per cent and 47.4 of total employment, respectively).<sup>118</sup>

Informal employment can provide an important source of income, especially in contexts of limited opportunities in formal employment. Such employment is often characterized by a lack of key social and labour protections, however, such as access to maternity or parental benefits, pensions and health care, all of which have a bearing on gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>119</sup> Furthermore, workers in the informal economy are often disadvantaged in terms of education (including knowledge of the labour law) and productive resources.<sup>120</sup>

Women-owned enterprises in Asia and the Pacific are also largely informal. Informality is linked with lack of access to finance,<sup>121</sup> which is, as discussed later in this section, a major challenge for women in the region. While not all enterprises are informal, women-owned businesses tend to be labour intensive and lower value added.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, because of their informal nature, such enterprises are often excluded from labour and social protections programmes.

Informal employment is highest in the agricultural sector, where 94.7 per cent of all employment is informal. Informal employment in non-agricultural sectors is also high, including in the industrial sector (where 68.8 per cent of employment is informal) and the services sector (54.1 per cent informal).<sup>123</sup> Women’s share of employment across all non-agricultural informal employment sectors varies from 94.2 per cent in Cambodia to 19.6 per cent in Armenia, as shown in Figure 1.3.

**Figure 1.3 Proportion of informal employment in non-agricultural employment (percentage of female employment), most recent year**



Source: ESCAP online database, based on ILO data. SDG 8.3.1, informal employment in total employment (percentage of total employment), 2018 or latest available. Accessed October 7 2020.

Important gender differences in labour market outcomes persist in the region, including women's high representation in vulnerable employment.<sup>124</sup> Women are not always more likely than men to be in informal employment, but they are much more likely to be in the most vulnerable forms of informal employment, which are characterized by irregularity, low pay and job insecurity.<sup>125</sup> In the formal sector, vulnerable work includes part-time work and short-term contract work where workers are likely to lack access to social protection and social safety nets. Women are overrepresented in vulnerable employment more broadly, including as domestic workers, home-based workers, contributing family workers and migrant workers.<sup>126</sup> In 2018, an estimated two thirds of informally employed women in the region were in vulnerable employment: 33.9 per cent as contributing family workers and 32.4 per cent as own account workers.<sup>127</sup> Vulnerable employment rates can obfuscate the reality of unemployment rates. Further, such rates mask decent work deficits and worrying gender gaps in female labour force participation.<sup>128</sup>

Over the past 25 years, labour precarity and vulnerability in both formal and informal employment have risen globally, including in Asia and the Pacific. Vulnerable employment in the region is largely defined by a lack of decent work, including shorter and/or uncertain labour contracts, and no social protections.<sup>129</sup> Industry, manufacturing and export-oriented sectors where short-term contracts are most common also tend to be associated with higher safety risks. Women's overrepresentation in precarious and vulnerable work is evident in the Pacific island countries and territories, for example,<sup>130</sup> where 84 per cent of women engage in vulnerable work compared to 71 per cent of men.<sup>131</sup>

Data suggest that the tide may be turning on vulnerable employment at least for some women in the region. In East Asia, the share of women as contributing family workers decreased from 41 per cent to 13 per cent between 1997 and 2017, while women's share in wage and salaried work increased from 45 per cent to 66 per cent in the same time period.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, 10 member States are state

parties and three are signatories to the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, indicating progress in protecting access to decent work for women migrant workers.<sup>133</sup>

### State responses to increase access to decent work

The Beijing Platform for Action calls on states to ensure women's access to decent work opportunities through putting in place enabling legislation, incentives or encouragement.<sup>134</sup> National review reports indicated that efforts to improve women's access to decent work are concentrated in the following initiatives.

- ✓ **Anti-discrimination laws and workplace policies:** Thirty-one countries surveyed reported taking actions to advance laws and workplace policies and practices that prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors. **Thailand** and **Timor-Leste** are the most recent countries to ratify ILO Convention 111 on Non-discrimination in Employment (in 2017 and 2016, respectively).
- ✓ **Equal wage legislation:** Eight countries reported enacting equal wage legislation. Timor-Leste is also the latest country in the region to ratify ILO convention 100 on Equal Remuneration (in 2016), bringing total ratifications in the region to 36 (62 per cent).
- ✓ **Measures against sexual harassment:** Twenty-two countries reported taking measures to prevent sexual harassment, including in the workplace. **Afghanistan's** 2015 Anti-Harassment Law, including protections for women and children, was strengthened by the 2017 Law on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment. **Georgia** and **India** are targeting harassment in the workplace through including sexual harassment measures in the labor code (Georgia) and creating an online platform for reporting (India).



A woman drives a truck in Thar, Pakistan.  
Photo: UN Women/Anam Abbas.

## Spotlight on

### Affirmative action for women's employment

Declining female labour force participation rates underscore the need for policy reforms that target the drivers of gender inequalities in productive employment. Several national review reports included promising examples of how governments are addressing discrimination against women in the workplace.

Affirmative action and positive discrimination policies, for example, are being implemented in **Pakistan**, **Timor-Leste** and **Turkey**, across a variety of sectors. In **Pakistan**, 10 per cent of civil service positions have been reserved for women. In **Timor-Leste**, the Ministry of Public Works has established a worker quota of 30 per cent for women and 2 per cent for persons with disabilities in all projects.

The Government of **Turkey** has provided incentives to employers to hire women by subsidizing the employer social security contributions for these workers for a period of 24 to 54 months.

Affirmative action policies can increase female employment and correct discriminatory hiring practices. Studies show that companies applying them cast wider searches when hiring, are more objective in their employee assessments, and provide more training, all of which improve performance. The examples above show a strong government commitment to building women's participation and visibility in the labour force, and to fostering women's employment experience to strengthen their potential for further career progression.

*Source: Cho and Kwon 2010.*



A woman works in apparel making (Bangladesh). Photo: UN Women/Fahad Abdullah Kaizer.



## Spotlight on

### Incentivizing the private sector to support women's rights at work

The private sector has a role in promoting and facilitating decent and inclusive work, such as by improving workplace safety, eliminating gender pay gaps, and providing options for family leave and work-life balance. Such workplace policies are critical for women to access decent work. Governments can encourage the private sector to do its part.

The Government of **Japan**, for example, has integrated gender equality and work-life balance policies into performance metrics for private companies that bid on government procurement contracts. The 2015 Act on the Promotion of Female Participation and Career Advancement emphasizes that women's success in the workplace requires that they can fully demonstrate their qualities and capabilities. Private enterprises and the national as well as local governments are called upon to develop action plans and disclose information regarding progress on improving women's workplace participation and advancement.

The Government of **Bangladesh** integrates metrics on violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights into factory inspections and concepts of good performance.

*Source: Governments of Bangladesh and Japan, national review reports.*

### Going further to promote access to decent work

The efforts listed above will require specific, complimentary investments to promote norms change and expand women's rights to decent work and rights at work, aiming for equal and safe workplaces that catalyse sustainable improvements.

Strengthening pathways to transition women from informal to formal employment is needed to address women's low labour force participation and overrepresentation in informal and vulnerable work. An important first step for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is the extension of labour-related protections to all workers in formal and informal jobs, and the promotion of decent work in all economic sectors. Second, a gender-responsive and inclusive transition process from informal to formal employment will enhance the well-being of workers and their families, and promote inclusive growth. While a framework for this exists in the 2016 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Vientiane Declaration, additional emphasis on gender-responsive and inclusive processes is warranted.<sup>138</sup>

Initiatives from within the region show that progress is possible. **Bangladesh**, for example, increased the minimum wage and set a mandatory annual salary increase for garment workers, raising the industry standard. **Fiji** established a national minimum wage in 2015 and increased it in 2017. In addition to benefiting factory and retail workers, the minimum wage legislation also benefits women in domestic work who are often left out of such protections. In **Lao PDR**, the 2014 Social Security Law allows informal sector workers to join the National Social Security Fund. In **Turkey**, under Law No. 5510, domestic workers, the bulk of whom are local or migrant women, are covered under social security.



Finally, women with care responsibilities are more likely to work in the informal economy and to be in vulnerable employment, including self-employment and as contributing family workers.

Going further to promote women's rights at work requires specific attention to building safe and inclusive workplaces, including by implementing policies in all sectors that eliminate the gender wage gap, equalize women's career progression opportunities, and address discriminatory social norms that underpin occupational segregation and gender-biased institutional workplace cultures. In each of these areas, efforts must address discriminatory social norms that restrict women's mobility, assign lesser value to women's education or reinforce the male breadwinner role. Special attention needs to be paid to ensuring decent work

for domestic workers, migrant workers, care workers and women in rural areas.<sup>139</sup> The ratification of key international agreements on non-discrimination and equal pay indicates political will among member States to address discriminatory social norms. While 36 out of 45 countries surveyed have ratified ILO Convention 111 on Non-discrimination in Employment, higher levels of commitment are still needed. Less than 50 per cent of countries in North and Central Asia, the Pacific, and East and North-East Asia have constitutional protections on non-discrimination in place.<sup>140</sup>

## Spotlight on

### Addressing intersecting inequalities for female farmers in the Republic of Korea

Gendered dynamics of poverty and opportunity intersect with other factors. For example, women, especially in rural areas, have the lowest access to full-time employment.<sup>135</sup> Only 30 per cent of persons with disabilities have sufficient income to support themselves.<sup>136</sup>

The **Republic of Korea's** Fourth Master Plan for Nurturing Female Farmers (2016-2020) takes an intersectional approach to supporting women in agriculture, including by recognizing and redistributing unpaid care through investment in childcare services.

The plan engages rural women to take part in decision-making through increased representation on the Food Policy Council and in agricultural cooperatives, and distributes female-friendly agricultural equipment, such as lighter tools and smaller machines. Specific attention is paid to migrant women, who are encouraged to settle in rural areas and become a new generation of female farmers. By responding to the needs and priorities of women across diverse rural communities, the policy seeks to create "workplace[s] where female farmers can lead a happy life by realizing genuine gender equality".<sup>137</sup>

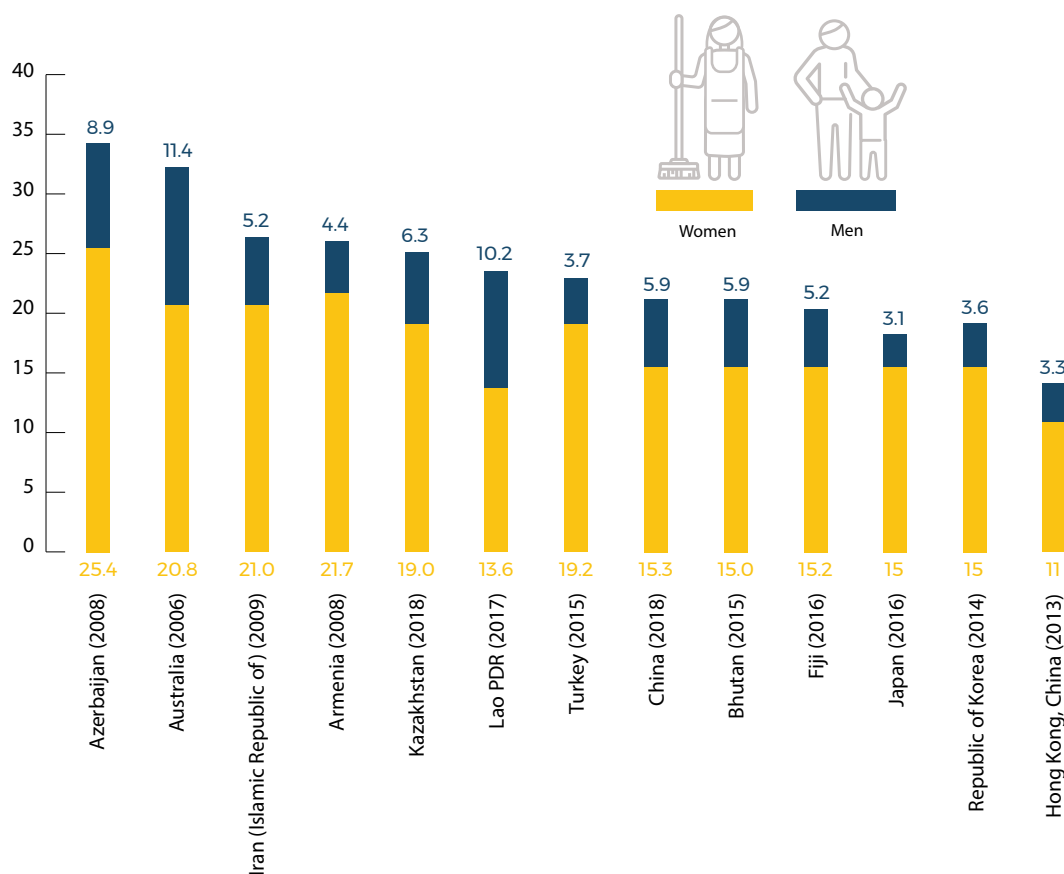
*Source: Government of the Republic of Korea, national review report.*

## Unpaid care and domestic work

On average, women in Asia and the Pacific spend 4.1 times the amount of time men spend on unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>141</sup> While women on average spend 262 minutes per day on unpaid work, men spend an average of 64 minutes, the lowest contribution of all regions globally.<sup>142</sup> Men

in Cambodia, India and Pakistan are among those who contribute least, providing 8.7 per cent, 8.9 per cent and 9.5 per cent, respectively, of total unpaid care work.<sup>143</sup> Variation exists within the region, although parity does not exist anywhere (see Figure 1.4).

**Figure 1.4 Proportion of time spent in unpaid domestic chores and care work, by sex, most recent year**



Source: United Nations Statistics Division database, SDG 5.4.1, proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic chores and care work, ages 15 and over, most recent year. Accessed 29 September 2020.

The unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work produces significant consequences from a gender equality and women's empowerment perspective. Women with care responsibilities face a "labour force participation penalty" when they attempt to participate in productive activities, while their male counterparts enjoy a "labour force premium".<sup>144</sup> Women in Asia and the Pacific with at least one child work more hours per week than mothers in other regions.<sup>145</sup> The additional hours worked results in a smaller gender gap in hours worked than in other regions. Mothers in Asia and the Pacific work 2 hours and 18 minutes less than fathers, compared to 9 hours and 12 minutes less for mothers in Europe and Central Asia.<sup>146</sup> Taken together, women in Asia and the Pacific spend more time working per day, in paid and unpaid work combined, than any other population group globally.<sup>147</sup> They face time poverty as a result, characterized by the persistent need to trade time allocations between paid work and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and the overall lack of time for social or community activities.<sup>148</sup>

Women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities impact employment outcomes in multiple ways. First, over 20 per cent of women in Asia and the Pacific cite "work/family balance" as a major challenge to their labour force participation, and nearly one quarter of women in East Asia mention the lack of affordable childcare as a primary challenge.<sup>149</sup> Time poverty is also leading women to engage in informal agricultural and/or home-based own account work to manage their paid and unpaid work responsibilities. This, in turn, increases the informality and vulnerability of women's work, and reduces formal wage employment opportunities.<sup>150</sup>

Second, care responsibilities can negatively impact women's remuneration and contribute to gender wage gaps. Where women spend twice as much time as men in caring activities, they earn only 65 per cent of what their male counterparts earn for the same job. When women's unpaid care work is five times that of men, their salaries are only 40 per cent of their male counterparts.<sup>151</sup>

Third, responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, including childcare responsibilities, also impacts the number of hours of paid work women engage in.<sup>152</sup> In 11 of 26 countries in the region with data, the number of women workers working only part-time hours exceeds one in four.<sup>153</sup> In Nepal, women are nearly 80 per cent less likely than men to engage in full-time work. Similar disparities exist in Afghanistan, Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>154</sup> Women who are married or have children are even less likely to be fully employed in the paid workforce.<sup>155</sup>

Finally, women with care responsibilities are more likely to work in the informal economy and to be in vulnerable employment, including self-employment and as contributing family workers, meaning they are less likely to contribute to social security and access social protection compared to other women and men.<sup>156</sup>

The need for investments in elderly care in the region is becoming more urgent, with the number of persons aged 65 years or older expected to increase by 50 per cent by 2030.<sup>157</sup> This will result in the world's highest increase in older person dependency ratios, from 3.7 per cent in 2015 to 4.9 per cent in 2030.<sup>158</sup> In Japan and China, the dependency ratios are projected to be even higher, at 12 per cent and 6.4 per cent, respectively.<sup>159</sup> Strong social norms around intergenerational solidarity and preferences for family-provided care mean that the unpaid care and domestic responsibilities of many families in the region are likely to increase. Women are more likely than men to provide unpaid care for elderly spouses and family members.

At the same time, women are overrepresented in older populations as a result of their longer life expectancies, and thus are more likely to need access to health care over the life cycle as well as long-term care (access to health care is discussed further in Cluster 2). Regional investments in health care for all and long-term care services would thus provide crucial support to women, both as recipients and providers of care.

## State responses to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid work

Policies that recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work are critical for ensuring women's access to decent (paid) work and shared prosperity. Paid maternity, parental and other family leave policies, as well as access to quality, affordable childcare, enable women and men to balance paid work and family responsibilities.<sup>160,161</sup> The national review reports indicated that member States are active through the following policies.

- ✓ **Paid family leave:** Across the region, 29 countries surveyed reported introducing or strengthening family leave policies since 2014. Some countries took actions to enable workers, more so women, to mitigate impacts on their careers. For example, a programme in the **Republic of Korea** supports women's re-entry to the workforce through national women's re-employment centres. **China** has established a care leave system that increased support for many one-child families facing a need for eldercare. **India** extended paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, expanded prenatal leave, and ensured medical leave in the case of abortions or pregnancy-related complications. **Turkey** has extended 16 weeks of paid leave to biological mothers and fathers as well as adoptive parents.
- ✓ **Expanding access to quality childcare services:** Twenty-three member States reported initiatives to expand childcare services or make existing services more accessible, especially for parents working part-time or in informal sectors.

In **Bhutan**, the Government conducted a needs assessment, and in response, established childcare centres targeted to parents in the public and informal sectors. Efforts to address diverse work schedules include **India** opening its national creche system to parents working at least 15 days per month, providing a quality and affordable childcare option to women working part-time. In 2017, the **Republic of Korea** extended the hours of operation for national daycare centres to support working parents.

- ✓ **Private sector incentives:** In addition to the examples provided earlier in Bangladesh and Japan, in **Malaysia** and **Thailand**, tax breaks and/or subsidies are used to incentivize employers to provide on-site childcare. This strategy can significantly ease work-life tensions for employees. Additional measures are needed, however, to ensure universal access to childcare that benefits all families, especially those in the informal sector who cannot access benefits available to formal public and private sector employees.
- ✓ **Increasing support for older persons and others needing intense forms of care:** Fifteen countries surveyed reported actions to expand support for frail and older persons and others needing intensive forms of care. **Afghanistan's** 2018 Social Protection Law provides shelter and income for older women to alleviate the care burden on families. **Tonga's** Social Services Project extends services and assistance to families responsible for the care of older family members or young children with disabilities. The projects operates through partnerships with local non-governmental organization (NGO) and private sector service providers.



Preschool children in Mongolia, 2015.  
Photo: UNICEF/Enkhzul A.

## Spotlight on

### Mongolia's Preschool Education Programme

**Mongolia's** Preschool Education Programme is a source of universal, free, high-quality childcare throughout the country. The programme is open to children between the ages of 2 and 5, and operates five days per week from 9am to 5pm, in alignment with full-time work demands.

In 2016, the Government replaced the “first come, first serve” placement for the programme with a lottery system to allocate placements in response to rising demand. Researchers tracked the labour market outcomes for mothers whose children were selected – and those whose children were not – for two years. The results showed that offering free public childcare has a significantly positive impact on labour market outcomes for parents, especially mothers.

#### Specifically:

- The rate of employment among mothers increased by 8.3 per cent.
- Mothers and fathers saw regular hourly wage increases of 6 per cent on average, with women with more than one young child seeing increases of 15.5 per cent on average.
- The probability of formal work for mothers increased by 10.8 per cent.
- Decreases in seasonal employment for mothers and fathers averaged 9.8 per cent and 12.7 per cent, respectively.

These results highlight the intricate and immediate linkages between alleviating women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and promoting women's access to decent work opportunities.

*Source: Altansukh et al. 2020.*

## Spotlight on

### Transforming the culture of work in Japan

The national review reports provided examples of policies to address discriminatory social norms that constrain women's access to decent work, and to transform workplace cultures to promote women's rights at work. **Japan**, for example, has passed a comprehensive and multifaceted policy framework that integrates social norms change into policies supporting better work-life balance for men and women. The Fourth Basic Plan for Gender Equality (2016-2020) comprises four policy areas covering women's participation and advancement in all areas of society, safety and security, gender-responsive infrastructure development, and implementation measures and targets.

The plan identifies four characteristics of a desirable society, including "[one] that has realized work-life balance of both women and men through reformation of 'men-oriented working styles'", which comprise labour practices that place value on long hours. These norms and the attendant practices contribute to occupation segregation and gender pay gaps, and reinforce women's caring roles when men have demanding schedules.<sup>162</sup> A supporting law, the 2018 Act on the Arrangement of Related Acts to Promote Work Style Reform, requires companies to address poor treatment of regular and non-regular workers such as part-time or contract workers. As women tend to be overrepresented in non-regular work as a result of their unpaid care responsibilities, this Act promotes the quality of work available to women and reduces care penalties in the workplace.<sup>163</sup>

Shifting the culture of work to embrace work-life balance and care responsibilities for all workers has the potential to address discriminatory attitudes in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women workers, and to redistribute unpaid care work between men and women.

*Source: Government of Japan, national review report.*



Japanese police women on duty in Hachiko square, Shibuya. Photo: Mahathir Mohd Yasin.

## Going further to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work

Analysis of regional reporting on efforts to address unpaid care and domestic work – and relatedly, to support paid care work – indicates a need for increased investment in policies that address the gendered division of labour throughout the life cycle. The policy actions listed in the previous section include important labour measures that can help promote the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work for employees. These actions are often limited in their impact, however, among those who are informally employed. They tend to maintain gendered norms around who provides family care work, rather than to dismantle these assumptions. Furthermore, the focus is largely targeted at maternity-related protections over more long-term care demands, such as for families with older persons or persons with disabilities, for example.

National review reports suggested insufficient attention to expanding women's access to decent work standards in all sectors, including labour protections for paid health and social care workers, and domestic workers. Access to decent work and labour protections for female migrant care workers is particularly weak.<sup>164</sup> There were some bright spots, however. According to the reports, eight countries have taken actions to promote decent work for caregivers, and half of these actions were reported by countries in South-East Asia. In the **Philippines**, the 2014 Domestic Workers Act extended minimum wage protections and leave entitlements. Similar policies in **Cambodia** and **Turkey** seek to strengthen decent work provisions and the formalization of care and domestic workers through, for example, regulation of contracts, paid public holidays and social security requirements.

**Nepal's** Labour Legislation Act of 2017 (Article 88) recognizes rights for domestic workers, including minimum remuneration, holidays, and allowances for cultural holidays and celebrations. Further progress is needed throughout the broader region, an imperative laid bare by the devastating impact of COVID-19 on older populations, and paid and unpaid care workers.

Care needs expand throughout the life cycle. Only seven national review reports, however, reported actions regarding childcare, family leave and eldercare. Another 13 countries reported actions in two of these three areas. Current piecemeal approaches to care policy fall short of realizing women's empowerment and gender equality. Holistic care policies that address the gendered division of labour *throughout* the life cycle are key for transformative change, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and opening pathways to paid work.<sup>165</sup> Such policy reform requires social norms change, augmented political will, and investment by both the public and private sector to make care work a national priority. As discussed further in Chapter 3, conducting time-use surveys and computing the value of unpaid care and domestic work are two important ways to account for the changing care demands on men and women throughout the life cycle.

Gender-responsive care policies have the potential to transform the gender division of labour within households and to have an impact on individuals' attitudes towards care work.<sup>166</sup> They can also create more inclusive notions of care, highlight care labour as work (and thus as a contributor to women's time poverty), and expand the idea of who performs paid and unpaid caring labour. In these ways, addressing unpaid care and domestic labour is central to promoting women's right to work and rights at work in Asia and the Pacific.



## Entrepreneurship

Enterprises are the largest generator of employment in the region.<sup>167</sup> In ASEAN countries, micro, small, and medium-size enterprises account for more than 96 per cent of total enterprises, between 52 and 97 per cent of domestic employment, and from 23 to 58 per cent of GDP.<sup>168</sup> In representing such a significant proportion of the region's employment opportunities, entrepreneurship – and the norms, policies and practices that shape it – plays a decisive role in women's access to work.<sup>169</sup> When accompanied by labour protections that reflect decent work standards (and by the social protection mechanisms elaborated in Cluster 2), entrepreneurship can be an important channel for women's empowerment. Access to productive assets and financial inclusion are both key components. Given the significant proportion of the female workforce employed in agriculture – in 2019, 65 per cent of female employment in Afghanistan, 63 per cent in Bhutan, 64 per cent in Lao PDR, 74 per cent in Nepal, 64 per cent in Pakistan and 60 per cent in Papua New Guinea<sup>170</sup> – access to productive assets such as land is critical for women's empowerment and financial agency.

### Women-owned enterprises

Regionally, the share of women-owned enterprises is lower than the share of enterprises owned by men, although variations exist across countries. Formal registration and establishing clear parameters for women's ownership are two elements that underlie this variation. For example, in South Asia, 9.6 per cent of formally registered micro, small, and medium-size enterprises have women as majority owners, roughly half the rate of enterprises with some female participation in ownership (18.4 per cent).<sup>171</sup> Complicated and/or expensive registration procedures reduce women's likelihood of having registered businesses, while gendered and discriminatory social norms impact women-led enterprises regardless of registration status.<sup>172</sup>

Across Asia and the Pacific, women's enterprises are primarily informal and unregistered.<sup>173</sup> For example, in Cambodia, 65 per cent of micro-, small, and medium-size enterprises are classified as "women-led", yet women own only one third of all registered businesses.<sup>174</sup> Women's rates of entrepreneurship are much higher when accounting for total (formal and informal) enterprise rates, such as in the Philippines (69 per cent), Viet Nam (59 per cent), and Indonesia (43 per cent).<sup>175</sup> Informality and lack of registration threaten to minimize the visibility of women's employment in these areas, increasing women's risk of being in vulnerable rather than decent work.

### Access to productive assets

While agriculture is a significant driver of women's employment in the region, available data show a significant gender gap in land holding and ownership, with only 20 percent of women holding secure land tenure.<sup>176</sup> The largest disparity is in Fiji, where women own a mere 3.6 per cent of registered, titled land. Even where gender gaps in land ownership are smallest, such as Armenia, Georgia and Thailand, women still hold less than half of the share of agricultural land.<sup>177</sup> Persistent gender bias in inheritance laws, especially in South and South-West Asia and the Pacific, continue to be a strong contributing factor to gender gaps.<sup>178</sup> Even where women have clear legal rights to property ownership and inheritance, their ability to exercise these rights may be constrained by patriarchal social systems that reduce women's ability to make decisions regarding their property.<sup>179</sup>

Women's exclusion from holding and owning land negatively impacts a range of social and economic outcomes. Land titles, for example, can enable access to credit, where collateral is required.<sup>180</sup> Land ownership has been linked to improvements in women's bargaining power in the home, decreased levels of domestic violence, greater levels of women's public participation and improved food security.<sup>181</sup> When women have secure tenure rights, they increase their capacity to adapt to climate change and bounce back after disasters.<sup>182</sup>

More than 1.1 billion people in the region still do not have a formal bank account.<sup>183</sup> Women are less likely to have a bank account than men, although this is changing. Men have higher access to accounts at a financial institution in 26 of the 34 member States with data.<sup>184</sup> Between 2011 and 2017, however, the percentage of women in the region with a bank account increased in every country, bringing the ESCAP regional average from 44 per cent of women having access to 68.2 per cent.<sup>185</sup> Notably, 10 countries more than doubled the proportion of women with bank accounts, including Cambodia (3.7 per cent to 21.5 per cent), Kyrgyzstan (3.9 per cent to 38.9 per cent), Tajikistan (2.1 per cent to 42.1 per cent) and Turkmenistan (0.8 per cent to 35.52 per cent).<sup>186</sup> Despite these relative increases, women's access to financial institutions in South and South-West Asian countries remains uneven, with 91.6 per cent of women in Iran (Islamic Republic of) holding financial accounts compared to 7 per cent in Afghanistan.<sup>187</sup> Despite variance across countries and subregions, women's access is less than that of men in all subregions, with the exception of South-East Asia.<sup>188</sup>

Barriers to women's financial inclusion can be legal, social or economic. In Pakistan, for example, complicated and discriminatory laws related to obtaining national identity cards constrain the ability of married women to open an account at a financial institution.<sup>189</sup> Social norms that restrict women's mobility, limit their social interactions and reduce their decision-making power within families also have a negative bearing on their access to financial services.<sup>190</sup> The ability to leverage income and productive assets for financial services such as a mortgage or loan is also reduced where women on average have less access to sources of collateral.<sup>191</sup> These barriers put women in a disadvantaged position and make them more likely to use informal financial services, often with predatory interest rates, to cover emergencies at home or in a business.

## State responses to support women's entrepreneurship and access to productive assets

Analysis of the national review reports indicates that member States approach women's entrepreneurship as both an engine for employment creation (Cluster 1) and a poverty reduction strategy (Cluster 2). Member States are making notable efforts to ensure that entrepreneurship promotion coincides with promotion of decent work opportunities and progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment with the following policies.

- ✓ **Financial inclusion:** Twenty-one member States reported taking actions to improve women's financial inclusion and access to credit. Countries in South and South-West Asia, in particular, emphasized actions to improve the financial inclusion of women. For example, **Bhutan, Myanmar and Pakistan** each established national financial inclusion strategies. Myanmar's Financial Inclusion Roadmap (2014-2020) stands out for its attention to women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (specifically, older persons and persons with disabilities). The **Maldives'** 2016 Gender Equality Act requires financial institutions to ensure that men and women have equal access to financial services and facilities.<sup>192</sup> In **India**, the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana programme gives collateral-free loans to women entrepreneurs to start and/or expand their businesses. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** has a gender-sensitive mobile credit programme that provides credit to rural and nomadic women.
- ✓ **Strengthening access to land:** Actions to strengthen women's land rights and tenure security were notably low, with only nine national review reports indicating such actions. Legal reforms to enhance and protect women's land tenure, inheritance and management, for example, were established in **Cambodia, China and Myanmar**.



Woman demanding gender balance in all forms/sectors/levels in life, Solomon Islands. Photo: UN Women/Marni Gilbert.

## Spotlight on

### Comprehensive, gender-sensitive approaches to advancing women's entrepreneurship

Advancing women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment requires comprehensive approaches that address multiple drivers and forms of gender inequality. The national review reports highlighted a variety of approaches that are promising because they are utilizing approaches that are transformative, gender-sensitive and intersectional.

The Promote programme, which operated from 2015 to 2019 in **Afghanistan** in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development, supported entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihood activities among poor, peri-urban and rural women. Recognizing the tendency for women to be excluded from financial markets, the programme developed community-based savings groups as a means for creating new income-generating activities. It also offered business support services, including training, market access and sustainable financing through a revolving loan fund. Rather than limit its objectives to the creation of new enterprises, the programme also focused on growth and sustainability, and was accompanied by parallel efforts to improve the national ecosystem for women's enterprises, including through the establishment of gender-sensitive policies, regulations and reforms.

Another example is the Markets for Change project, established in **Fiji**, the **Solomon Islands** and **Vanuatu** in partnership with UN Women and local governments across three countries in 2014. Markets for Change aims to empower women market vendors by amplifying their voices and participation in marketplace governance structures; addressing their financial and business needs, especially in rural areas; implementing gender-responsive, transparent and accountable local government and market management processes; and investing in accessible and gender-responsive marketplace infrastructure.

The project has established a network of 30 resource centres, 26 women's extension centres, and 1,702 women's groups, and sought to ensure women enterprise-owners have access to appropriate and meaningful support services. The centres have also provided a safe place for women vendors to sleep, a feature that is especially important for those who cannot travel home at the end of the day.

*Source: Governments of Afghanistan, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

### Partnerships for women's access to digital tools in the Philippines

The Beijing Platform for Action emphasized the critical roles of information and communications technology (ICT), and the importance of women's skills, knowledge and access to technologies to realize their rights.

In 2018, the **Philippines** Department of Information and Communications Technologies announced a multiprogramme initiative called Women Empowerment-ICT. One component connected emerging female entrepreneurs with #SheMeansBusiness, a Facebook-led initiative that designs customized training modules for small and medium enterprises.

A second component, in partnership with Connect Women, creates a job-matching programme where women completing training in digital marketing are paired with female entrepreneurs who can employ them.

Through engaging private sector and civil society partners, the department aims to utilize existing programmes to empower women with economic and digital literacy skills. By directly linking graduates with employers, these partnerships also include a strong focus on a successful transition to the workplace. To ensure the same outcomes for female entrepreneurs, the **Philippines** must ensure that a gender-responsive environment for enterprises exists, especially in terms of women's access to resources.

*Source: Government of the Philippines, national review report.*

### Going further to support women entrepreneurs

While member States emphasized supporting women's entrepreneurship through access to finance and land in the national review reports, larger-scale efforts are needed to achieve widespread and sustainable progress. Where legislation exists, effective implementation is needed to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Two areas require further investment in particular: financial and digital inclusion, and labour and social protection.

While 19 member States reported prioritizing women's enterprise development over the past five years, only two reported actions to enhance women's digital and financial inclusion. Only seven countries (**Afghanistan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Federated States of Micronesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Uzbekistan**) reported actions to improve women's access to modern technologies, infrastructure and services. Yet, such actions can enable e-commerce options for women entrepreneurs, and are especially crucial for including women with mobility-limiting disabilities or living in remote and rural areas.

Women entrepreneurs, especially those operating in the informal economy, are too often left out of key labour-related protection mechanisms such as equal pay and minimum wage standards. While promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing access to financial tools are important strategies for women's economic empowerment, these alone are not enough to achieve gender equality in the economic or social realms. More needs to be done to address the vulnerabilities of women entrepreneurs in low-paying sectors, for example, especially to enhance job security, and guarantee access to pensions, family leave policies and childcare.<sup>193</sup> Other efforts need to promote women entrepreneurs in high-value sectors, champion their businesses in appropriate forums, and create national associations with institutional links to appropriate government bodies that could include women entrepreneurs in creating an enabling policy environment. Ensuring accessible and inclusive business registration processes and enhanced data tracking on women's formal and informal enterprises are key enablers of women's entrepreneurship.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Women are central economic actors in Asia and the Pacific, playing particularly prominent roles as care workers, entrepreneurs and contributing family workers. Their overrepresentation in these often informal and vulnerable roles, however, highlights the persistence of women's weak labour market position across all countries.<sup>194</sup>

Women's right to work and their rights at work are constrained by high levels of informal employment, and often hinge on the willingness of employers to ensure decent work and equal opportunities.<sup>195</sup> Progress has been made in strengthening legal frameworks and workplace policies that support women's labour force participation and opportunities for decent work, including parental leave protections and equal pay policies, and anti-discrimination laws. Where a gender-responsive labour policy is absent, however, discriminatory social norms, excessive unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and limited protections from discrimination and harassment shape women's experiences and capacities to enter or remain in the workplace.

Promoting rights to and at work must be balanced with efforts to address social norms around gender pay gaps, occupational segregation and vulnerable employment. Programming to shift social norms can be catalysed through leadership by member States in generating new policies, regulations and interventions that mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>196</sup> Member States have expressed commitment to supporting women's entrepreneurship, but further action is needed to grow women's productive assets, expand access to online and offline markets, and enact gender-responsive labour and social protections in order to ensure entrepreneurship offers opportunities for decent work as well.

The following recommendations to accelerate broader progress are based on the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda, analysis of available SDG data and the Asia-Pacific Declaration. They seek to ensure that women fully enjoy the benefits and opportunities of inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work.



**Ramp up efforts to address discriminatory social norms** that threaten to undermine the implementation of inclusive legal and workplace policies. Ensuring women's right to work and rights at work requires addressing systemic issues. Discriminatory social norms undergird and perpetuate occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, and the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work, and threaten to undermine implementation of workplace policies designed to promote women's access to decent work.



**Develop clear, gender-responsive pathways for the transition from informal to formal work**, with a focus on areas where women, including migrant women workers, are overrepresented. The expansion of labour-related policies and decent work protections to workers in all sectors (formal and informal) is a necessary first step.



**Complement programmes that promote women's entrepreneurship** with actions to strengthen women's access to productive assets, such as land, finance and technology, as well as to basic services and infrastructure. This would support enterprises and address the time poverty caused by women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities.



**Invest in the routine collection of regionally comparable time use data** to make visible the time burdens faced by women, in alignment with SDG 5.4.1, and use this data to inform policies that facilitate work-life balance, address low female labour force participation rates and close gender wage gaps.

68. ESCAP database, SDG 8.1.1, GDP growth rate (2015 US dollars, average annual) (percentage change per annum), 2018. Accessed 10 September 2020.
69. ILOSTAT, regional share of the global labour force, ILO modelled estimate, 2019. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/population-and-labour-force/#>.
70. ILO 2018d.
71. ILO and UN Women 2020. UN Women Central and Southern Asia grouping includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The ILO grouping for South-East Asia includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
72. ILO 2018c.
73. ESCAP database, based on UNESCO data, completion rate (female), primary education (percentage of relevant age group, female population), 2018. Accessed 10 September 2020. Of the 30 ESCAP countries with available data, girls' completion rates increased with the exception of Pakistan (dropping from 58 per cent in 2012 to 56 per cent in 2018) and Armenia (dropping slightly from 100 per cent in 2011 to 99 per cent in 2016).
74. Desai and Joshi 2019.
75. ESCAP 2017a.
76. ESCAP 2020.
77. ESCAP 2019a.
78. Discussion of infrastructure-related policies to reduce and redistribute women's unpaid domestic work (e.g., collection of water and firewood) is presented in Cluster 6.
79. ADB and UN Women 2018.
80. ILO 2018a. During the same time period, East Asian women's labour force participation dropped from 67.7 per cent to 60.2 per cent. Southern Asia saw decreases from 31.4 per cent to 27.9 per cent. For this calculation, East Asia includes Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia; Republic of Korea and Taiwan Province of China. Southern Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
81. Unemployment rates often fail to account for those who are no longer looking for jobs (i.e., discouraged job seekers, etc.).
82. See: [https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/description\\_LFPR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/description_LFPR_EN.pdf)
83. World Bank databank, ratio of female-to-male labour force participation rate (percentage) (modelled ILO estimate). Accessed 29 November 2020.
84. Ibid. Data reflect the change in the datapoint between the 2000 and 2020 indicators. For this calculation, East Asia and the Pacific includes Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Fiji; French Polynesia; Guam; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Kiribati; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Malaysia; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Northern Mariana Islands; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu and Viet Nam. South Asia includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
85. ILOSTAT, ratio of female-to-male labour force participation rate (percentage) (modeled ILO estimate), 2020. Accessed 7 October 2020.
86. ESCAP database, SDG 8.3.1, informal employment in agricultural employment (percentage of female employment), 2018 or most recent year. Accessed 8 October 2020. Informal employment in agricultural employment as a percentage of female employment is high in subregions outside of South and South-West Asia, with Maldives (100 per cent), Cambodia (99.8 per cent), Lao PDR (99.5 per cent), Armenia (99.2 per cent), Viet Nam (99.2 per cent) and Timor-Leste (99 per cent) having rates of 99 per cent or higher.
87. Desai and Joshi 2019.
88. ILO 2018a.
89. ESCAP 2017c. This can include policies and programmes that promoted job-search assistance and opportunities for targeted training and apprenticeships.
90. Bangladesh, Brunei, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
91. ILO 2018a.
92. ESCAP database, SDG 8.5.2, unemployment rate (15 years and older), female (percentage of female labour force) and unemployment rate (15 years and older), male (percentage of male labour force), 2018 or latest available year. Accessed 7 October 2020.
93. ESCAP database, SDG 8.5.2, unemployment rate (15 years and older), female (percentage of female labour force), 2018 or latest available year. Accessed 7 October 2020.
94. ESCAP database, SDG 8.5.2, youth unemployment rate, female (percentage of female labour force aged 15 to 24 years), 2018 or latest available. Accessed 7 October 2020. Male youth unemployment is also high in these countries (32.8 per cent in Armenia, 24.3 per cent in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and 24.6 per cent in Samoa), but remains much lower than female youth unemployment.
95. ESCAP 2017c.
96. ESCAP 2017c.
97. ADB 2013.
98. OECD and ILO 2019.
99. ADB and UN Women 2018.
100. ILO 2018d.
101. UN Women undated.
102. ILO 2019.
103. ASEAN 2017.
104. UN Women 2020b.
105. Elson and Cagatay 2000.
106. ILO 2018d.
107. Ibid.
108. ESCAP 2015.
109. Seguino 2020.
110. ILO 2018a.
111. OECD 2014.
112. ILO 2018a.
113. ILO 2018d.
114. UN Women 2020k.
115. ILO 2018f.
116. ESCAP database, SDG 8.3.1, informal employment in total employment (percentage of total employment), 2018 or latest available year. Accessed 7 October 2020.
117. ILO 2018f
118. Ibid. Total informal employment in rural areas is higher than total informal employment in urban areas in all countries analysed except for two: Brunei Darussalam (urban informal employment is 33.8 per cent compared to 25.2 per cent total rural informal employment) and Samoa (urban informal employment is 38.4 per cent compared to 34.2 per cent total rural informal employment).
119. ILO 2018f.
120. UN Women 2020k.
121. Ciccone, Moncarati and Chakamhang 2019.
122. ESCAP 2017a.
123. ILO 2018f.
124. OECD 2014.
125. Ibid.
126. UN Women 2020e.
127. ILO 2018f; OECD and ILO 2019
128. ILO 2018a.
129. Esquivel and Enriquez 2020.
130. The Pacific island countries and territories include the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

131. UN Women 2015b.
132. ILO 2018d.
133. See: <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>. The State Party Member States are: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Turkey. The signatories are Armenia, Cambodia and Palau.
134. ILO 2018d.
135. ESCAP 2017c.
136. ESCAP 2017e.
137. As reported in the Republic of Korea national review report (p. 18).
138. See: <https://asean.org/storage/2016/09/Vientiane-Declaration-on-Employment.pdf>.
139. Kabeer, Mahmud and Tasneem 2018.
140. ADB and UN Women 2018.
141. Ibid.
142. ILO 2018d.
143. ILO 2018b.
144. Ibid. The labour force participation penalty is greatest in Thailand, where there is a gap of 14.3 percentage points in the employment-to-population ratios of women living with and women living without children. This penalty is stronger for rural women with care responsibilities, who see an increase of 6 percentage points in the likelihood of being outside the labour force compared to urban women carers.
145. Ibid.
146. Ibid.
147. Ibid. Women in Asia and the Pacific spent 463 minutes in combined paid and unpaid work, compared with 442 minutes for women in the Americas and 417 minutes for women in Africa.
148. ADB 2015.
149. ADB and UN Women 2018.
150. Bastagli and Hunt 2020.
151. ADB and UN Women 2018.
152. ESCAP 2018c.
153. ILO 2018a.
154. ESCAP 2018c.
155. ILO and UN Women 2020.
156. ILO 2018b.
157. UN Women 2019a.
158. ILO 2018b.
159. Ibid.
160. Access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, including contraception and maternity care, are also important in supporting women's access to paid work. These are discussed further in Cluster 2.
161. UN Women 2019a.
162. Folbre 2018.
163. Ibid.
164. UN Women 2020i. In 2018, remittances to many Pacific island nations amounted to \$698 million.
165. UN Women 2019a.
166. ILO 2018b.
167. ILO 2018d.
168. ESCAP 2017a.
169. ILO 2018d.
170. ILOSTAT, employment in agriculture, female (percentage of female employment) (modelled ILO estimate), 2019. Data retrieved 21 June 2020. Accessed 12 October 2020. In 2019, agricultural employment accounted for 56.9 per cent of female employment in South Asia and 22.7 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific.
171. ILO 2018e.
172. ESCAP 2017a.
173. Asia Foundation and ADB 2018.
174. Ibid.
175. ESCAP 2017a.
176. ESCAP 2017b.
177. Ibid.
178. Ibid.
179. ESCAP 2018b.
180. Ibid.
181. OHCHR 2013.
182. UNEP 2016.
183. ESCAP 2020.
184. ESCAP database, SDG 8.10.2, adults (15 years or older) with an account at a bank (percentage of the population aged 15 years and above), 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020.
185. ESCAP database, SDG 8.10.2, female adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank (percentage of population aged 15 and above), 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020.
186. ESCAP database, SDG 8.10.2, adults (15 years or older) with an account at a bank (percentage of the population aged 15 years and above), 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020.
187. ESCAP database, SDG 8.10.2, adults (15 years or older) with an account at a bank (percentage of the population aged 15 years and above), 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020.
188. ESCAP database, SDG 8.10.2, female adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank (percentage of population aged 15 and above), 2017. Accessed 10 September 2020. In South-East Asia, 48.6 per cent of women and 46.3 per cent of men had access to bank accounts in 2017. This was driven by notably higher access rates for women in Indonesia, Lao PDR and the Philippines. Countries in other regions also have higher access rates for women (including Georgia, Mongolia and New Zealand).
189. World Bank 2018.
190. Government of Pakistan, national review report.
191. Asia Foundation and ADB 2018.
192. World Bank 2018.
193. Asia Foundation and ADB 2018.
194. ILO 2018d.
195. Ibid.
196. UNDP 2019.



## Cluster 2

### Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

Photos clockwise from top left: A medical practitioner is checking blood pressure of a rural woman in Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Mr. Mohammad Rakibul Hasan. Handicapped female calligraphist, Malaysia. Photo: UN Women/Loi Choong Kin; A woman uses water to wash her face, Nepal. Photo: UN Women/Narendra Shrestha.



## Overview

As discussed in Cluster 1, high rates of economic growth in Asia and the Pacific are not translating into inclusive growth; the benefits of progress have not been evenly distributed. Rising inequality, including gender inequality, remains an issue.<sup>197</sup> Gaps in women's access to social protection, health care and education remain, especially for women and girls in rural and remote areas, women with disabilities, and migrant and displaced women and girls.

In the national review reports, member States reported that promoting women's access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health, was one of the top priorities for action over the past five years. They also reported measures to advance women's entrepreneurship and business development, strengthen access to social protection programmes, and expand access to quality health and education services.

The Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda provide guidance on eradicating poverty through gender-responsive social protection and social services. Cluster 2 tracks progress in areas related to poverty eradication (Beijing critical area of concern A and SDG 1), social protection and social services, including health (critical area of

concern C and SDG 3) and education (critical area of concern B and SDG 4).<sup>198</sup> The Beijing Platform for Action identifies governments as the primary drivers of social development and establishes social protection, including social safety nets and support systems, as integral to protecting women against adverse economic environments and preserving livelihoods and assets.

The focus of this section is to synthesize reported actions by member States to broaden social protection coverage so no one is left behind; ensure that health-care services are affordable, accessible and universal, and make education accessible and relevant for all. Section 1, on poverty and social protection, provides an overview of progress towards poverty eradication and the provision of appropriate, quality and universal social protection programmes for women and girls throughout the life cycle. Section 2, on women's health and health-care access, will highlight health trends in the region, including outcomes for women and girls, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health services. Finally, Section 3, on women and girls' education, discusses trends relevant to improving non-discriminatory education outcomes and access to skills training for women and girls.



**The focus of this section is to synthesize reported actions by member States to broaden social protection coverage so no one is left behind.**

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# Poverty and social protection

## Poverty eradication

While significant progress has been made in reducing poverty in recent decades, an estimated 233 million people in Asia and the Pacific still live below the international extreme poverty line (less than \$1.90 a day), and approximately 1 billion live on incomes below \$3.20 a day (the poverty line for lower middle-income countries).<sup>199</sup> Within countries, the gap between the bottom 40 per cent of income earners and the top 60 per cent is growing.<sup>200</sup> Women and girls are more likely to live in households below the poverty line especially during their reproductive years: 119 women aged 25 to 34 years live in poor households for every 100 men of the same age group.<sup>201</sup>

A 2018 analysis by UN Women and the Asian Development Bank found that the largest gender gap in working poverty (the rate of poverty among the working population) was in South and South-West Asia, where 30.9 per cent of working women compared to 25.4 per cent of working men are impoverished.<sup>202</sup> For example, in 2016, 87.2 per cent of employed women in Afghanistan were living on less than \$1.90 per day compared to 3.9 per cent in Sri Lanka.<sup>203</sup> South Asia is the only subregion in the world where there is a statistically significant gender difference (15.9 per cent of women versus 14.7 per cent of men) in extreme poverty.<sup>204</sup> When adjusted for population sizes, South Asian women are 9 per cent more likely to live in poverty than men compared with the global average of 4 per cent more likely.<sup>205</sup>

## Social assistance and social insurance programmes

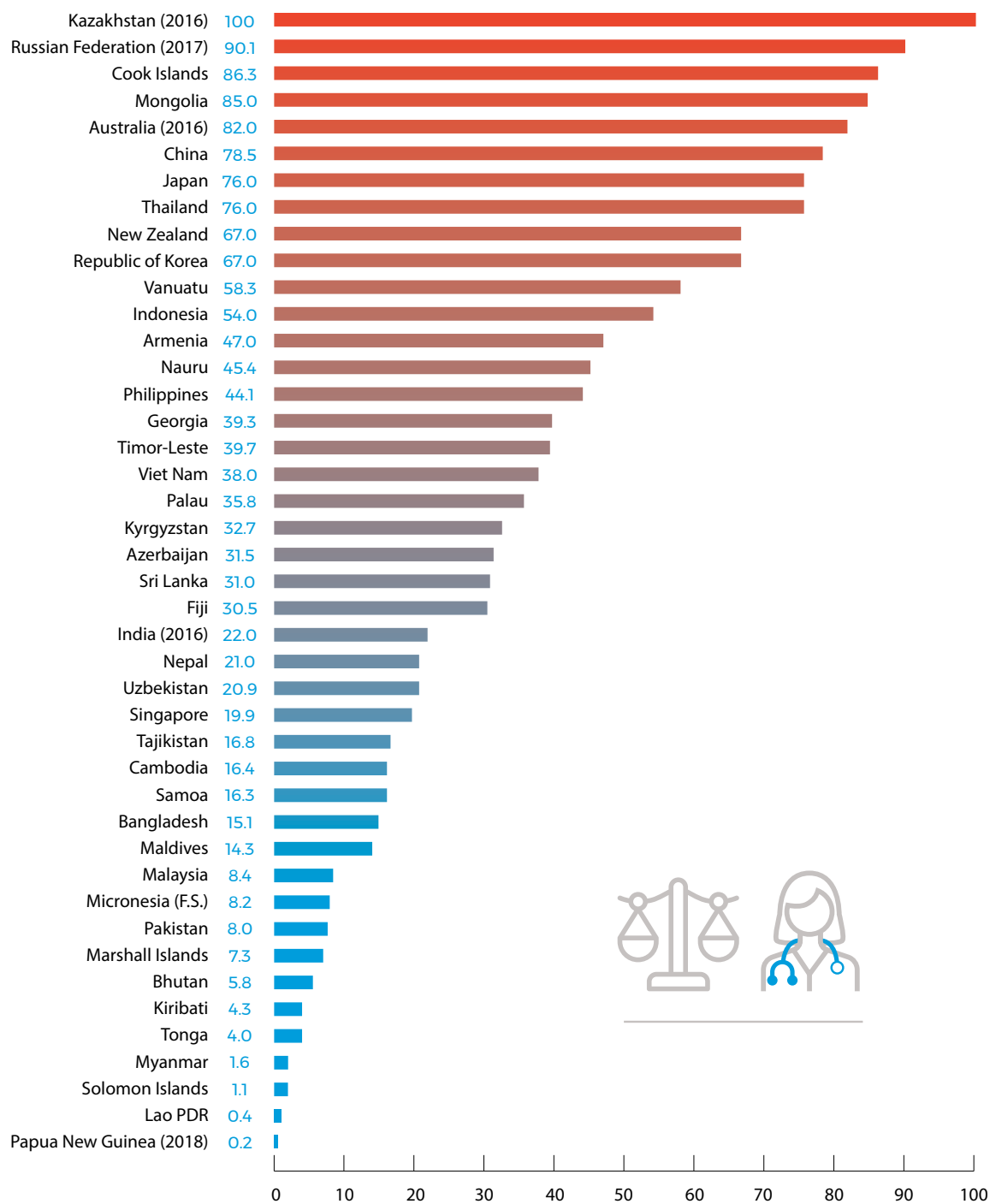
Social protection encompasses policies and programmes designed to protect all people against poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion through the life cycle. It is gender-responsive when adequate actions are taken to address gender-related risks and contingencies. Social protection implementation usually takes the form

of conditional or unconditional cash-based or in-kind protections (including contributory and non-contributory schemes), and measures to build human capital and enhance access to resources and employment. *Social assistance* describes social protection programmes financed from general taxation while *social insurance* is generally derived from employer and employee financing.<sup>206</sup> The combination of contributory and non-contributory social protection systems can reduce the risk of poverty for women and their families.<sup>207</sup> Not all forms of social protection promote equality, however. Conditionality can have negative consequences for women, such as increases in unpaid care work and coercive implementation practices.<sup>208</sup>

Social protection floors are established when a country ensures a minimum set of basic guarantees that ensure universal access to essential health care and basic income security throughout the life cycle.<sup>209</sup> Social protection floors can protect individuals against inefficiencies from costly targeting schemes that often miss the most vulnerable populations, as well as from employment-based benefits that privilege those with formal, uninterrupted and full-time employment.<sup>210</sup>

Regionally, social protection coverage remains uneven. Some countries extend programmes to at least 85 per cent of the population, such as the Cook Islands (86.3 per cent in 2019), Kazakhstan (100 per cent in 2016), Mongolia (85 per cent in 2019) and the Russian Federation (90.1 per cent in 2017). Others have coverage rates of less than 1 per cent, such as Lao PDR (0.4 per cent in 2019) and Papua New Guinea (0.2 per cent in 2018) (see Figure 2.1). Overall, 60 per cent of the population in Asia and the Pacific is unprotected from falling ill, having a disability, becoming unemployed, getting pregnant or being old.<sup>211</sup>

**Figure 2.1 Proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection programme, 2019 or most recent year (percentage)**



Source: ESCAP online database, based on ILO: World Bank data, SDG 1.3.1, population covered by at least one social protection benefit (percentage), 2019. Accessed October 14 2020.<sup>212</sup>

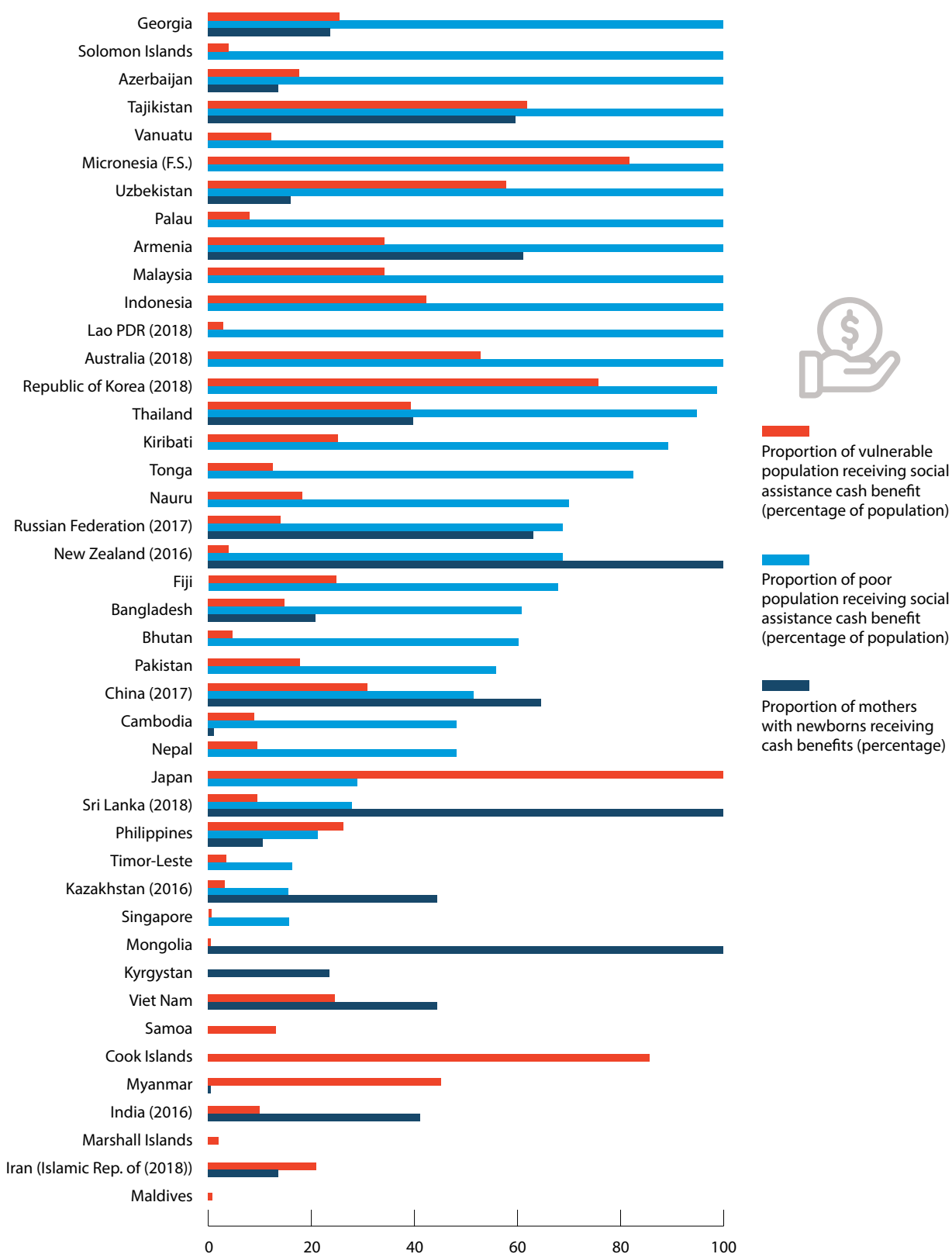


Woman worker in Lao PDR.  
Photo: UN Women/Pathumporn Thongking.

Formal sector employment remains the strongest pathway to social protection.<sup>213</sup> By contrast, vulnerable populations are at greater risk of exclusion, including the 64 per cent of employed women in informal employment.<sup>214</sup> Those in the “missing middle” – i.e., in informal employment with employers that do not participate in social insurance programmes, and with incomes that do not qualify them for social assistance programmes – have few opportunities to access social protection.<sup>215</sup> In three of the eight countries with sex-disaggregated data (Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Kazakhstan), unemployed women are much less likely than unemployed men to access unemployment benefits.<sup>216</sup>

There are some signs of progress, however. Social protection coverage is trending positively. This includes the extension of contributory and non-contributory social protections to vulnerable groups, such as self-employed and informal workers.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, women are on the whole less protected than men, as a result of their overrepresentation in informal and vulnerable employment (see Cluster 1). Women also contribute less to pension schemes,<sup>218</sup> and this exacerbates links between ageing and poverty. As shown in Figure 2.2, the kinds of social protection available and their population coverage remain highly variable across the region.

**Figure 2.2 Proportion of the population receiving social protection benefits, by benefit type, 2019 or most recent year (percentage)**



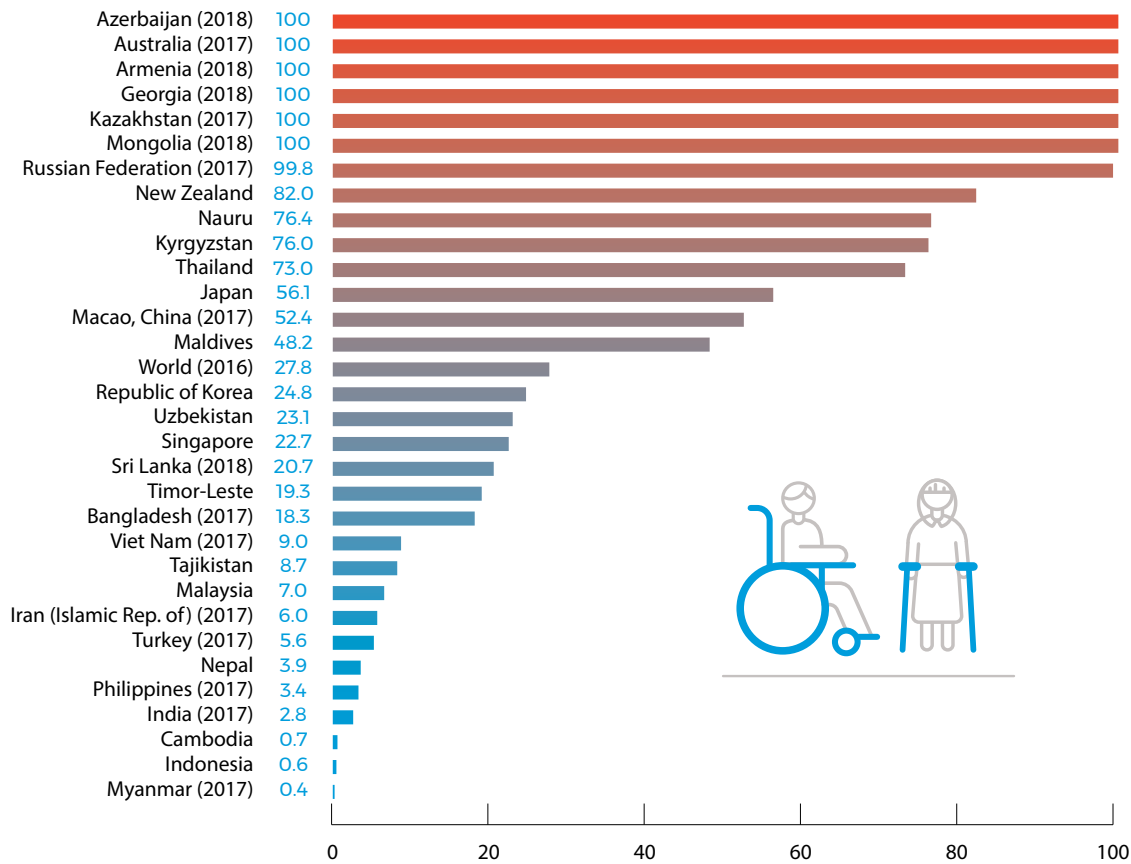
Source: ESCAP database, based on ILO and World Bank data for SDG 1.3.1. Accessed 14 October 2020.

Vulnerable groups, such as older women, women migrant workers and women with disabilities continue to face barriers to accessing social protection programmes. Older women often have less or no access to pensions or social security, owing to their lower labour force participation rates in formal employment. As women on average live longer than men, this leaves them at greater vulnerability to the social, health and economic disadvantages associated with old age.<sup>219</sup> For example, in Iran (Islamic Republic of), only 3 per cent of women above the statutory pensionable age received a pension in 2017 compared to 31 per cent of men.<sup>220</sup> In Georgia, overall population access to pensions is much higher, but women are still disadvantaged: 89.7 per cent of women of pensionable age received a pension in 2016 compared to 97.7 per cent of men.<sup>221</sup> Work status, exclusion from national programmes and other constraints such as language continue to serve

as barriers to access for migrant women and their families.<sup>222</sup> Some countries in the region are taking steps to address these. For example, Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka have made provisions for migrant workers to be included in social protection programmes.<sup>223</sup>

Women with disabilities in the region also face uneven access to social protection coverage (Figure 2.3). Globally, 27.8 per cent of persons with disabilities received disability cash benefits in 2016. While the available data are not sex-disaggregated, and thus do not illustrate the extent to which women with disabilities access disability benefits, the data below do indicate a need to improve access to disability case benefits in all countries, save for the select few with 100 per cent coverage by disability benefits (Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia).

**Figure 2.3 Proportion of population with a severe disability receiving disability cash benefits, 2019 or most recent year (percentage)**



Source: ESCAP database, based on ILO and World Bank data for SDG 1.3.1. Accessed 14 October 2020.

Social protection policies and systems can empower women and girls by addressing the risks they face across the life cycle, increasing their access to services and infrastructure, and promoting their economic opportunities, voice and agency.<sup>224</sup> In recent years, social protection systems have been stressed by the changing nature of work, including growing informality, multiplying microenterprises, and digital and technological demands. For example, social protection programmes are increasingly functioning to promote the abilities of poor households to invest in productive assets and diversify income-generating activities, including through the extension of microcredit access, in addition to traditional safety net services.<sup>225</sup> Cash and asset transfer systems, for example, have focused on rural women's access to productive assets such as credit as well as training in rural areas to promote the formation of non-farm enterprises<sup>226</sup> (see "Spotlight on entrepreneurship and social protection"). While entrepreneurship is in no way a substitute for social protection, such programmes signal the importance of entrepreneurship trends in the region, where it is viewed as a tool for building women's rights to work (as in Cluster 1), addressing poverty and unemployment, and extending social protection.

### State responses to reduce poverty and improve access to social protection among women and girls

National review reports indicated that efforts by member States to reduce poverty and improve women's access to social protection are concentrated in the following areas.

✓ **Support for women's entrepreneurship and business development activities:** Thirty-three member States reported supporting women's entrepreneurship and business development activities as a strategy to reduce poverty among women and girls. **Australia's** New Business Assistance and New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, for example, provides business training, mentoring and 39 weeks of income support to ensure access to decent wages during the early stages of the business (for more details, see "Spotlight on entrepreneurship and social protection").

✓ **Strengthening social protection programmes for women and girls:** Twenty-five member States took actions to introduce or strengthen social protection programmes for women and girls. **Armenia**, for example, established basic income support and training for young mothers to enhance their labour market potential. The **Philippines** established a modified conditional cash transfer programme to strengthen the reach of the Pantawid Family Pilipino Programme (4Ps) to vulnerable populations excluded by the original programme conditions. **Cambodia, Japan and Malaysia** crafted gender-responsive social protection policies to address women's lower access to pensions (Japan and Malaysia) and to reach women in non-standard forms of work (Cambodia).

✓ **Expanding access to social protection programmes for women and vulnerable populations:** Nine countries reported improving access to social protection programmes for women and vulnerable populations, including women in informal employment, domestic workers, migrant and refugee women, and women in humanitarian settings. For example, **India and Nepal** extended social protection programmes to reach informal workers (including home-based, self-employed and domestic workers). **Tajikistan** established expanded social protections for persons with disabilities, including access to health care and through responsive and accessible sexual and reproductive health-care services.

✓ **Conditional cash transfer programmes are more popular than unconditional programmes:** Member States reported more actions to strengthen conditional cash transfers (13 countries) than unconditional cash transfers (10 countries). **Contributory social protection schemes** (13 countries) are more popular than **non-contributory social pensions** (8 countries).

## Spotlight on

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### Kazakhstan's comprehensive approach to social protection

**Kazakhstan** is striving for universal social protection coverage that includes accounting for multiple contingencies across the life cycle. In 2013, for example, it introduced a childbirth benefit payment that was followed in 2014 by a subsidy programme, where the Government pays the pension contributions for working women during their maternity, up until the child turns 1 year old. Kazakhstan also implemented the Employment Road Map 2020, which utilizes a multifaceted approach to reducing unemployment in a country where nearly one third of the labour force is in informal work or self-employed. The Road Map provided a focus on boosting rural incomes through a combination of employment promotion, income support, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and strengthened support for the school-to-work transition.

Three key elements stand out. First, Kazakhstan focused on training and retraining for rural unemployed and self-employed workers in order to ensure sustainable work and support micro-, small, and medium enterprise opportunities.

Second, the Government enacted a Free Vocational Education for All Initiative in 2017 that emphasized providing workforce qualifications to low-income students and students with disabilities (in line with the complementary 2019 National Plan to Ensure the Rights and Improve the Livelihoods of People with Disabilities in Kazakhstan). Through this initiative, the Government signed agreements with employers to provide stipends to students while they attended TVET training. Finally, the initiatives above were combined with the introduction of a single aggregate payment system that increased the inclusion of informal workers in the compulsory medical and social insurance and pension schemes (formal protections).

Through these initiatives, Kazakhstan showed it was possible to craft an approach to social protection that addresses the needs of women workers related to childbirth, childcare and national unemployment, and to be sensitive to vulnerable populations, including those in rural and remote areas, the informally employed and self-employed, youth and persons living with disabilities.

*Source: Government of Kazakhstan, national review report.*

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**Kazakhstan also implemented the Employment Road Map 2020, which utilizes a multifaceted approach to reducing unemployment in a country where nearly one third of the labour force is in informal work or self-employed.**

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## Spotlight on

### Turkey, social protection and women's employment

**Turkey** stands out for enacting initiatives directed at improving women's access to social protection and work, with three programmes addressing women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work.

First, through Law No. 6111, the Government has encouraged women's labour force participation by offering employers an incentive: For each woman hired, the Government covers the employer-paid social security contributions for the first 24 to 54 months of employment. In addition to providing support for women in the workforce, this policy provides a clear incentive to employers to make more inclusive hiring decisions.

Second, the Grandmother Project (2017-2018) was designed to reduce the number of women exiting from the labour force after childbirth. The Government allotted payments for grandmothers who cared for children aged 0 to 3 years. Such a programme has many potentially positive impacts, including increasing income security for elderly women. Furthermore, social norms around intergenerational transmission of culture are influential in Turkey; childcare options that keep children close to their families may be more enticing to mothers seeking to enter the labour force. While these components of the project are worth celebrating, the Grandmother Project, like many other childcare programmes, reinforces the idea that care work is "women's work" whether in the household or in daycare facilities primarily staffed by women. Yet the approach may provide support to mothers who would otherwise opt out of the workforce.

Third, Turkey recently established work programmes for mothers who are also on social assistance or who are victims of violence.

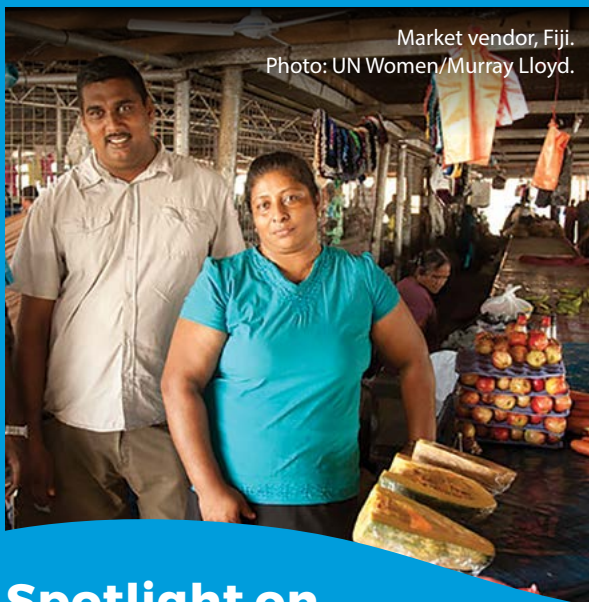


Young mother from Turkey.  
Photo: Charles Roffey.

The Mothers at Work Project (2018) provides vocational training and a childcare allowance to relieve concerns about attending trainings. The Painter Forewoman Project (2016-2017) provided an opportunity for women on social assistance to gain vocational training in key sectors, including construction.

Each of these initiatives is notable for being gender sensitive. They acknowledge women's unpaid care burdens and develop pathways for women to access decent employment. While these initiatives do not yet move care work responsibilities out of the household and into the public sphere, they represent a meaningful first step to build labour force participation for mothers. A concern, however, is that many were only in operation for a short period. Long-term, sustainable investments are required for such measures to propel structural changes.

*Source: Government of Turkey, national review report.*



Market vendor, Fiji.  
Photo: UN Women/Murray Lloyd.

## Spotlight on

### Entrepreneurship and social protection

In Cluster 2, member States were asked to report their actions in the past five years to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls. In response, 33 countries reported supporting women's entrepreneurship and business. Entrepreneurship is not social protection, but the reports showed that many social programmes emphasize enterprise development among vulnerable households receiving state assistance and other kinds of support.

Some countries complement social protection schemes with enterprise development for poor and vulnerable households. In the **Philippines**, the 4P programme (Pantawid Pamilyang Filipino Programme) extends cash benefits and health insurance to poor and vulnerable populations, including indigenous, rural and remote populations, to break intergenerational cycles of poverty. The programme also includes a Sustainable Livelihood Programme that facilitates microenterprise development activities through cash, training and services.<sup>227</sup>

**Samoa** created a vulnerability assessment tool, in line with their "Tua I le Vao Ola Strategy", to support vulnerable households through small businesses. The enterprise development programme's definition of vulnerable women includes school dropouts, unemployed women, women with disabilities and survivors of domestic violence.

In **Fiji**, enterprise development is implemented specifically for graduate beneficiaries of other programmes. The National Centre for SME Development provides training and capital funding to recipients of the Poverty Benefit and the Care and Protection Allowance programmes, with a focus of graduating beneficiaries from them. The progress of created businesses is tracked for three months and benefit payments are stopped when the enterprise is considered sustainable.

**The Islamic Republic of Iran** has developed a gender-sensitive mobile credit programme for providing credit to rural and nomadic women. By encouraging women to make small savings deposits and engage in collectives and groups activities, the Rural and Nomadic Women's Microcredit Fund encourages a culture of savings and promotes women's participation in social and economic activities. Further, the Government provides low interest and a 49 per cent capital contribution to enable women to access credit without risking increasing indebtedness.

These examples show that enterprise development programmes targeting poor and vulnerable populations are popular in the region to reduce poverty and unemployment. Going forward, all programmes should pursue decent work objectives (such as through a guaranteed basic income for new businesses as in **Australia**) and take protective measures to address rising indebtedness among vulnerable populations.

*Source: Governments of China, Fiji, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Samoa, national review reports.*



Woman collects her salary at the local bank in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh, India. Photo: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh.

### Going further to enhance women's access to social protection

The analysis in Cluster 1 highlighted that women's enterprises tend to be small, low in profits and informal. Enterprise development targeted at poor and vulnerable populations, including women, is not a substitute for other social protection policies. While investments in entrepreneurship programmes can be a component of gender-responsive poverty alleviation strategies, measures must be in place to ensure that lending schemes (i.e., microcredit) do not lead to rising indebtedness.<sup>228</sup> To offer social protection and decent work benefits to vulnerable women, such programmes should be integrated with social protection floors that secure a minimum income, as well as access to health care and pensions, as women's enterprises are much more likely to be low-growth, low-skilled and informal.<sup>229</sup> Social transfers are an important mechanism for reducing women's heightened risk of poverty during their reproductive years.

In line with the agreed conclusions of the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women, member States should also seek to avoid the common pitfalls of conditionalities for social protection programmes, especially where conditions reinforce gender stereotypes and exacerbate women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities. Additionally, social protection programmes must "ensure that they are adequate, proportional and non-discriminatory and that non-compliance does not lead to punitive measures that exclude women and girls who are marginalized or in vulnerable situations".<sup>230</sup> Universal and gender-responsive social protection schemes can help to reduce opportunities for abuses of discretionary power by programme staff and other gatekeepers.<sup>231</sup>

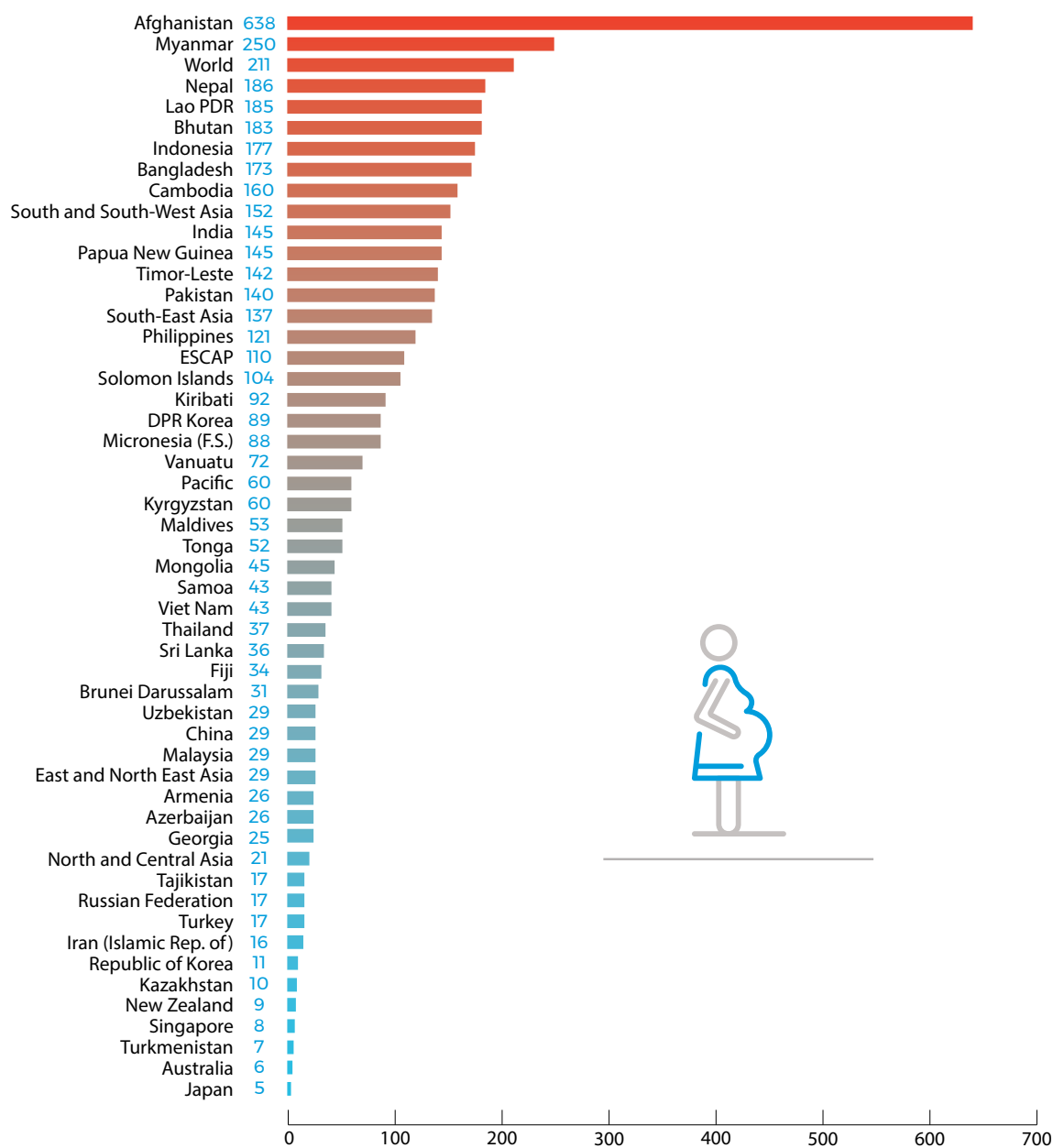
## Women's health and health-care access

### Maternal mortality and safe birth

Maternal mortality rates for women in the region aged 15 to 49 have fallen by nearly half since 2000, from 252 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 110 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2017.<sup>232</sup> As shown in Figure 2.4, extreme variations persist at the subregional and country level, however. The Pacific subregion is home

to one of the lowest rates of maternal mortality in the region, in Australia, at 6 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The subregion also has rates as high as 145 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Papua New Guinea. The high average in South and South-West Asia obscures a wide range from 17 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Turkey to 638 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in Afghanistan.<sup>233</sup>

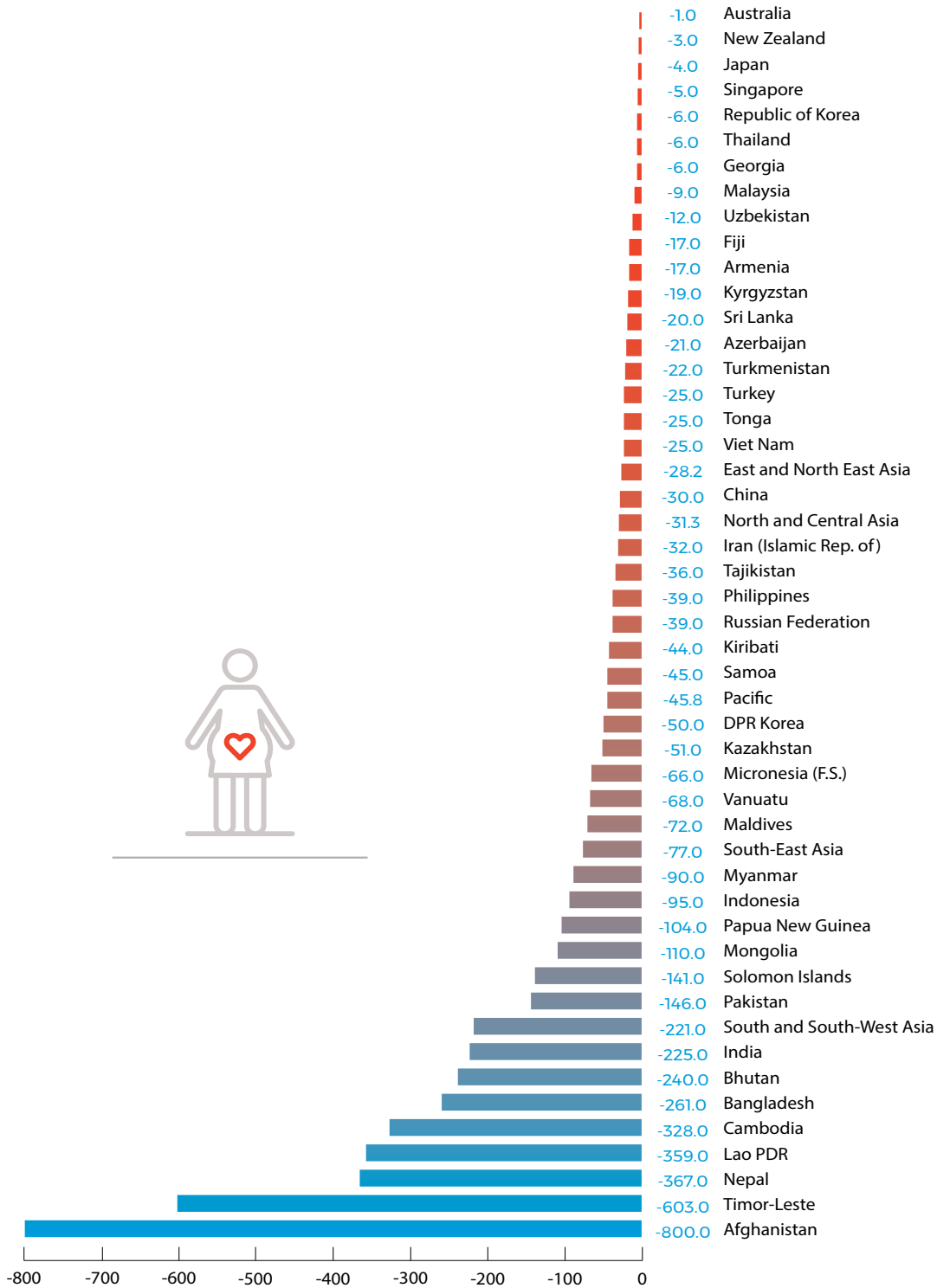
Figure 2.4 Maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births), by country and subregion, 2017



Source: ESCAP database, based on WHO data on SDG 3.1.1, maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births). Accessed 15 October 2020.

Despite an overall declining trend for maternal deaths in the region (see Figure 2.5), in 2015, almost 92 per cent of all maternal deaths (around 78,000 women) occurred in just 12 countries, particularly concentrated in the South and South-West Asia subregions.<sup>234</sup>

**Figure 2.5 Change in maternal mortality (deaths per 100,000 live births), by country and subregion, 2000–2017**

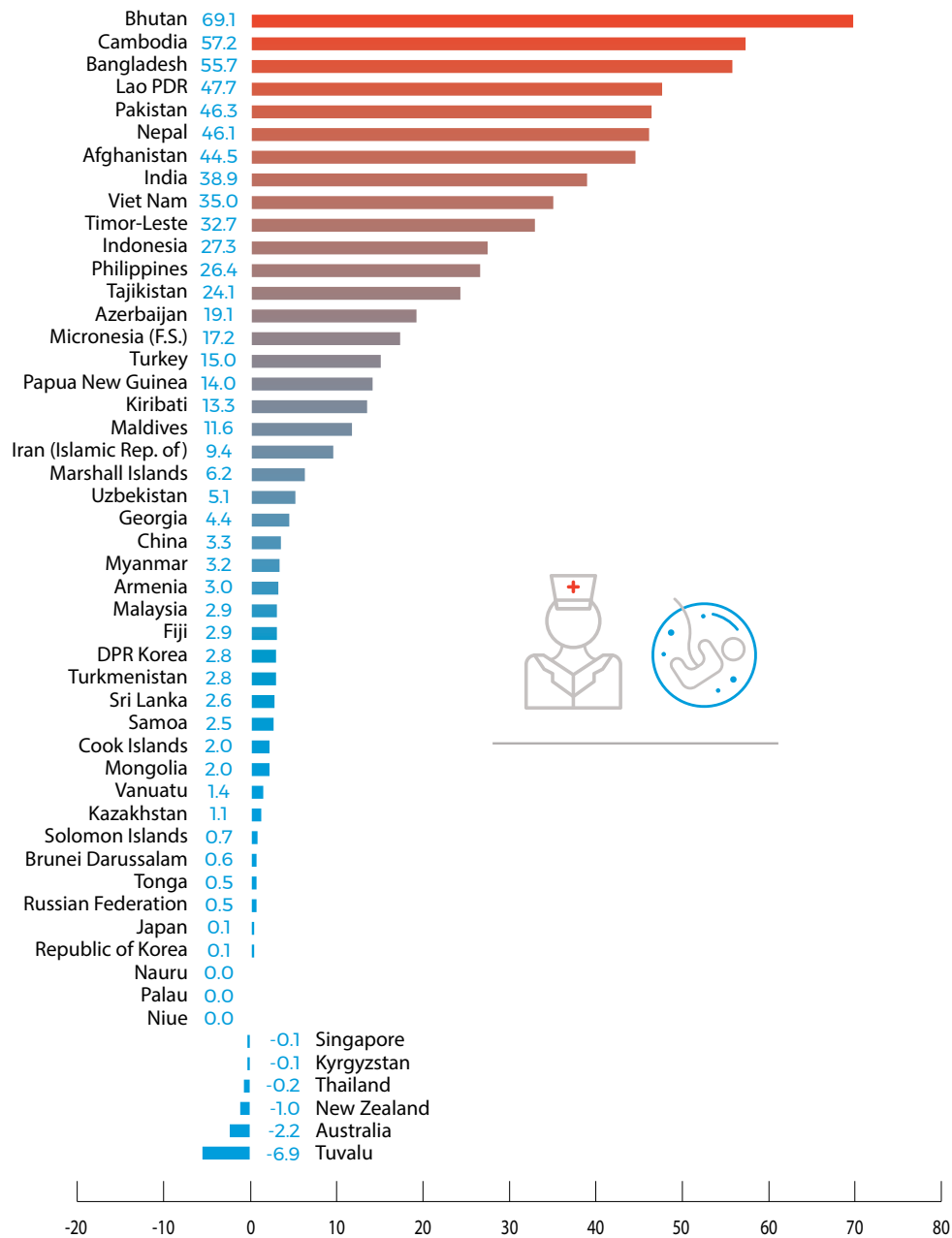


Source: Author calculation based on ESCAP database, based on WHO data, SDG 3.1.1. Accessed 15 October 2020.

The reduction in maternal mortality is related to increased birth attendance by skilled health personnel across all subregions since 2000. Some countries, like Australia and Tuvalu, have seen negative trends (Figure 2.6). Most countries showing little to no change, namely Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Niue, Palau, Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Singapore and Thailand, had extremely high rates (99 per cent or

higher) of births attended by skilled personnel in 2000. Access to skilled health personnel, however, remains uneven and is strongly linked to household wealth.<sup>235</sup> The wealthiest 20 per cent of households in Asia and the Pacific are up to 6.5 times more likely to have births attended by skilled health personnel than the poorest 20 per cent, especially among rural, poor and poorly educated households.<sup>236</sup>

**Figure 2.6 Change in the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel between 2000 and 2017**



Source: Author calculation based on ESCAP database, based on UNICEF data, SDG 3.1.2, proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel. Accessed 15 October 2020.

## Access to sexual and reproductive health services

Fewer than 4 out of 10 people in Asia and the Pacific have access to health care.<sup>237</sup> Out-of-pocket expenditures for services unduly impact poor and vulnerable households, and are among the highest in the world.<sup>238</sup> A critical component of health care is access to quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health services, including access to contraception and, where legal, safe abortion. Some regions have seen progress in this area. Notably, between 2000 and 2017 in the South and South West Asia subregion, the proportion of women married or in a union and of reproductive age who had their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods increased from an average of 61.6 per cent in 2004 to 72.1 per cent in 2016.<sup>239</sup> Despite this progress, however, in 13 countries in Asia and the Pacific, less than half of women have their needs met, compared to a global average of 76.8 per cent.<sup>240</sup>

Multiple dynamics constrain women's access to family planning across the region. These include cultural and traditional norms that deter women from accessing sexual and reproductive health services, accessibility shortfalls for women in rural and remote areas, lack of funding for services and shortages of supplies. The current lack of data on sexual and reproductive health in

conflict and humanitarian settings also presents problems for effective resource allocation and timely service delivery.<sup>241</sup> The data that are available, however, paint a grim picture. In these contexts, the combination of weak service delivery capacity and conflict-related stresses exacerbate existing vulnerabilities faced by minority groups, including women with HIV, and sexual and gender minorities.<sup>242</sup> In contexts of high insecurity, refugee and internally displaced women often have limited – if any – access to sexual and reproductive health services, a dynamic that increases their risk of being left behind despite progress more broadly in these areas.<sup>243</sup> These dynamics are relevant for humanitarian contexts in Asia and the Pacific.

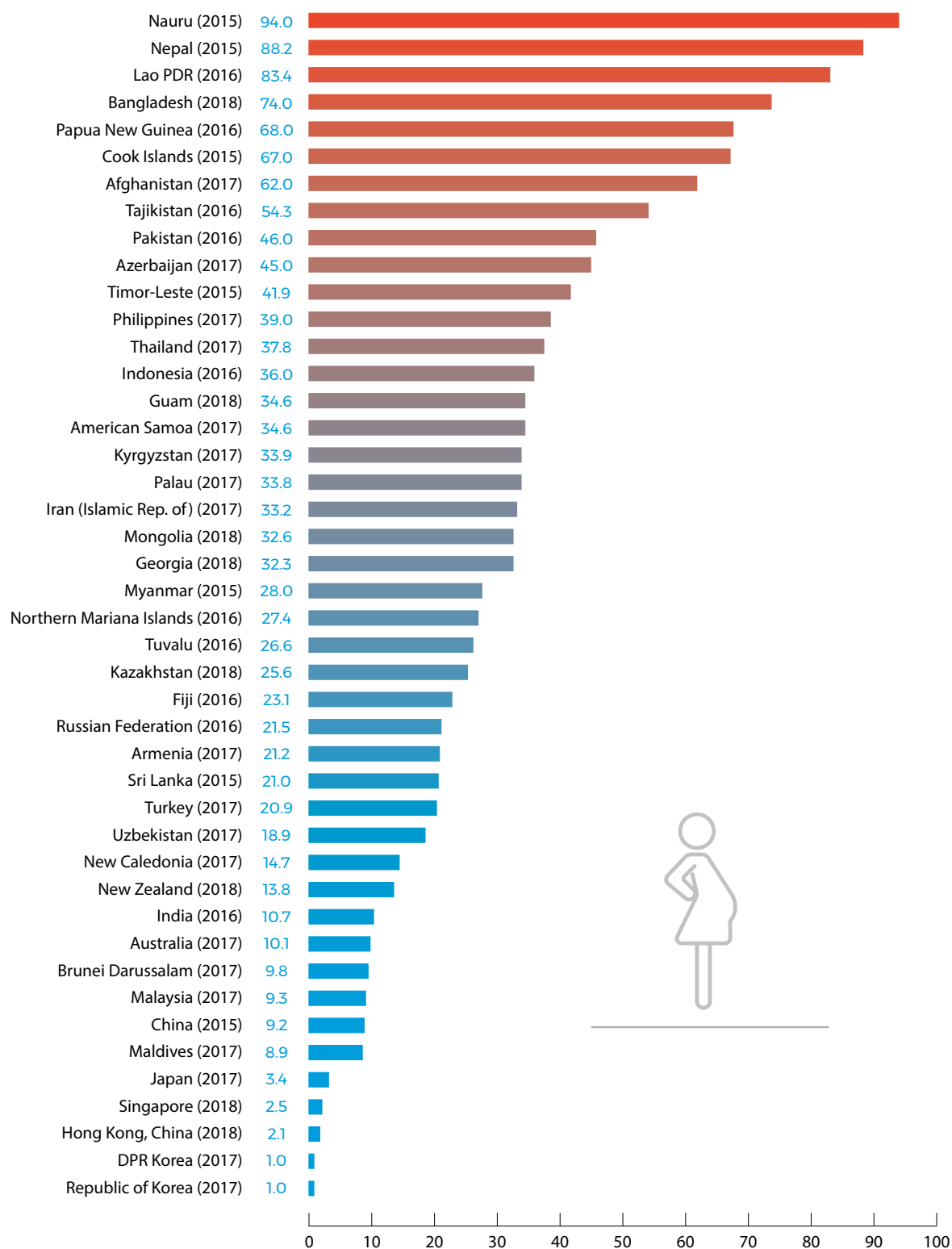
## Adolescent fertility

Available data indicate that rates of adolescent fertility are declining across the region, especially in South and South-West Asia.<sup>244</sup> Between 2000 and 2020, the regional average declined from 48 births per 1,000 adolescent women to 23.9 births per 1,000 adolescent women.<sup>245</sup> Subregionally, adolescent fertility ranges from a low of 7.1 births per 1,000 adolescent women in East and North-East Asia to a high of 43.15 births per 1,000 adolescent women in South-East Asia (see Figure 2.7).<sup>246</sup> In some countries (Azerbaijan, Fiji, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Tajikistan) adolescent fertility rates are rising.<sup>247</sup>



**A critical component of health care is access to quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health services, including access to contraception and, where legal, safe abortion. Some regions have seen progress in this area.**

**Figure 2.7 Adolescent fertility rate, number of live births per 1,000 females aged 15-19 years, most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on United Nations Population Division data, SDG 3.7.2, adolescent fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years). Accessed 10 September 2020.



Adolescent girls can face a range of barriers to accessing contraception. Some are written into laws and policies that restrict the provision of contraception, based on age or marital status. Others relate more to cultural and contextual dynamics at the local level, such as health worker bias or adolescents' lack of information, financial resources or transportation options.<sup>248</sup> Early, child and forced marriages remain a key determinant of adolescent fertility in the region (see Cluster 3), with married adolescent girls having the highest unmet need for contraception.<sup>249</sup>

Adolescent fertility can have a negative economic and social impact on girls and their families, including poorer health outcomes for young mothers and their children,<sup>250</sup> girls' reduced education and labour force outcomes,<sup>251</sup> and increased experience of violence within marriage or partnerships.<sup>252</sup> As adolescent girls and young women (ages 15 to 24 years old) are among the furthest behind groups in Asia and the Pacific, the adoption of age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education, both in and out of schools, is critical to support the right to access quality, adequate, and non-discriminatory information and services, and to challenge discriminatory social norms that limit women's and girl's decision-making power (see "Spotlight on Thailand's comprehensive approach to adolescent sexual and reproductive health").<sup>253</sup>

### State responses to improve health outcomes for women and girls

The national review reports indicate that member States have shown a strong focus on improving health outcomes for women and girls. Strengthening universal and public health services was the most commonly reported action.

✓ **Expanding universal health coverage and public health services:** Thirty member States reported actions to expand women's access to health services through **universal health coverage** or public health services. In **Thailand**, an affordable, quality and accessible approach to migrant health care allows both documented and undocumented migrants to enrol in health

insurance coverage. The **Republic of Korea** has enhanced its long-term care insurance policy by providing additional assistance for the care of older persons, either through home care or placement in institutional care facilities. Further efforts to expand health care to vulnerable groups were achieved in **Turkey** (among domestic workers) and **Viet Nam** (among women in rural and remote areas, and indigenous women). **The Islamic Republic of Iran** and **Myanmar** expanded health-care access for refugee women, and women in remote and conflict-afflicted areas.

✓ **Expanding specific health services for women and girls:** Thirty-eight countries reported expanding specific health services for women and girls, including related to sexual and reproductive health, mental health and HIV. **Lao PDR** and **Mongolia** created evidence-based programmes to ensure that ethnic and poor women, respectively, have amplified access to antenatal care services. **New Zealand's** 2014-2018 Disability Action Plan commits to removing discriminatory barriers that limit women with disabilities' access to sexual and reproductive health services.<sup>254</sup> **Cambodia** and **Georgia** have integrated sexual and reproductive health service delivery into universal health-care programmes. **India, Indonesia** and **Kazakhstan** have established specific adolescent health service centres to provide quality, appropriate and accessible health services, including sexual and reproductive health services for young women and girls. **Bangladesh** extended comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services to women in refugee camps, including services for adolescent girls and access to family planning.

✓ **Promoting comprehensive sexuality education:** Sixteen countries reported boosting comprehensive sexuality education in schools or through community programmes. **Fiji** has promoted comprehensive sexuality education within schools and in the community. **Lao PDR** and **Thailand** have strengthened these programmes in educational settings that include TVET and teacher training, respectively.

## Spotlight on

### Using technology to ensure access to health services

In **Bangladesh, Mongolia** and **Timor-Leste**, ICT is extending access to health-care services for women and girls. In **Bangladesh**, for example, a mobile app was developed for sexual and reproductive health practitioners to improve communication and services for women who have difficulties accessing physical health centres. Similarly, the Liga-Inan mobile health programme in **Timor-Leste** uses SMS systems to facilitate relationships between expectant mothers and health-care professionals.

In 2016, **Mongolia**, in partnership with UNFPA and the Government of Luxembourg, established telemedicine services to provide pregnancy and prenatal care for women in remote and rural areas, thereby reducing their need to travel to clinics. This programme combined medical services, reduced costs for patients and an e-learning platform to improve professional knowledge.

By leveraging ICT to facilitate access to health care, these member States aim to close service gaps that often leave the most vulnerable women excluded from critical public services. ICT platforms designed to consider the specific needs and experiences of the user<sup>255</sup> can provide an accessible source of information especially for those in remote or rural areas.

*Source: Governments of Bangladesh, Mongolia and Timor-Leste, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

### Thailand's comprehensive approach to adolescent sexual and reproductive health

**Thailand's** comprehensive approach to improving adolescent sexual and reproductive health and reducing adolescent pregnancy highlights many promising actions that emphasize access to information and prevention of adolescent pregnancy, and promote the well-being of young mothers.

A multistakeholder approach incorporates government departments, educational institutions, and families and communities. It began with the 2016 Act for the Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Pregnancy Problem, which calls for holistic cooperation among five government ministries, recognizing that adolescent pregnancy is a multisectoral issue that affects health, education and social protection programmes. Educational institutions have now been tasked with ensuring that teachers can provide age-appropriate sexuality education and counselling. This is reinforced through strengthened measures to provide comprehensive sexuality education in school.

Another piece entails activities to build family relationships, and encourage parents as well as businesses to communicate with children and employees, respectively, about sexuality education and resources. Finally, the Youth-Friendly Health Services initiative provides reproductive and contraceptive services to women and girls younger than 20 years.

A second component of Thailand's approach supports young mothers to achieve well-being. Thailand has established a system to ensure that young mothers have suitable and continuous educational options as well as referrals to appropriate reproductive health and social welfare services. Pregnant students can change their study plan or suspend their studies if needed until after they give birth. In addition, adolescent mothers are eligible for the Child Support Grant and vocational training to promote their future livelihood and income-generating capabilities.

In each of these areas, the approach to adolescent groups is inclusive, meaning that the particular needs of adolescents in vulnerable groups (including LGBTI, ethnic minorities, indigenous women, and other minority groups) are recognized, and these adolescents gain access to accurate and adequate information on the prevention of adolescent pregnancies.

*Source: Government of Thailand, national review report.*

## Going further to improve health outcomes

Sexual and reproductive health services are a key catalyst for sustainable development across Asia and the Pacific. The capacity of women and girls to access these services has implications for their rights related to life, health, privacy, education and non-discrimination. In recent years, however, efforts to promote women's and girls' access to sexual and reproductive health and rights have been met with pushback from extremist influences.<sup>256</sup> Financial and geographical barriers to accessing services are also often exacerbated for women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. **Kyrgyzstan**, for example, noted in its national review report that the lack of adequate infrastructure, equipment and available health care keeps women with disabilities from accessing mammograms and other essential health services.<sup>257</sup>

Regionally, delivering improved health outcomes for women is hampered by inadequate levels of resources and information among community members and practitioners, inappropriate or poor quality information and services, and women's limited autonomy to seek such services.<sup>258</sup> More efforts are needed, for example, to increase the number of skilled birth personnel and to meet needs among youth and migrants.<sup>259</sup> Discriminatory social norms and practices against women can heighten the risk of death from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes.<sup>260</sup> It is paramount that member States adopt additional measures to guarantee access to health care, especially sexual and reproductive health services, for women and girls whose access is hampered by language, lack of information, insufficient resources, political instability or fear of discrimination.<sup>261</sup>

Upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights, strengthening services and improving decision-making for adolescent girls will have far-reaching impacts not only on their health outcomes, but also their educational opportunities, labour market prospects and lifelong earning potential (Cluster 1); their ability to live free from violence (Cluster 3); and their ability to participate in public life (Cluster 4). To this end, **Nepal's** 2018 Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act is a positive example, enshrining the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls in the Constitution.

## Quality education for women and girls

### Improving educational outcomes

Ensuring women and girls obtain a quality education requires progress in educational access (enrolment rates), the quality of education in terms of skills (literacy and proficiency), safety (access to single-sex sanitation facilities, and protection from harassment and violence), non-discrimination (ensuring that educational curricula are free from gender bias), and educational outcomes in terms of labour market opportunities and a successful school-to-work transition. Across Asia and the Pacific, this requires addressing dynamics that create barriers to women and girls in obtaining a quality education and enjoying positive results. These dynamics include multidimensional poverty and vulnerability, natural disasters, and specific bottlenecks related to age, health, wealth, ethnicity, location and gender.<sup>262</sup>

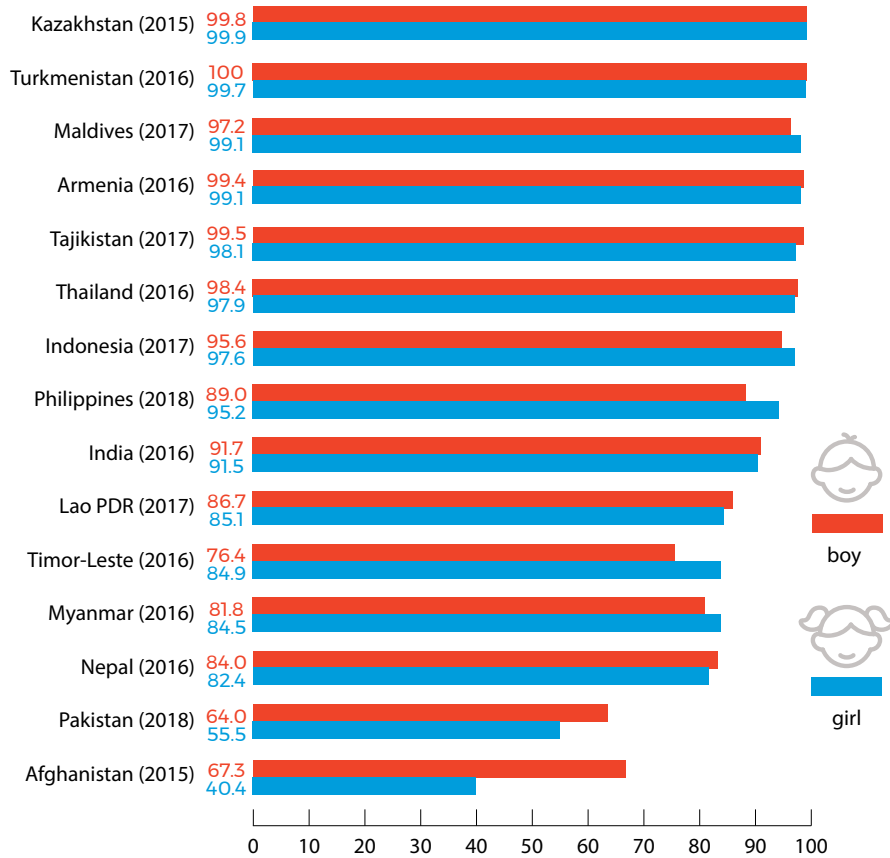
Discriminatory social norms and gender roles constrain access to education. For instance, gender roles that assign household chores to girls can force them to drop out of school early, while inadequate water and sanitation can make attendance more difficult once girls reach puberty.<sup>263</sup> Taboos around menstruation as well as harmful practices such as early, child and forced marriages also have immediate impacts on girls' education.<sup>264</sup> For example, married girls in Nepal are 10 times more likely to drop out of school than their unmarried peers.<sup>265</sup> A lack of safe, accessible transportation and the threat of harassment in public spaces often deter young girls and women from continuing their education.<sup>266</sup>

Since 2000, the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools has climbed across the region, with some variation. Between 2000 and 2018, countries in South Asia increased primary school enrolment of girls from 68.9 per cent to 86.9 per cent. Since 2014, however, female enrolment in primary school has decreased in Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines and Tuvalu.<sup>267</sup> Once girls in the region are enrolled in primary school, they have a high likelihood of primary school completion.<sup>268</sup> The 15 countries with data show

mixed educational outcomes. Differences in overall access to education for boys and girls are clear (for example, between Afghanistan and Kazakhstan). As shown in Figure 2.8, however, there is no clear trend in primary school completion rates for girls relative to

boys. In some countries, girls have higher completion rates (e.g., Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Timor-Leste) while boys have higher completion rates in others (e.g., Afghanistan, Lao PDR, Pakistan and Tajikistan).

**Figure 2.8 Proportion of relevant age group completing primary education, by sex, most recent year**

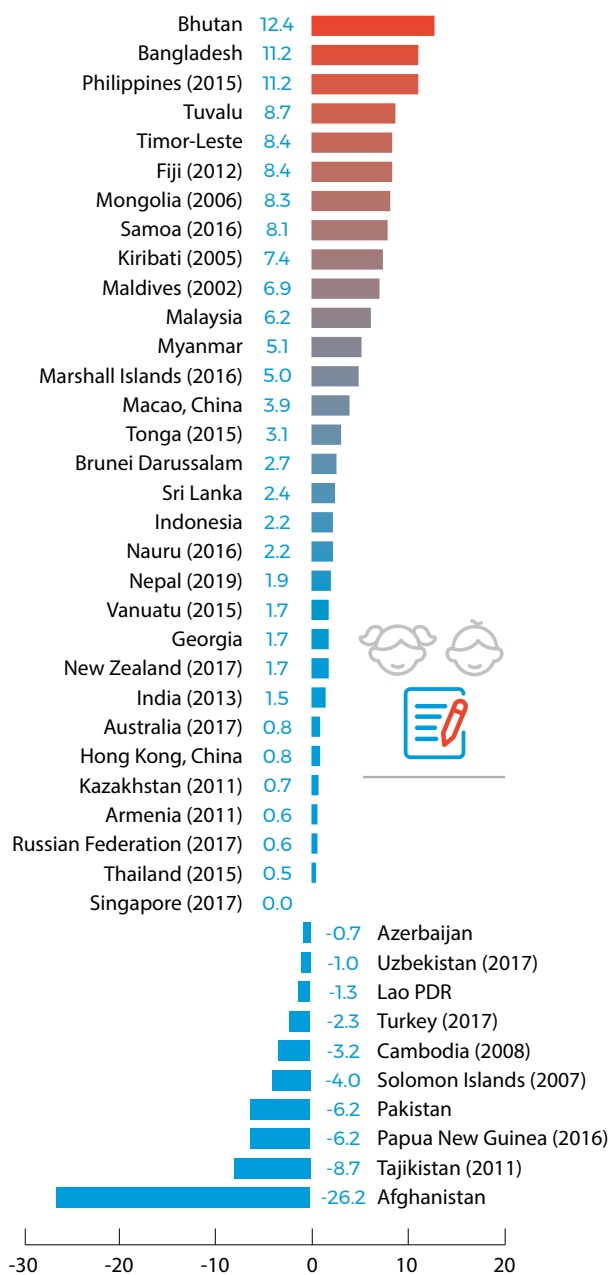


Source: ESCAP database, based on UNESCO-UIS data, SDG 4.1.2, completion rate by education level. Accessed 10 September 2020.

Variations in educational outcomes extend to the secondary level. Figure 2.9 shows no clear regional trends in the gender gap in enrolment at the secondary level. Bhutan has the largest gender gap in enrolment *in favour of girls*, while Afghanistan has the largest gender gap in enrolment *in favour of*

*boys*. The majority of countries with data show that at the secondary level, enrolment rates favour girls (see Figure 2.9). Multiple member States reported that enrolment in secondary education is at parity (Singapore) or nearing parity (Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Thailand).

**Figure 2.9 Gender gap in enrolment in secondary school, 2018 or most recent year**



Source: Author calculation based on World Bank databank, school enrolment, secondary (percentage net) by sex. Accessed 15 October 2020.

In the post-primary years, gains in gender parity in school enrolment taper off.<sup>270</sup> In Afghanistan and Tajikistan, for example, women are up to 60 per cent less likely to complete school than men.<sup>271</sup> Additionally, despite a gain of 17 per cent in female youth literacy rates since 2000, only 59 per cent

of women aged 15 years and older in the region (compared with 78 per cent of men) can read and write.<sup>272</sup> While more girls than boys achieve proficiency in math and reading by the end of primary school in all Asia and the Pacific member States (except Australia), by the end of lower secondary school there is a decline in proficiency for both girls and boys (albeit steeper for girls) that persists until adulthood.<sup>273</sup>

The intersections of poverty, gender and rural residence result in the most limited access to secondary education across 21 countries with available and comparable data.<sup>274</sup> In Lao PDR, only 1 per cent of rural, poor women have attained secondary education.

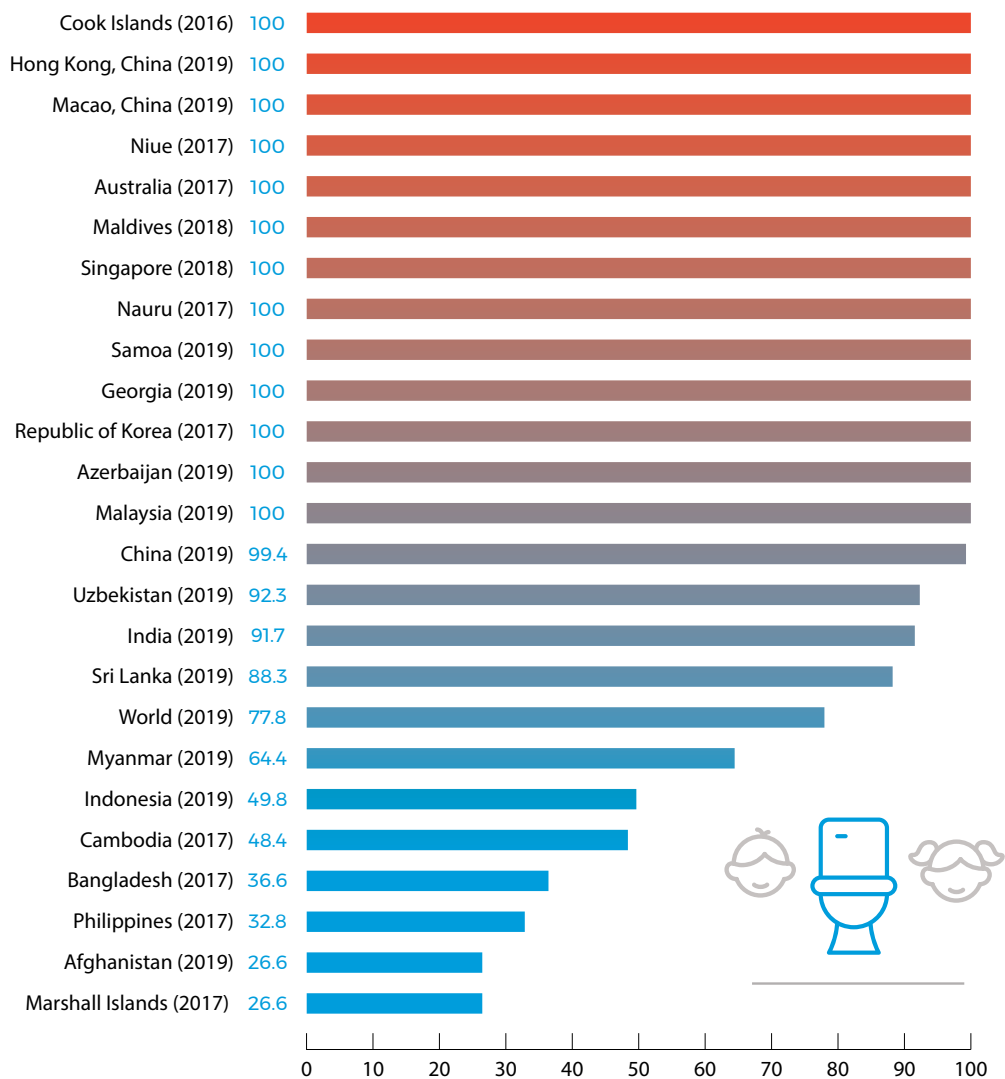
Children with disabilities are also disadvantaged. Among 51 countries globally, the World Health Organization and the World Bank found that girls with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific are among those least likely to complete primary school: 42 per cent of girls with disabilities complete primary school compared to 51 per cent of boys with disabilities, 53 per cent of girls without disabilities and 61 per cent of boys without disabilities.<sup>275</sup> The gap in primary school attendance between students with disabilities and those without ranges from 10 per cent in India to 60 per cent in Indonesia; for secondary school, the gap ranges from 15 per cent in Cambodia to 58 per cent in Indonesia.<sup>276</sup> This disadvantage follows persons with disabilities into the workforce, where they are two to six times less likely to be employed.<sup>277</sup>

School-related gender-based violence is another serious obstacle to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in Asia and the Pacific. The threat of or experience of school-related gender-based violence can have negative impacts on school attendance, dropout rates, school performance and low self-esteem.<sup>278</sup> The incidence of school-related gender-based violence can be exacerbated by conflicts and crises, more so for girls and women with disabilities.<sup>279</sup> Violence experienced while travelling to school and violence and/or bullying in school deter girls and women with disabilities from engaging in, or being able to meaningfully enjoy, educational opportunities (see Cluster 3).

Discriminatory social norms also contribute to low rates of enrolment and educational completion among girls. For example, norms that uphold women’s responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work can lead girls to drop out of school.<sup>280</sup> Discriminatory norms can also lead parents to systematically underestimate or undervalue the academic abilities of girl children.<sup>281</sup> Even where attendance rates are equal, gender discrimination

in curricular materials, subject streaming,<sup>282</sup> a lack of basic infrastructure, or gaps in providing safe and harassment-free environments can hamper the educational progress of girls and women.<sup>283</sup> As shown in Figure 2.10, many countries in the region have ensured that girls have safe and accessible infrastructure, especially single-sex basic sanitation facilities, in primary schools.

**Figure 2.10 Proportion of schools with single-sex sanitation facilities, primary, most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on UNESCO-UIS data, SDG 4.a.1. Accessed 16 October 2020.

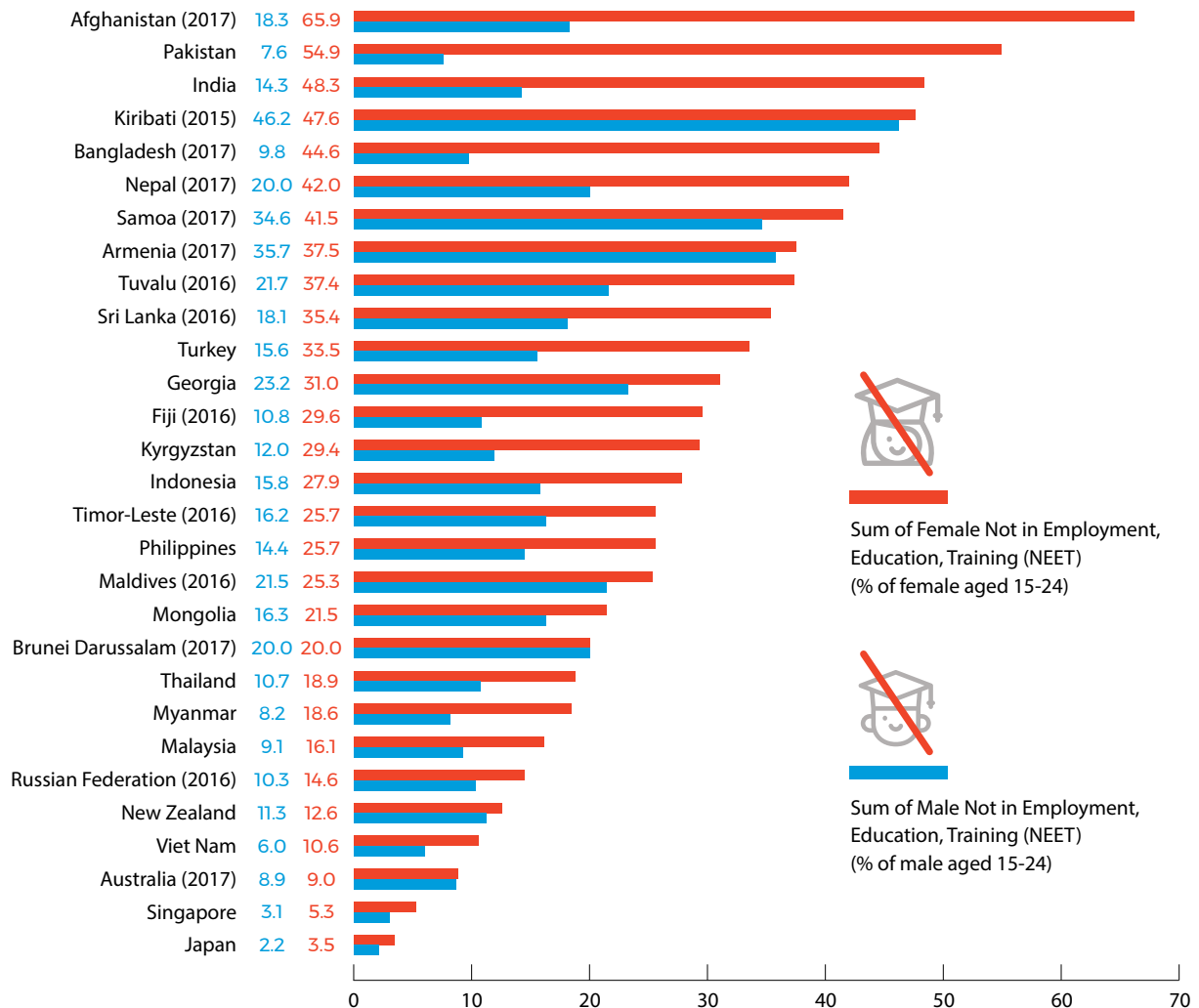
## Access to skills and training

A successful transition from school to work is critical to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, and ensuring that women's educational outcomes are translated into labour market skills and income-earning potential. In Asia and the Pacific, younger persons are the least likely to have full-time employment, however.<sup>284</sup> Sex-disaggregated rates of "not in employment, education or training" (NEET) provide insights on gender gaps in access to economic opportunities. On average, one in three young women in the region (35.6 per cent) is NEET, rising to one in two young women in South and South-West Asia (48.1

per cent).<sup>285</sup> Female NEET rates exceed male NEET rates in all countries.<sup>286</sup>

Analysis of labour force surveys in China also showed that NEET rates are significantly higher among married women and women migrants.<sup>287</sup> In 19 of 29 countries with available data, more than one in five women are NEET (see Figure 2.11).<sup>288</sup> The gender gap is highest in Afghanistan Bangladesh and Pakistan, where female rates are 47.6 per cent, 34.8 per cent and 47.3 per cent, respectively, higher than the NEET rates for males.<sup>289</sup> In Pacific countries, the gender gap is only 1.5 per cent, on average. Regionally, there has been little progress in diminishing these gaps since 2015.<sup>290</sup>

**Figure 2.11 Proportion of youth (15 to 24 years) not in education, employment or training, by sex, 2019 or most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on ILO data, SDG 8.6.1. Accessed 16 October 2020.

Improving school-to-work transition rates and reducing NEET rates are critical to addressing poverty in the region.<sup>291</sup> ILO research in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, Samoa and Viet Nam found that young women in all five countries were less likely than their male peers to find stable, regular employment and to earn higher wages.<sup>292</sup> Furthermore, approximately half of young women were contributing family workers without wages. Gender-based constraints (including occupational segregation, and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities) were found to have undercut young women's abilities to successfully navigate the transition to the workplace.<sup>293</sup>

When NEET rates reflect women's exclusion from school and work as a result of unpaid work responsibilities and other discriminatory social norms, policy frameworks that reduce and redistribute these responsibilities can increase women's access to education and the labour force.<sup>294</sup>

### State responses to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for women and girls

Policies to improve educational access, quality and safety for women and girls are critical for ensuring that they are not only present in education systems but can translate their education and skills into economic opportunities. The national review reports described member States taking action through the following measures.

✓ **Strengthening educational curricula:** Twenty-one member States reported taking action to increase gender responsiveness and eliminate biases at all levels in education. **Fiji, Pakistan** and **Turkmenistan** reported revising primary and secondary school educational materials to remove discriminatory language. **Kazakhstan, Lao PDR** and **Tajikistan** are integrating gender-responsive curricula in TVET and skills training to combat discriminatory social norms underlying women's occupational segregation.

✓ **Promoting safe, harassment-free and inclusive educational environments:** Twenty countries reported taking actions to such environments. For example, **Bangladesh** enhanced access to safe drinking water and single-sex sanitation facilities in schools.<sup>295</sup> **Thailand** and **Tonga** are using training to involve school administrations and teachers in supporting harassment-free environments. **Nepal** is going further to build a comprehensive school safety plan that aims to end gender-based violence in schools and promote child- and adolescent-friendly spaces in the community, working through advocacy and awareness activities. In the Pacific, **Kiribati, Samoa** and the **Solomon Islands** have taken clear steps to protect educational access and quality for pregnant students.

✓ **Enhancing access to TVET:** Twenty-five countries reported taking actions to increase women's access to TVET and skills development programmes. **Australia, Bangladesh** and **Lao PDR** are utilizing vouchers, quotas and public awareness strategies to promote inclusive TVET.



**Discriminatory social norms and gender roles constrain access to education.**

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Adolescent girl, Thailand.  
Photo: UN Women/Younghwa Choi.



## Spotlight on

### Protecting the right to education for pregnant adolescent girls

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that educational outcomes for women and girls are hindered by discriminatory customary norms; early, child and forced marriages (see Cluster 3); and adolescent pregnancies.<sup>296</sup> It is therefore encouraging to see that many member States across the region have taken action to promote pathways for pregnant adolescent girls to continue their education. **Palau**, the **Republic of Korea**, **Samoa** and **Thailand** stand out for their efforts in this area.

In the **Republic of Korea** and **Thailand**, teacher training is provided to help educators work with pregnant adolescents and teenage parents in the classroom.

In Thailand, this training was combined with a requirement that schools provide appropriate and consistent education to pregnant students. As a result, between 2016 and 2018, the number of young mothers returning to their same school doubled from 12.2 per cent to 24.1 per cent.

In **Palau**, support for education for pregnant adolescents and young mothers extends to the tertiary level, through provisions for childcare at Palau Community College. **Samoa's** Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture launched a National Safe Schools Policy that includes provisions to ensure pregnant students receive adequate support to continue their studies during and after pregnancy.

*Sources: Governments of Palau, Republic of Korea and Thailand, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

### Strengthening the school-to-work transition by addressing gender-based occupational stereotypes

The Beijing Platform cautioned that despite rising levels of educational enrolment, women and girls would remain the “most vulnerable in the labour market” unless they could complete all levels of education and attain qualifications to facilitate the school-to-work transition.<sup>297</sup> Regionally, the potential gains that women with greater educational attainment might enjoy are undercut by an outsized informal sector and lack of decent work opportunities.<sup>298</sup> In **Bangladesh** and **Lao PDR**, where the majority of the poor are young, school-to-work transition is critical to eradicating poverty.<sup>299</sup> It is also a key issue in countries like **Mongolia**, where there is an inverse gender gap in education, with more girls than boys at the secondary and/or tertiary levels. Ensuring that these girls and young women have equitable returns to their educational capital is key to promoting the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The national review reports show that **Armenia**, **Thailand** and **Turkey** are each taking action to tackle gender-based occupational stereotypes as part of their wider efforts to support women and girls in their transition from school to decent work opportunities.

In 2014, **Armenia** created a course that oriented students to areas where labour market demand was highest and outlined the professions available to those in vocational education. The course also encourages students to consider how discriminatory social norms create occupational segregation, and, in doing so, attempts to tackle the gender-based stereotypes that influence how students choose professions.

In **Turkey**, the Ministry of Education is working with employers and private sector companies to ensure that qualified female students find placements in the traditionally male-dominated automotive and agricultural sectors once they complete their education and/or training. **Thailand** is utilizing a similar strategy, but with a focus on promoting women within the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce.

These initiatives indicate that strengthening the school-to-work transition for women and girls requires attention and action at multiple levels, including: improving the share of females in TVET, and secondary and advanced education; directly addressing the role of gender-based stereotypes in occupational segregation; and ensuring that qualified women have equal access to decent work, including in non-traditional and technological fields where workers are in demand.

*Source: Governments of Armenia, Bangladesh, Lao PDR, Thailand and Turkey, national review reports.*

### Going further to improve education opportunities and outcomes

Increasing access to education for women and girls must be complemented by actions to address gaps in the quality of educational services, and measures to improve their quality, safety, accessibility and affordability.<sup>300</sup> Addressing discriminatory social norms, including those around the value of education for girls and their future workforce opportunities, can also catalyse positive changes for girls’ rights in other areas, such as through reductions in early, child and forced marriage and other harmful traditional practices (see Cluster 3). These efforts should be complemented by improvements in adolescent

sexual and reproductive health and rights, including by providing comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>301</sup>

Strategies that involve reducing financial costs are important to increasing girls’ access to education in disadvantaged populations.<sup>302</sup> Discriminatory gender stereotypes in educational and vocational training curricula must be addressed to reduce occupational segregation and enhance women’s access to decent work, including in non-traditional and in-demand fields (as discussed in Cluster 1 and the “Spotlight on strengthening the school-to-work transition by addressing gender-based occupational stereotypes”).<sup>303</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

The review of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the areas of poverty eradication, social protection and social services highlights the urgent need for increased provision of services, and improved scope, quality, safety, accessibility and affordability.<sup>304</sup> Gender-responsive social protection programmes for women need to expand, including schemes for income security, health care, parental and child benefits, and pensions.

Cash transfer programmes are a key mechanism through which member States are extending social protection coverage. The widespread application of conditionalities for these programmes, however, is concerning, especially where investments have not been made to improve the accessibility and

quality of health and other services that women are expected to use as part of these programmes.

Significant regional progress has been made to close gender gaps in secondary education, yet women's labour force participation rates remain low. Greater regional efforts are needed to improve school-to-work transitions and ensure that decent work opportunities are available to young women.

There are concrete steps that member States can pursue to catalyse progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda moving forward, and, specifically, to ensure that women and girls enjoy the benefits of poverty eradication strategies, social protection programmes and social services, including for health and education.



**Implement universal social protection floors to guarantee minimum protections for all women.** This is key to ensuring that the poorest and more vulnerable women can enjoy the benefits of a minimum wage, health care, social insurance and pensions, irrespective of their employment or migration status.



**Strengthen protections for women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights,** and ensure the provision of affordable and quality sexual and reproductive health services, especially for adolescent girls, LGBTI groups, women in rural and/or remote areas, women in conflict and/or crisis contexts, women with disabilities, women migrants, internally displaced women and refugees.



**Ensure that quality, non-biased educational curricula are adopted at all levels of school.** These should support efforts to address discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that undermine educational outcomes for girls and women, and weaken their school-to-work transition and economic opportunities.



**Invest in regular collection, analysis and dissemination of data on young women** who are NEET in line with SDG 8.6.1, towards tracking progress on successful school-to-work transitions and building evidence-based policies.

197. Huang, Morgan and Yoshino 2019.
198. Food security and nutrition are also important to progress in Cluster 2. Analysis of this topic is in Cluster 6.
199. ESCAP and ILO 2020.
200. ESCAP 2019b.
201. UN Women 2020h.
202. ADB and UN Women 2018.
203. Ibid.
204. Ibid.
205. Ibid.
206. Bastagli and Hunt 2020.
207. UN Women 2019a.
208. Cookson 2019.
209. See ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).
210. UN Women 2019a.
211. ESCAP 2018e.
212. Social protection programmes included in this indicator are social insurance, maternity cash benefits, labour market programmes, unemployment benefits, work injury protections, pensions, social assistance programmes, cash benefits, child/family cash benefits and disability cash benefits.
213. Gaszdar 2018.
214. ILO 2018d.
215. ILO 2017.
216. ESCAP database, SDG 1.3.1, unemployment benefit coverage, by sex (percentage of unemployed population), 2017 or most recent year. Accessed 14 October 2020. Unemployed women have less coverage for unemployment benefits in Azerbaijan (0.8 per cent), Iran (Islamic Republic of) (0.8 per cent) and Kazakhstan (4.5 per cent) than unemployed men, of whom 2.6 per cent, 12 per cent and 6.8 per cent, respectively, have coverage.
217. ILO 2017.
218. Asia Foundation and ADB 2018.
219. UN Women 2019a.
220. ESCAP database, SDG 1.3.1, proportion of population above statutory pensionable age receiving a pension, by sex, (percentage of population), 2017. Accessed 14 October 2020.
221. Ibid.
222. Stewart-Evans, Turquet and UN Women 2020.
223. ILO 2017.
224. Bastagli and Hunt 2020.
225. FAO 2015.
226. Ibid.
227. IPCIG 2019.
228. Briones 2019.
229. Hernandez, Nunn and Warnecke 2012.
230. ECOSOC 2019b.
231. Kabeer 2014
232. ESCAP database, SDG 3.1.1, maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births), 2017. Accessed 15 October 2020.
233. Ibid.
234. ADB and UN Women 2018.
235. ESCAP 2018c.
236. ADB and UN Women 2018.
237. ESCAP 2018e.
238. In 2015, the proportion of the population spending more than 25 per cent of household consumption or income on out-of-pocket health care expenditure was 4.1 per cent in South Asia and 3.5 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, compared to a world average of 2.9 per cent. The World Bank databank, 2019. Accessed 15 October 2020.
239. ESCAP database, SDG 3.7.1, demand for family planning satisfied with modern methods (percentage of women of reproductive age). Accessed 10 September 2020. These statistics may be underestimated as data tend to be collected only for women who are married or in a union.
240. Ibid.
241. CanWaCH 2020.
242. World Bank 2020a.
243. ECOSOC 2019a.
244. ESCAP database, SDG 3.7.2, adolescent fertility rate (live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years), 2020. Accessed 10 September 2020. Between 2000 and 2020, in South and South-West Asian countries, adolescent fertility rates dropped from 78.3 live births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years to 26 live births. This decline was particularly pronounced in Afghanistan (165.2 to 69), Bhutan (89.2 to 20.2), India (76.9 to 13.2) and the Maldives (44.5 to 7.8).
245. Ibid.
246. Ibid.
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262. UNESCO 2018.
263. ESCAP 2018d.
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267. World Bank databank, school enrolment, primary, female (percentage net), 2018. Accessed 15 October 2020. Female enrolment rates fell between 2014 and 2018 in Cambodia (94 per cent to 90.2 per cent), Lao PDR (95.4 per cent to 90.6 per cent), the Philippines (96.2 per cent to 93.7 per cent in 2017) and Tuvalu (78.5 per cent to 72.4 per cent in 2016).
268. World Bank databank, persistence to last grade of primary, female (percentage of cohort), 2018. Accessed 16 October 2020. Persistence rates in 2018 were 95.6 per cent for East Asia and the Pacific and 82.4 per cent for South Asia.

269. Percentages reflect the difference in the proportion of female enrolment and male enrollment in secondary school in 2018 or the most recent year for which data are available for a given country.
270. UNFPA 2019.
271. ESCAP 2018c.
272. UNESCO 2018.
273. ADB and UN Women 2018.
274. ESCAP 2018d.
275. Clarke and Sawyer 2014, WHO and World Bank 2011.
276. WHO and World Bank 2011.
277. ESCAP 2019b.
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280. ESCAP 2018e.
281. Emran, Jian and Shilpi 2020.
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283. ESCAP 2015.
284. ESCAP 2017c.
285. ESCAP database, SDG 8.6.1, youth not in education, employment or training (percentage of population aged 15 to 24), 2019. Accessed 16 October 2020.
286. Ibid. The one exception is Brunei Darussalam, where NEET rates are equal: 20 per cent of young men and women are NEET.
287. Yang 2020.
288. ESCAP database, SDG 8.6.1, youth not in education, employment or training (percentage of population aged 15 to 24), 2019. Accessed 16 October 2020.
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290. ESCAP 2020.
291. ESCAP 2018e.
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298. ESCAP 2019b.
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301. Emran et al., 2020.
302. J-PAL 2017.
303. ILO 2018d.
304. Cookson 2018a.



# Cluster 3

## Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Photos clockwise from left: Woman practices Muay Thai, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women; Women visit a police station, Philippines. Photo: UN Women/ Ploy Phutpheng; Participants in the August Ending Violence in Samoa (EVIS) roundtable event. Photo: UN Women/Ellie van Baaren.

## Overview

Violence against women and girls constitutes the most extreme manifestation of gender-based inequalities and discrimination. It exists on a continuum that ranges from verbal and sexual harassment, to intimate partner or non-partner violence, trafficking, child marriage and the gender-motivated killing of women (femicide).<sup>305</sup> Available data from Asia and the Pacific indicate widespread intimate partner violence, as well as non-partner violence; early, child and forced marriage; sexual violence; and the persistence of other harmful practices (e.g., female genital mutilation). Gender is a significant factor in human trafficking in the region.<sup>306</sup>

In all of its forms, violence against women and girls compromises women's and girls' capacities to exercise and enjoy their rights, and has repercussions across the social, political and economic spheres of women and girls' lives.<sup>307</sup> For instance, women who experience violence in the region earn 35 per cent less than women who do not, as violence is related to more informal employment due to the irregularity and unpredictability of women's ability to go to work.<sup>308</sup> While some women and girls are more at risk than others, violence occurs regardless of their wealth, age, sexuality, geography, ability or ethnic group.<sup>309</sup> At the same time, the greater exclusion and discrimination experienced by women facing multiple and intersecting inequalities can compound risks of and experiences with violence.<sup>310</sup> Eliminating violence against women and girls, including by tackling the stigmas and stereotypes that shape and normalize it across public and private spheres, would be transformative for women and girls across Asia and the Pacific.

Member States have widely recognized that violence against women and girls poses a significant barrier to gender equality and women's

empowerment.<sup>311</sup> National country reports illustrate that taking action to mitigate, reduce and respond to it has been the top priority for governments over the past five years – a prioritization expected to continue in the coming five years.

Ensuring that women and girls in the region can live free from violence, stigma and stereotypes is critical for accelerating progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and across the 2030 Agenda goals. The Beijing Platform for Action defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”.<sup>312</sup> The Platform also notes that in all its forms, violence against women is linked to entrenched social norms and is “a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement”.<sup>313</sup> This framing connects discriminatory social norms to the perpetration and normalization of violence against women and girls, and thus encourages States to direct policy attention towards measures that not only *respond* to violence but also seek to *prevent* it.

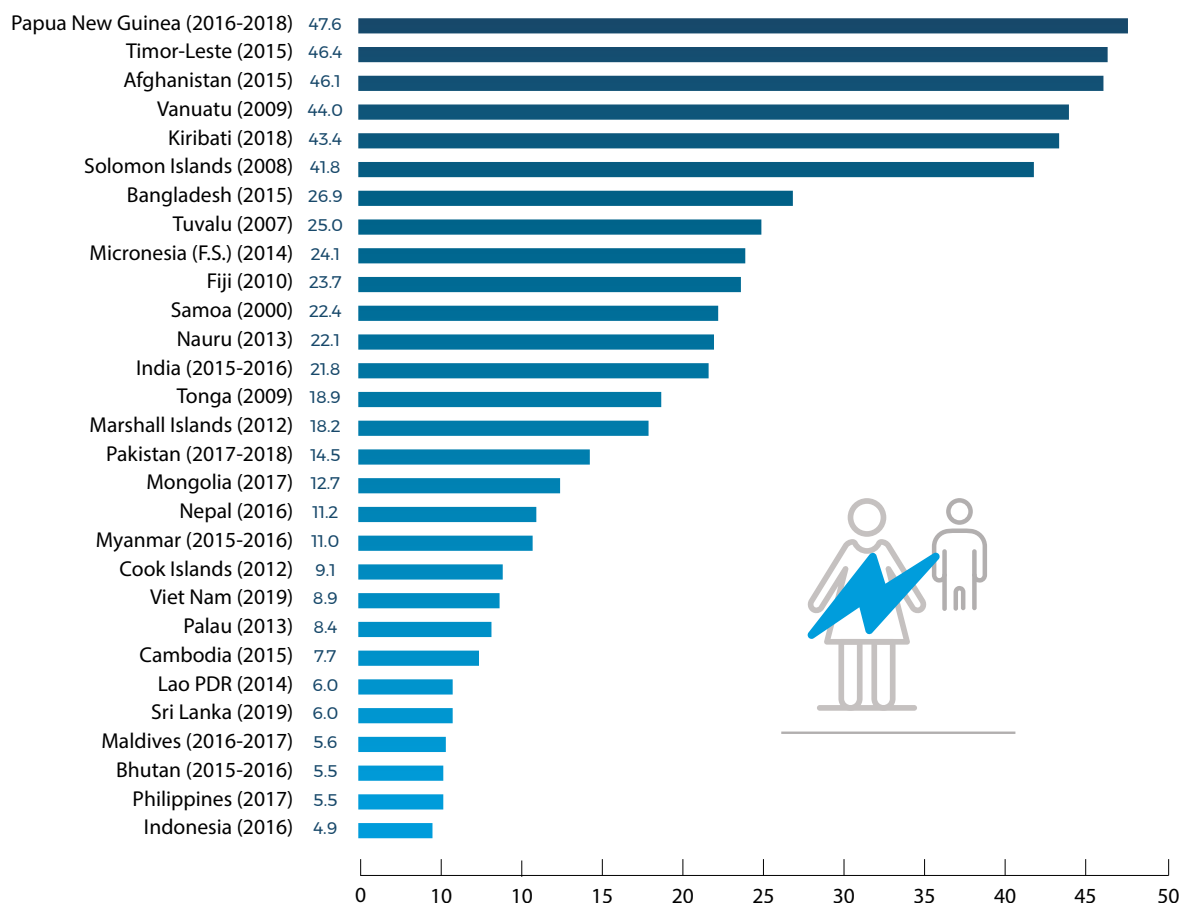
The discussion in Cluster 3 highlights member States' progress across various manifestations of violence against women and girls. Section 1 provides an overview of regional trends with respect to intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. This is followed by analyses of violence against women and girls in the media and online in Section 2, and human trafficking and early, child, and forced marriage in Section 3.

## Intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence

Gender inequality is a driver of violence against women and girls within families. Discriminatory social norms that promote harmful masculinities, expectations around women’s submissiveness, and restrictions on women’s autonomy and security ignite and sustain violence.<sup>314</sup> In Asia and the Pacific, deep-rooted patriarchal family structures<sup>315</sup> coupled with men’s sense of entitlement in controlling women and their bodies normalize violence in households and can prevent it from being seen as a violation of the rights of women and girls.<sup>316</sup> These dynamics can in turn stymie legal efforts to criminalize the practice.<sup>317</sup> Intimate partner violence in the household often occurs in conjunction with violence against children, which can trigger cycles of abuse.<sup>318</sup>

The proportion of women in Asia and the Pacific who have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the last 12 months varies across the region, with 47.6 per cent of women in Papua New Guinea, 46.4 per cent in Timor-Leste and 46.1 per cent in Afghanistan reporting such violence, compared with less than 6 per cent in Bhutan, the Maldives and the Philippines.<sup>319</sup> In Japan, women’s reports of spousal violence rose from 8.8 per cent in 2014 to 10.3 per cent in 2017, with increases observed in all age groups with the exception of women in their thirties.<sup>320</sup> In the Pacific subregion (excluding Australia and New Zealand), between 9 and 48 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 reported that they had experienced intimate partner violence in the last 12 months.<sup>321</sup> As shown in Figure 3.1, five countries in Asia and the Pacific have rates exceeding 40 per cent of women and girls.

**Figure 3.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older reporting physical and/or sexual violence in the past 12 months, most recent year**



Source: UNFPA database, based on kNOWVAWdata. Accessed on 18 November 2020.

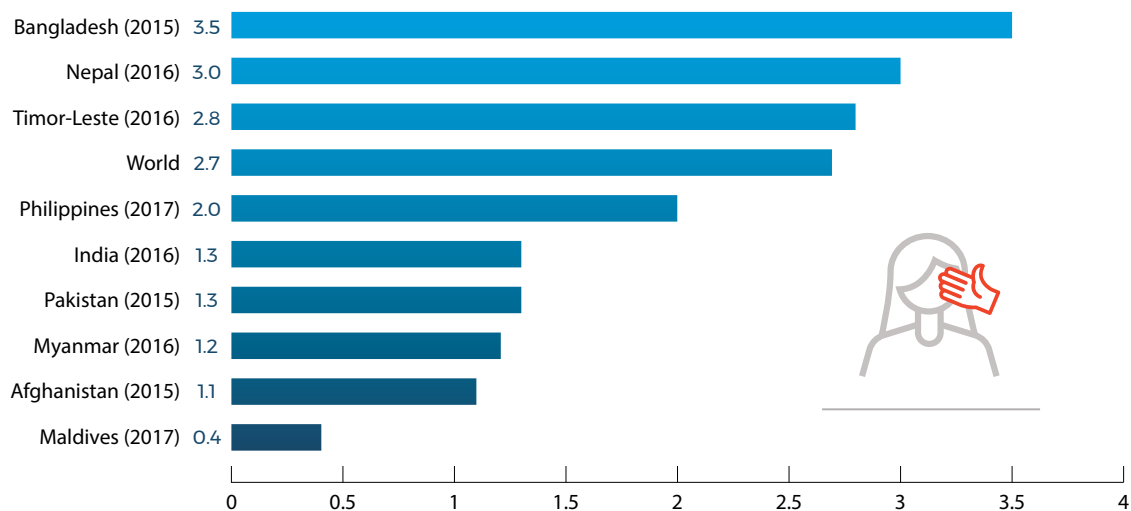


Violence against women and girls is not only perpetrated by intimate partners or family members, and it is not only pervasive in the home. The risk of experiencing non-intimate partner violence by persons other than partners and family members saturates public and private domains, reaching into spaces and infrastructure that women and girls use to navigate their day-to-day lives, including public transportation and public toilets.<sup>322</sup> Young women are especially disempowered and underprotected from such threats, even as they are among the groups most targeted for sexual harassment.<sup>323</sup>

Prevalence rates of women who have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, regardless of the perpetrator, vary widely across Asia and the Pacific, with 35.6 per cent of women in Fiji reporting such

violence, compared to 4.2 per cent in Singapore.<sup>324</sup> Sexual violence often starts when girls are young. From the nine countries with available data on young women (aged 18 to 29 years) who reported having experienced sexual violence before the age of 18, Bangladesh, Nepal and Timor-Leste have rates higher than the world average (see Figure 3.2). Data from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu indicate that girls are at an acute risk of sexual violence; more than 30 per cent of women report being sexually abused before age 15.<sup>325</sup> Women and girls who face multiple and intersecting inequalities are particularly vulnerable to violence. Asia and the Pacific is home to an estimated 350 million women and girls with disabilities, and this group experiences around 1.5 times more physical and sexual violence than those without disabilities.<sup>326</sup>

**Figure 3.2 Proportion of women aged 18 to 29 who experienced sexual violence by age 18, most recent year (percentage)**



Source: ESCAP database, based on UNICEF and UNODC data, SDG 16.2.3. Accessed 15 October 2020.

Despite legislative advancements around several forms of violence against women and girls in the region, the World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law database shows that fewer than 50 per cent of countries in North and Central Asia and the Pacific have laws in place to address sexual harassment. Marital rape is not explicitly criminalized in more than half of the countries in most subregions.<sup>327</sup> For vulnerable populations, including women with disabilities<sup>328</sup> as well as persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities,<sup>329</sup> violence is

perpetrated by a range of actors (family members, neighbours, strangers, teachers, transport providers, health workers) and in a range of spaces (the home, education system, legal systems, health-care systems, and public spaces, including the workplace).<sup>330</sup> Additionally, women with disabilities are 4.2 times more likely to experience controlling behaviour from partners and have statistically significant higher rates of non-partner violence than women without disabilities.<sup>331</sup>

Elaborating trends on violence against women and girls – particularly intimate partner or domestic violence and sexual violence – is hindered not only by gaps in data, but by the widely recognized problem of underreporting (see Chapter 3). Reporting can be constrained by social and gender norms around stigma and shame, and the limited availability and access to relevant services for survivors (see Cluster 5).<sup>332</sup> Access to justice is often derailed at the first step – reporting – especially where women and girls lack trust in legal processes and police services.<sup>333</sup> In 2015, only 50 per cent of member States in the region had gender-sensitive justice systems, with features such as family or family violence courts, or specialized entities and trained personnel within law enforcement, especially police departments.<sup>334</sup>

### State responses to intimate and non-intimate partner violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment

Thirty-nine countries reported on actions to address intimate partner and domestic violence, including marital rape, between 2014 and 2019. The national review reports indicated that efforts to address intimate and non-intimate partner violence, sexual violence and harassment are concentrated in the following initiatives.

- ✓ **Introducing or strengthening legal frameworks:** Thirty-six countries reported introducing or strengthening laws on violence against women and girls, including through better enforcement and implementation. More specifically, 28 countries reported strengthening legal frameworks around intimate partner violence or domestic violence, while 14 countries reported establishing sexual harassment policies. **China's** anti-domestic violence law (2015), for example, stipulates that preventing domestic violence is a “shared responsibility of the State, society and every family,”<sup>335</sup> undercutting assumptions that domestic violence is a private or family issue.<sup>336</sup> Recognizing that the impacts of domestic violence extend beyond the household into other spheres of women's lives, **New Zealand's** 2019 Domestic Violence Victims' Protection Bill creates legislative requirements for workplaces to support survivors of domestic violence, including through flexible working conditions and up to 10 days paid leave. Other countries have **introduced measures to address sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces.** **Australia's** Human Rights commission established an Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in workplaces throughout the country, looking at prevalence, drivers and the adequacy of the current legal framework. **Timor-Leste's** National Action Plan for Gender-Based Violence directly addresses sexual harassment in public service offices and establishes a zero-tolerance policy for harassment in schools. In 2016, a local law was passed in Quezon City, the **Philippines**, to prevent catcalling and harassment.
- ✓ **Introducing or strengthening services for survivors of violence:** For example, shelters, help lines, dedicated health services, legal and justice services, counselling, housing, etc. Thirty-six countries, including every country in East and North-East Asia and more than three-quarters of countries in North and Central Asia, the Pacific, and South and South-West Asia reported taking these or similar actions. (See “Spotlight on partnerships for addressing violence against women and girls”).
- ✓ **Introducing or strengthening women's access to justice:** Twenty-four countries reported having taken these actions, such as through establishing specialized courts, and providing specialized trainings for the judiciary, prosecutors, lawyers, paralegals, the police and social workers, among others. Programmes enhancing access to legal services through the provision of tele-law services to reduce transport and potential unease (**India**) and government payment of lawyers' fees and/or provision of free legal services (**Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of)**) are examples of other initiatives. The **Republic of Korea** has taken action to ensure that all women survivors can access services, regardless of registration (migration) status. Information services to inform women and girls of their rights and to facilitate access to gender-responsive services have also been instituted in police stations (**Australia, Pakistan**), court houses (**Bangladesh**) and support centers (**Armenia**). As the Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes the importance of increasing the

gender-sensitive knowledge base of those implementing policies, including judges, law enforcement and other service providers, this is an encouraging development.

- ✓ **Prevention strategies centred on raising public awareness:** Thirty-five countries reported using public awareness-raising initiatives to promote attitudinal and behavioural change as their most common violence prevention strategy. Eighteen countries said they had supported grass-roots and community-level mobilization. Approximately the same number reported working with men and boys. These are also promising developments, as they align with key areas of intervention recognized as essential to prevention work, including community mobilization, strategic engagement with men and boys, and educational initiatives.<sup>337</sup> In **Kiribati**, for example, a Male Advocacy Program established in 2014 provided training for men who were already active supporters of women's empowerment to support behavioural change among their peers.

- ✓ **Addressing violence against women facing multiple forms of discrimination:** Twenty-seven countries reported taking actions to address violence against women facing multiple forms of discrimination. In **Australia**, for example, the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy (2016–2026) responds to experiences of violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI people. This policy includes recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalized for domestic violence-related injuries than non-indigenous women. **The Islamic Republic of Iran** reported strengthening punishments for violence against refugee women. **India's** 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act prohibits gender-based cruel treatments for women with disabilities, including sterilization and termination of pregnancies.

## Spotlight on

### Working with men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls

In **Georgia** and **Papua New Guinea**, concerted efforts have been made to address the role of men and boys in the prevention of violence against women and girls. **Georgia's** "CHVEN (WE) – Men Against Violence" programme, launched in 2015, taps prominent Georgian men to use sports activities, awareness-raising initiatives and other interventions to prevent domestic and other forms of violence against women. **Papua New Guinea's** "Husband Schools" provide sexuality education, family planning and gender-based violence awareness-raising for boys and young men who are not enrolled in school.<sup>338</sup>



"Orange the World" event (Papua New Guinea).  
Photo: UN Women/Johannes Terra.

The initiative not only focuses efforts on boys and young men as integral to prevention, but is accessible to those not enrolled in traditional schooling. Both Georgia and Papua New Guinea have established spaces for men and boys where they can unlearn harmful gender norms, and even become future allies in preventing and reducing violence against women and girls.

*Source: Governments of Georgia and Papua New Guinea, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

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### Amplifying data collection efforts for domestic violence and sexual harassment

Evidence from **Australia**, the **Philippines**, and **Uzbekistan** highlights how investing in quality data collection is key to understanding the drivers of violence against women and girls. In **Australia**, the Human Rights Commission is leading a National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, the Inquiry is examining the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment in Australian workplaces, its drivers and impacts, the adequacy of the current legal framework and measures to address harassment.

In the **Philippines**, the Philippine Commission on Women held consultations with survivors to better understand the factors that lead women to underreport violence. The Commission learned that the lack of reporting is driven by social and cultural norms that push women to suffer in silence, including women's feelings of fear for their personal safety, fear of ruining their family reputation and fear of reprisal from local service providers once they report. In response, the Philippines trained and empowered health-care workers to report violence and provide effective referrals to enable victims to access services.

In order to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls, the Women's Committee of **Uzbekistan**, along with international and national partners, launched the "Strengthening the role of women by protecting [their] rights and increasing their labour activity in Uzbekistan" project. It involved research in 100 target communities on topics ranging from family conflict to domestic violence to women's rights.

The research identified a lack of awareness among women about their rights, especially in relation to domestic violence, and further identified that this awareness gap was also driven by persistent discriminatory norms.

To increase reporting to the police and judicial actors, some member States have taken actions to simplify and secure reporting pathways for survivors. They have also strengthened requirements for police and judicial actors to pursue cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment. State responses have included mandatory reporting of violence (**China**), "no drop" policies for police and judicial actors to ensure appropriate investigation and prosecution (**Cook Islands, Georgia, Tuvalu**), and increased public awareness and outreach to spread information about available options for reporting (**India, Palau, Tuvalu**).

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**The Commission learned that the lack of reporting is driven by social and cultural norms that push women to suffer in silence.**

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Taken together, these examples highlight how data collection efforts can be bolstered to better understand the local drivers of violence against women, women's experiences of violence, and, crucially, the dynamics that keep women from reporting to authorities or trusting available services. Moving forward, data collection efforts will need to be matched with efforts to amplify effective data use in the form of evidence-based policies that help governments channel their resources and strategies more efficiently and effectively (see Chapter 3).

*Source: Governments of Australia, China, Cook Islands, Georgia, India, Palau, Philippines, Tuvalu and Uzbekistan, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

### Partnerships for addressing violence against women and girls

The national review reports highlight how multistakeholder partnerships are having a notable and positive impact on the development, implementation and sustainability of initiatives to address violence against women and girls. For example, in **Armenia**, through a partnership between the government, UNFPA and UN Women, the Government successfully built the capacity of front-line social workers, who became more adept at recognizing and reporting cases of domestic violence, and at raising victims' awareness about available support services.

Collaborations have also led to more effective sharing of technical knowledge to promote informed legislation and services in the region. In **Lao PDR**, the Ministry of Justice and UN Women collaborated to develop the law on "Preventing and combating violence against women and children", which was endorsed by the National Assembly in 2014. **Bhutan** formed a coalition of groups (including parliamentarians, the Law Commission, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, and human rights and women's rights' organizations) to develop legislation to protect women from violence, ensure protections for domestic workers, and devise an action plan to address early, child and forced marriages.

Member States have built successful public awareness campaigns to tackle discriminatory social norms by working with private sector stakeholders, including the media. For example, **Mongolia's** "Combating GBV" programme involves a partnership with the Press Institute of Mongolia to ensure that journalists and media personnel are capable of sensitive and gender-responsive reporting on violence against women and girls.

The award-winning #KnockOutDomesticViolence campaign in the **Philippines** was the product of a partnership between the Philippine Commission on Women and a private advertising agency.

In addition to capacity development, legislation and public awareness, partnerships are being utilized to promote better services for survivors of violence. For instance, **Australia's** "Safe phones for women" programme was developed in partnership with a national telecommunications company and front-line services providers (i.e., family violence support centres). It provides women with access to a new smart phone as well as information on how to use the device safely. In **Kiribati**, donor support from Australia and technical support and training provided by the Fiji Women's Crisis Center have been central to the operations of the Kiribati Women and Children's Support center, which opened in January 2018.

These examples highlight that successful collaborations and partnerships to address violence against women and girls exist in diverse formations, and that different stakeholders have different roles to play. Civil society organizations can provide critical front-line information sources to inform policymaking, and they are also key to ensuring that services are adequate, inclusive and of high quality. In collaboration with civil society organizations, private sector actors, particularly in the media, can play an important role in enhancing the dissemination of communications and public awareness campaigns, especially those targeted at tackling discriminatory social norms. Finally, donor governments and international organizations can provide regionally specific technical knowledge as well as crucially needed funding.

*Source: The Governments of Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Kiribati, Lao PDR, Mongolia, and the Philippines, national review reports.*



Women in Uzbekistan.  
Photo: UN Women/Janarbek Amankulov.

### Going further to address intimate and non-intimate partner violence, sexual violence and harassment

The national review reports illustrate that there is political will in much of the region to create or enhance legal frameworks that address violence against women. **Fiji's** Family and Domestic Violence Leave Act, for instance, provides leave to workers (including part-time and casual workers) so that they can make safe arrangements, attend court hearings, or access police services in cases of violence.

Addressing violence against women and girls calls for multifaceted approaches that include, but are not limited to, robust legal frameworks that criminalize violence. Maintaining regional progress in developing and strengthening legal frameworks around violence against women and girls will require more attention to effective implementation. In countries where political will is weak or lacking, effective enforcement of existing laws remains a challenge. Furthermore, powerful conservative and discriminatory social norms, including attitudes (held by both men and women) that normalize violence, present barriers to successful implementation of laws and service access. Implementation can be strengthened by amplifying communications efforts so that women and girls are aware of services available to them, and

by providing targeted gender-sensitive capacity-building and training for security and justice sector actors. In general, since discriminatory social and gender norms are a driving force behind each of the challenges listed above, future efforts will need to grapple with how to incorporate more norms change into preferred legislative, policy and awareness-raising actions.

Beyond legislation, measures to address violence against women and girls should be accompanied by partnerships that promote community-based strategies and educational interventions, and leverage programming with men and boys<sup>339</sup> (see “Spotlight on working with men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls”). Addressing discriminatory social norms can also have a preventative and protective effect in emerging spaces where women are active (particularly digital and political spaces).<sup>340</sup> Engaging men and boys is an important tactic for preventing violence against women and girls, as entrenched attitudes and discriminatory social norms around gender, including the social constructions of masculinity, underlie the persistence of violence against women.<sup>341</sup> *The UN Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific* found significant gendered pathways of co-occurrence between childhood trauma and all forms of violence against women.<sup>342</sup> Initiatives from the region show that progress is possible, though these efforts will need to be ramped up moving forward.

## Violence against women and girls in the media and online

Online violence is increasing in prevalence within the wider ecosystem of violence against women and girls.<sup>343</sup> Women and girls may restrict their use of ICT, due to the fear of harassment and abuse, resulting in their reduced participation as digital citizens on social media and other digitally facilitated community spaces.<sup>344</sup> Gender is also a significant risk factor for child sexual exploitation and abuse online. Young persons with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities face particular risks in this area.<sup>345</sup>

As more media content has moved online, existing gender-based stereotypes intersect with the “social construction of digital expertise” and “the stereotype of technology and engineering as a male domain”, which has implications for girls’ confidence and aspirations to develop their technical skills.<sup>346</sup> Persistent gender stereotypes and negative portrayals of women in the media contributes to violence against women and girls, and gender inequality more generally.<sup>347</sup> The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found that women in South Asia were more likely to be depicted in the media as “victims”, while women in South-East Asia were likely to be depicted as “family figures”. It also discovered that women in the region feel they are increasingly depicted as “sexual objects”.<sup>348</sup>

On average, women make up 28.6 per cent of the media workforce in Asia and the Pacific, compared to 35.1 per cent globally.<sup>349</sup> Women tend to be at lower levels of decision-making, representing only 17.9 per cent of media executives and filling only 19.5 per cent of senior editorial roles.<sup>350</sup> Not unrelatedly, sexual harassment of women in the media has been estimated at 34 per cent in the region, with 59 per cent of perpetrators being supervisors in the workplace.<sup>351</sup>

### State responses to tackling violence against women and girls in the media and online

The national review reports indicated that actions in this area were minimal overall, but member States did report on some measures to tackle violence

against women facilitated by technology and in the media.

- ✓ **Legislation to criminalize online and technology-facilitated violence:** Twenty-five countries reported that they had introduced or strengthened legislation and regulatory provisions to address these forms of violence. **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, New Zealand and Pakistan** are among the member States that enacted such legislation during the reporting period. **Japan**, for example, revised its 2016 Anti-Stalking Act, expanding the definition of “stalking” to include digital messages and comments on web forums and blogs, and also criminalized sharing of sexual images without consent. Some countries that have passed legislation in this area have encountered difficulties. **Pakistan’s** Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (2016) has gaps in implementation due to limited awareness and training among enforcement officers, and the failure to keep complaints confidential, which led to a fear of reporting among victims.<sup>352</sup> **Bangladesh** and **New Zealand** have addressed similar challenges by ensuring that police and other law enforcement personnel receive appropriate training.
- ✓ **Enhance access, affordability and use of ICT for women and girls:** Nineteen countries reported on measures to enhance access, affordability and use. **China** and **Thailand**, for example, expanded ICT infrastructure in rural areas, while **Pakistan** and the **Philippines** launched training programmes to promote the digital inclusion of women and girls.
- ✓ **Promote the participation and leadership of women in the media:** Sixteen countries reported that they had promoted women’s participation and leadership. **Nepal’s** 2017 Mass Media Policy includes a goal to mainstream women in media professions by strengthening efforts to build women’s capacities and skills in the industry. Screen **Australia’s** Gender Matters programme supports actions to address the gender imbalance in the national screen industry, including through the establishment of a 50 per cent quota for women in creative teams receiving production funding.

## Spotlight on

### Addressing online violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls online is an important issue, one that threatens access to work (Cluster 1), education (Cluster 2), and political and public life (Cluster 4). Member States report taking action through legislation criminalizing such violence (**Australia, Pakistan**), promoting reporting, and raising public awareness, especially among children.

**New Zealand** and the **Republic of Korea** have supported the criminalization of online harassment with victim support and public awareness campaigns. In April 2018, the Government of the **Republic of Korea** launched the first Digital Sex Crime Victims Support Center to provide one-stop comprehensive support services, including counselling, content deletion, investigation, and legal and medical assistance for those subject to illegal video recording and dissemination.

**New Zealand** conducted and disseminated research among young boys and girls to raise awareness of the gendered risks of digital harm, and to contribute to evidence for designing prevention and reduction efforts.

**Bangladesh**, and **India** have established cyber help desks to facilitate reporting of online abuse (Bangladesh) and explicit or violent online materials (India). Despite these measures, challenges persist in the awareness of enforcement officers around online forms of harassment and violence, and the difficulties inherent in protecting victim confidentiality when online platforms are involved.

Taken together, these examples highlight how addressing online violence against women and girls requires multiple efforts to clearly define it and raise awareness of it among communities and enforcement officers.

*Source: Governments of Australia, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, national review reports.*

### Going further in tackling violence against women and girls in the media and online

The lack of attention to online and media platforms as a medium through which violence against women is perpetuated is likely to impede progress on the Beijing Platform for Action goals.<sup>353</sup> Accelerating progress requires addressing gender inequalities in the media both in representations and portrayals of women, as well as in ensuring the equal participation and leadership of women within STEM and media organizations. Tackling technology's role in facilitating violence against women calls for closing the digital gender gap; building women's digital skills; bolstering their participation in the creation of ICT, media and online content; and addressing technology's role in facilitating violence against women.

Given the increasing incidence of violence against women and girls allowed by technology, efforts by member States to enhance women's access to and use of ICT must be complemented by capacity-building so that young women can use digital tools safely. Such capacity will be realized with the increased promotion of opportunities for girls and women in STEM subjects, and their further education and employment in these sectors, which will challenge gender stereotypes (see Cluster 1 and Cluster 3).

The limited attention to women's and girls' safety in online spaces seen across the national review reports points to a gap in efforts geared at tackling the entrenched and discriminatory social norms that underlie violence against women and girls, and are often perpetuated through media content and women's unequal representation and leadership. Only eight countries reported efforts to shift the



representation of women in the media as a priority strategy for preventing violence against women and girls. For example, **Turkey's** updated Principles of Ethical Audio-Visual Broadcasting policy (2018) bans content where women are abused. This is part of a larger objective to strengthen women's representation in the media, as outlined in the country's National Action Plan for Women's Empowerment (2018–2023).

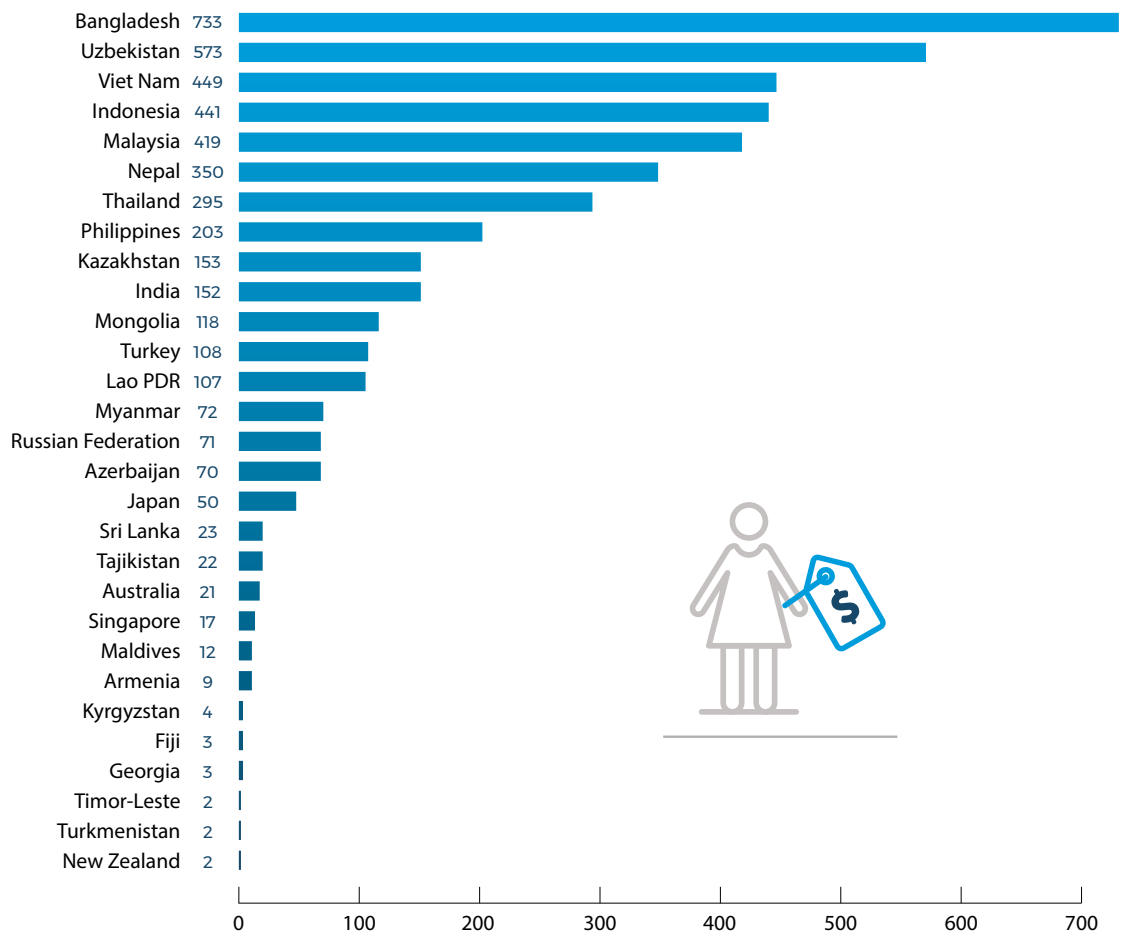
One area to strengthen action is in improved communication between governments and ICT and media companies. Only eight countries reported working with ICT businesses to set and adhere to good business practices. Better partnerships can stimulate broader efforts to tackle violence against women and girls in the media and online.

## Human trafficking, and early, child and forced marriages

### Human trafficking of women and girls

Human trafficking in Asia and the Pacific is shaped by a variety of political, environmental and social factors.<sup>354</sup> Individual migrants are primarily motivated by the potential for economic opportunities.<sup>355</sup> A wide body of evidence shows that women and girls, indigenous peoples, migrants, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups are disproportionately subjected to the worst forms of labour exploitation.<sup>356</sup> Figure 3.3 shows that Bangladesh has the highest number of detected victims of human trafficking, totaling 733 in 2017 (an increase from 114 in 2007).<sup>357</sup>

**Figure 3.3** Detected victims of human trafficking, total (number), 2017

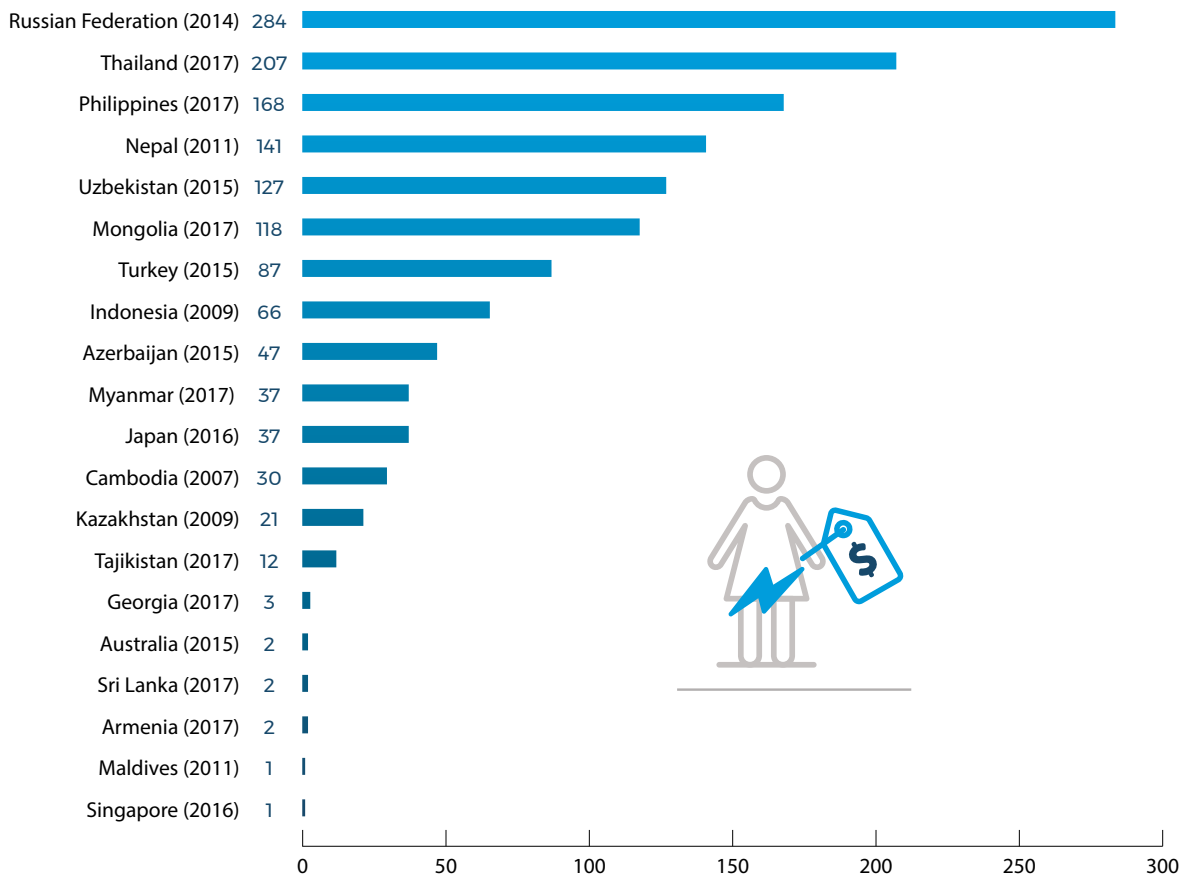


Source: ESCAP database, based on UNODC data, SDG 16.2.2. Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population. Accessed 16 October 2020.

Across the region, women and girls are at higher risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation than men and boys (see Figure 3.4), a situation exacerbated by displacement and growing insecurity (see Cluster 5). In 15 countries in East Asia and the Pacific in 2016, women accounted for 48 per cent of all trafficking victims, and girls 19 per cent.<sup>358</sup> Women are overrepresented in smuggling routes in South-East Asia.<sup>359</sup> Trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent in East Asia and

the Pacific, while trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour are nearly equal in Central Asia and South Asia. The data show that women and girls from East Asia and the Pacific account for two thirds of the total number of detected trafficked persons,<sup>360</sup> though there is considerable variation within the region.<sup>361</sup> In South Asia, women were also overrepresented among trafficking victims, with women accounting for 32 per cent and girls 27 per cent.<sup>362</sup>

**Figure 3.4 Detected victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation, total, most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on UNODC data, SDG 16.2.2. Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population. Accessed 16 October 2020.

When legal channels for migration are blocked, expensive or slow, migrants may be pushed to use smugglers.<sup>363</sup> The complex gender dimensions of human trafficking become apparent through connections to women’s access to opportunities and resources (Cluster 1), conflict and crises (Cluster 5) and environmental degradation (Cluster 6).

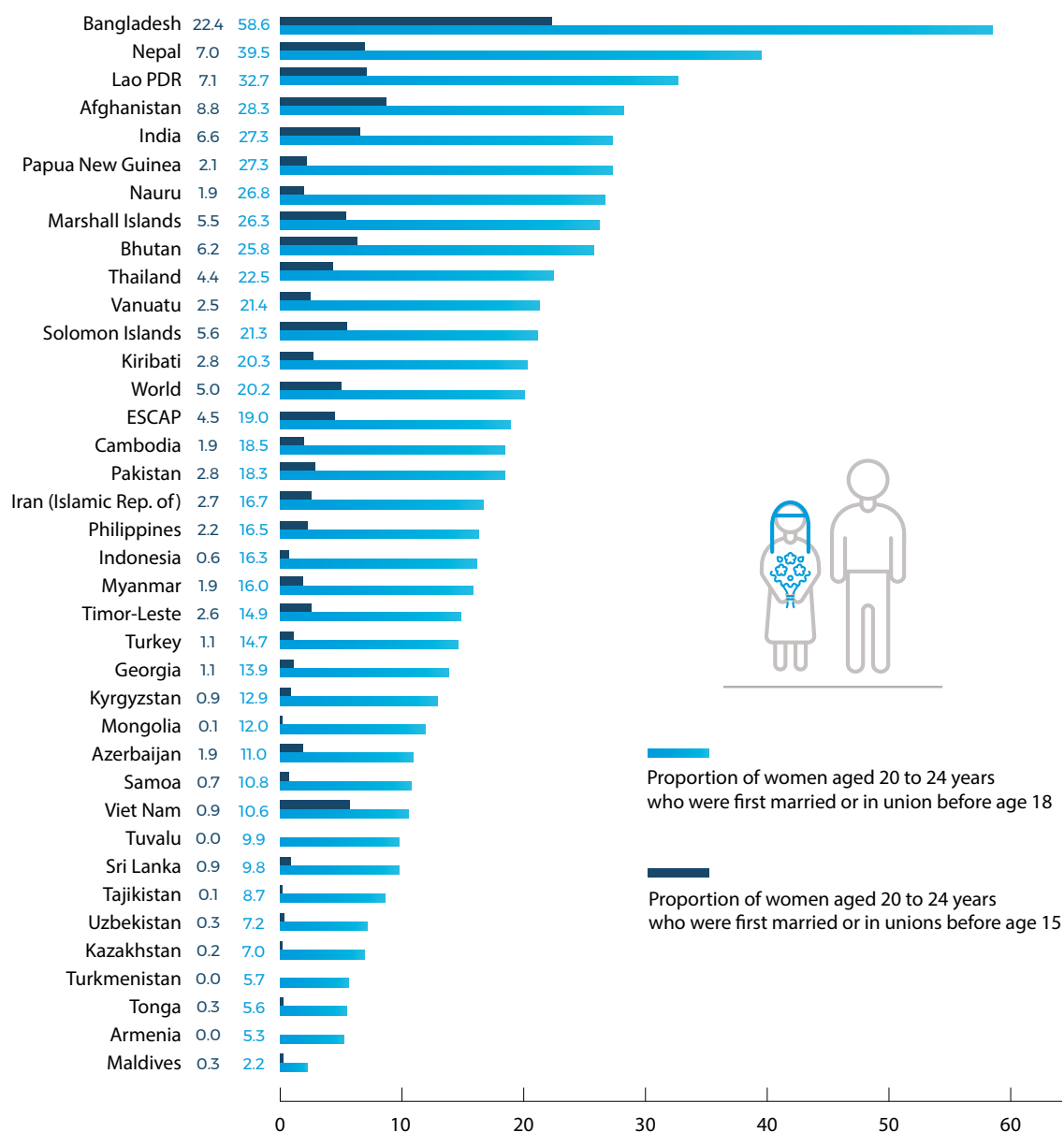
Survivors of human trafficking often face social stigma and discrimination, which can create barriers to reporting and accessing support services.<sup>364</sup> While there is a notable trend towards increasing convictions for human trafficking in the region, many countries continue to have relatively low conviction rates.<sup>365</sup>

## Early, child and forced marriages

Early, child and forced marriage rates have declined globally. In 2019, Asia and the Pacific had a prevalence rate of 19 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in a union before the age of 18, compared to a global average of 20.2 per cent. South Asia has the highest prevalence rates in the world, while women in Central and South Asia continue to marry at the

youngest ages in the world.<sup>367</sup> In 2019, the South and South-West Asia subregion reported that 28.7 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18, with 7.4 per cent having married before the age of 15.<sup>368</sup> As illustrated in Figure 3.5, the highest rates of early, child and forced marriage before the age of 18 are in Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Nepal, while Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Lao PDR have the highest rates of marriage before the age of 15.

**Figure 3.5 Proportion of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in a union before ages 15 and 18, most recent year<sup>366</sup>**



Source: ESCAP database, based on UNICEF data, SDG 5.3.1. Accessed 16 October 2020.

Early, child and forced marriage can be a precursor or outcome of other harmful practices such as child labour (as a way to address the inability to provide a dowry) and human trafficking, with caste-based discrimination compounding the drivers of child marriage in South Asia.<sup>369</sup> Crises can amplify existing drivers of early, child and forced marriage, including poverty and low education, and can generate new drivers, comprising displacement, family separation, weakening social institutions, and threats of sexual and other forms of violence.<sup>370</sup> A 2017 analysis of legislation restricting early, child and forced marriages in the region found that almost 60 million girls aged 10 to 17 were not legally protected, and that where laws did exist, implementation was weak, with 77 per cent of early, child or forced marriages in South Asia taking place illegally.<sup>371</sup>

Early, child and forced marriage constitutes a violation of the human rights of the girl child, and has adverse impacts on their sexual and reproductive health, and their educational opportunities. It reduces their bargaining power within households and increases risks of further violence.<sup>372</sup> Such marriages are detrimental to girls and young women throughout their lives. They often see their agency and opportunities for education (Cluster 2) and professional growth (Cluster 1) hampered as a result of early pregnancies (Cluster 2). They are also often unable to make decisions that relate to their well-being and/or that of their households (Cluster 4). Early, child and forced marriages correlate to lower pay, lower quality jobs and reduced asset ownership (Cluster 1), and may leave women with limited resources and capacities to cope with different kinds of shocks. They are also more vulnerable to violence later in life. For example, approximately one in five ever-partnered girls in South Asia reported that they have experienced intimate partner violence.<sup>373</sup> In Georgia, women married before the age of 18 were found to be more likely to suffer emotional abuse and sexual and physical violence than women who married later.<sup>374</sup>

### State responses to tackling human trafficking, and early, child and forced marriage

Policies that ensure that women and girls in Asia and the Pacific are free from violence, stigma and

stereotypes are critical for achieving progress across all dimensions of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. The national review reports referred to member States taking the following measures.

- ✓ **Measures to tackle the trafficking of women and girls:** Twenty-two countries reported diverse actions to combat trafficking. These included strengthening legal frameworks and national action plans on trafficking (**Azerbaijan** and **Thailand**); enhancing services for survivors, including opening shelters (**Malaysia**); and training hospital staff and other first responders in gender-responsive strategies to assist women and child trafficking victims (**Indonesia**). **Australia's** Modern Slavery Act of 2018 emphasizes the prevention of trafficking and calls on large private sector actors to directly report efforts to combat modern slavery and human trafficking throughout their supply chains and operations.
- ✓ **Legislation to combat early, child and forced marriage:** Nineteen countries reported prioritizing actions to address these marriages. **Bangladesh**, a country with one of the highest rates, passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017, which included both increased punishments for those assisting early, child and forced marriages as well as a requirement for a birth certificate at the time of marriage to ensure compliance.<sup>375</sup> In **Nepal**, legislation was enacted to increase the age of legal marriage to 20 years. The Government has worked with civil society and community-based organizations to craft awareness-raising programmes on the negative effects of early, child and forced marriage.
- ✓ **Services for survivors:** While 36 countries reported strengthening services for survivors of any kind of violence, many of these actions were directed at survivors of human trafficking. In **Georgia**, for example, foreign and domestic victims of human trafficking have access to public services, and foreign trafficking victims are also eligible for a one-year residence permit, which includes the right to seek employment, thus creating pathways for victims to reduce their future vulnerability.

## Spotlight on

### The cross-cutting impacts of addressing early, child, and forced marriage

Early, child and forced marriage is an issue with strong intercluster linkages. The national review reports indicated that the issue in Asia and the Pacific is associated with low awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescent fertility and decreased educational opportunities for girls (Cluster 2). It restricts girls' access to public life (Cluster 4), and intensifies in times of insecurity (Cluster 5) and crisis, including environmental disasters (Cluster 6), particularly among displaced populations.

Research in **Georgia** and **Malaysia** shows that changing social norms associated with early, child and forced marriage, especially through awareness-raising efforts with parents and community members, is critical for reducing the practice. **Pakistan** provides an example of how this might work. Prior to passing the 2019 Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill, which raised the legal age of marriage to 18 years, the Government undertook direct consultations with young women and men and their mothers on the adverse effects of early, child and forced marriages, in order to jumpstart social norms changes in advance of the legislative changes.

**The Islamic Republic of Iran** and **Georgia** have each made notable efforts to build partnerships and strengthen national institutions (Cluster 4) and security sector personnel (Cluster 5) in order to address early, child and forced marriages. Recognizing that such marriages are often unregistered, **Iran (Islamic Republic of)** has worked with various stakeholders, including the Ministry of Justice, the Civil Registration Office and the judiciary, to form a national Task Force on the Issues of Early Marriages. It follows a three-fold strategy to invigorate policies, strengthen interagency cooperation, and raise public awareness to transform social norms and attitudes.

By addressing the discriminatory social norms that propagate early, child and forced marriages and strengthening multistakeholder cooperation and coordination, especially among departments that are key to the implementation of legal codes, these countries are taking notable steps to build multifaceted approaches that enable them to make progress on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls across multiple cluster areas.

*Source: Governments of Georgia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Iran (Islamic Republic of), national review reports.*

### Going further in tackling early, child and forced marriage, and human trafficking

Recognizing the centrality of gender in the dynamics of trafficking is key for meeting the needs of survivors and improving prevention efforts.<sup>376</sup> Relatedly, strengthening partnerships between governments and the private sector can enhance understanding of the complex political economy behind employers of forced female labourers, including the norms and practices that make trafficked women and girls preferred workers.<sup>377</sup> Furthermore, as the risks of human trafficking, along with early, child, and forced marriage and domestic violence, are exacerbated during and after disasters,<sup>378</sup> efforts to stop these practices must be incorporated into environmental and disaster risk reduction and recovery planning.

Legislation criminalizing early, child, and forced marriages must be strengthened to accelerate progress on the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly in relation to the girl child (critical area of concern L). Especially in countries where there are parallel legal systems (i.e., where religious or traditional jurisprudence exist alongside the civil justice system), efforts to prevent early, child and forced marriages must be bolstered. Member States should also channel efforts towards the creation and strengthening of services for women and girls who are or were in an early, child or forced marriage.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Eliminating violence against women and girls is an enduring priority for member States across Asia and the Pacific. Regional progress has been made in passing new laws and strengthening existing laws related to elimination, but more effective implementation is needed. Despite a notable focus on reducing violence against women and girls, prevalence rates remain high across the region, which illustrates the need for additional action.

Member States need to strengthen efforts to address the online experiences of women and girls, where many are prone to new forms of cyber violence. More engagement with the media industry could help in stopping discriminatory portrayals of women and girls. Finally, recognizing the centrality of gender in the dynamics of trafficking is key for meeting the needs of survivors and improving prevention efforts.



**Continue to enact and/or strengthen existing legislation to end violence against women and girls, and enhance implementation** through adequate financing and specialized trainings of relevant actors to improve efficacy and effectively deter further violations. Strengthen relevant legal frameworks and standards for due diligence by employers to reduce human rights violations such as human trafficking.



**Provide comprehensive and gender-responsive services for survivors.** Promote coalitions among police, legal, health and social services to develop inclusive, quality, accessible and effective services.



**Strengthen legislative measures with parallel efforts to establish multistakeholder partnerships that tackle discriminatory social norms** leading to practices such as early, child and forced marriages. Moving forward, partnerships with women's rights organizations, media networks, technology companies and communities (including men and boys) will be key for creating an enabling environment to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, whether in physical or online spaces.



**Prioritize the regular collection, dissemination, and effective use of regionally comparable and timely data on all forms of violence against women and girls** in line with SDG indicators tracking all forms of violence against women and girls (i.e., 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 16.1.3 and 16.2.3), preferably disaggregated by key factors such as age, ethnicity, income, geographic location, disability and migrant status.

305. ADB and UN Women 2018.
306. Hunt et al. 2020.
307. UNICEF, UN Women and Plan International 2020.
308. UN Women 2013.
309. ADB and UN Women 2018.
310. Larasi 2017.
311. ESCAP 2019a.
312. United Nations 1995.
313. Ibid.
314. UN Women 2019a.
315. Matrilineal structures also exist in Asia and the Pacific, such as the matrilineal land tenure systems in multiple Pacific Member States (e.g., the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). See Stege et al. 2008.
316. Fulu 2016.
317. Coomaraswamy 2005.
318. Namy et al. 2017.
319. UNFPA, proportion of women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months, 2020 or most recent year. Accessed 10 September 2020.
320. UNFPA 2019.
321. UNFPA 2020.
322. ADB and UN Women 2018.
323. UN Women 2018b.
324. ADB and UN Women 2018.
325. Ibid.
326. Ibid.
327. Ibid.
328. Vaughan et al. 2018.
329. Sousti and Amin 2020.
330. Ibid., Vaughan et al. 2018.
331. Astbury and Walji 2014.
332. UNFPA 2019.
333. World Bank 2017.
334. ESCAP 2015.
335. Government of China, national review report, p. 26.
336. UNFPA 2019.
337. Fulu 2016.
338. ADB and UN Women 2018.
339. UNFPA 2019.
340. UN Women 2020j, UN Women 2014c.
341. ADB and UN Women 2018.
342. Fulu et al. 2017. Data collection on men took place in Bangladesh, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka.
343. UN Women 2020j.
344. Ibid.
345. UNICEF 2020.
346. Wajcman 2019.
347. UN Women 2019a.
348. UNESCO and UN Women 2015.
349. Ibid.
350. Ibid.
351. Ibid.
352. Government of Pakistan, national review report.
353. United Nations 1995.
354. UNODC 2018b.
355. Ibid.
356. LeBaron 2020.
357. ESCAP database, 16.2.2, detected victims of human trafficking, total (number), 2017. Accessed 16 October 2020.
358. UNODC 2018a. The proportion of girls trafficked increases to 50 per cent of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Countries included in East Asia and the Pacific by UNODC are Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
359. UNODC 2018c.
360. UNODC defines East Asia and the Pacific as including Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.
361. UNODC 2018a. Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines and Singapore reported majorities of women among the detected victims. Indonesia, Lao PDR, New Zealand, Thailand and Timor-Leste documented more men. The countries of the Mekong area found more child victims, especially girls.
362. UNODC 2018a. The UNODC South Asia subregion includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
363. UNODC 2018b.
364. Hunt et al. 2020.
365. UNODC 2018a.
366. For the series, women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 15, data corresponds to the year 2006 for Papua New Guinea and Uzbekistan, 2007 for Marshall Islands, Nauru and Tuvalu, 2009 for Kiribati and Maldives, 2010 for Bhutan, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, 2011 for Azerbaijan, 2012 for Tonga, 2013 for Mongolia, Pakistan, Turkey and Vanuatu, 2014 for Cambodia, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa and Viet Nam, 2015 for Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Solomon Islands and Thailand, 2016 for Armenia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan, 2017 for Lao PDR, Philippines and Tajikistan, 2018 for Indonesia. The series women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 has data corresponding to the year 2006 for Uzbekistan, 2007 for Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu, 2009 for Kiribati, 2010 for Bhutan, and Islamic Republic of Iran, 2011 for Azerbaijan, and Tonga, 2013 for Vanuatu, 2014 for Bangladesh, Cambodia, Samoa, and Viet Nam, 2015 for Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Solomon Islands and Thailand, 2016 for Armenia, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste, and Turkmenistan, 2017 for Afghanistan, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, and Tajikistan, 2018 for Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Turkey..
367. ECOSOC 2019a.
368. ESCAP database, SDG 5.3.1, women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in a union before age 18 (percentage), 2019. Accessed 16 October 2020.
369. UNFPA and UNICEF 2020a. The UNICEF South Asia subregion includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
370. UNFPA and UNICEF 2020b.
371. Wodon et al. 2017.
372. ECOSOC 2019a.
373. UNICEF et al. 2020.
374. World Bank 2017.
375. The Bangladesh national review report also discusses the National Action Plan for Ending Child Marriages (2018-2030) and various community awareness efforts, including through television shows.
376. Hunt et al. 2020.
377. LeBaron 2020.
378. ICRC and ASEAN 2018.



# Cluster 4

## Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Photos clockwise from left: Veronica Fonova, women's rights activist, leading Kazakhstan's first feminist rally, Kazakhstan. Photo: UN Women/ Executive elections for the Northern Islands Market Vendor Association, Vanuatu. UN Women/Murray Lloyd; Woman speaking at a panel in Sri Lanka. Photo: UN Women/Boost Metrics.



## Overview

Women's representation in national parliaments, local deliberative bodies and management positions is improving on average, but uneven progress, both within countries and regionally, indicates that achieving gender equality in decision-making is still a distant goal in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>379</sup> The region's average representation of women in national parliaments, while on the rise from 12.7 per cent in 2000 to 19.9 per cent in 2020, remains lower than the global average of 24.9 per cent in 2020.<sup>380</sup> While 11<sup>381</sup> countries had parliaments where women's representation was higher than the global average in 2020, in 13 countries, women hold fewer than 10 per cent of parliamentary seats. Eight of the latter are in the Pacific subregion.<sup>382</sup> That said, the region as a whole struggles to achieve an aggregate representation of women in national parliaments above 20 per cent.<sup>383</sup> A further issue is that effective gender mainstreaming within governments, including through gender-responsive budgeting, remains stunted by low levels of integration within and between government departments, insufficient political will and inadequate resourcing.

Women's participation in public life and decision-making takes place in different ways. Women participate as political candidates and elected representatives at the national, provincial and local levels, and as leaders in government institutions that create and implement public policies and programmes. Women serve in political parties and electoral commissions, cast votes in elections and more. In each of these roles, women must contend with discriminatory social norms around leadership qualities, time poverty and unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and unequal access to resources, training and social support required to meaningfully participate in public life, including in terms of legal protections and security in public spaces.<sup>384</sup>

The rise of extremism (discussed further in Cluster 5) and the accompanying backlash against women in public life, as well as gender fatigue, are serious challenges. Against this backdrop, civic spaces have been shrinking, while attacks on women in political and public life have been increasing.<sup>385</sup> Governments remain uniquely able to challenge discriminatory policies and practices, however, and the national

review reports indicated that member States are taking strides to encourage the participation of young and minority women in public life, including through capacity-building and skills development programmes, and by collecting and analysing data on women's political participation. Member States also reported on efforts to strengthen inclusive government frameworks, specifically through gender-responsive budgeting and partnerships with civil society organizations.

The Beijing Platform for Action clearly establishes that women's equal participation in public life and decision-making is a key lever for realizing all other elements of gender equality. Cluster 4, on participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions, continues the commitment to political equality established in CEDAW (Articles 7 to 9) and strengthened in the Beijing Platform for Action through critical areas of concern on women in public life and women in the media, as well as SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 16 on strong institutions. Under SDG 5, indicator 5.1.1 tracks legal frameworks to promote, enforce and monitor gender equality. Evidence from nine countries in Asia and the Pacific with data in 2018<sup>386</sup> suggests they are building legal frameworks to promote women in political and public life (Armenia and Australia), address violence against women (Australia, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Pakistan and Viet Nam), promote women's employment and economic benefits (Armenia, Australia and the Philippines), and promote gender equality in marriage and the family (Fiji, India and Viet Nam).<sup>387</sup>

The discussion under Cluster 4 focuses on the various facets of women's participation in public and political life and the gender responsiveness of institutions at the national level. Section 1, on women in public life and decision-making, provides an overview of women's representation in national parliaments and local deliberative bodies, as well as in managerial positions in the private sector. Section 2, on strengthening national gender machineries, reviews efforts to enhance the gender sensitivity of national gender machineries, implement gender-responsive budgeting, and build partnerships with civil society actors.

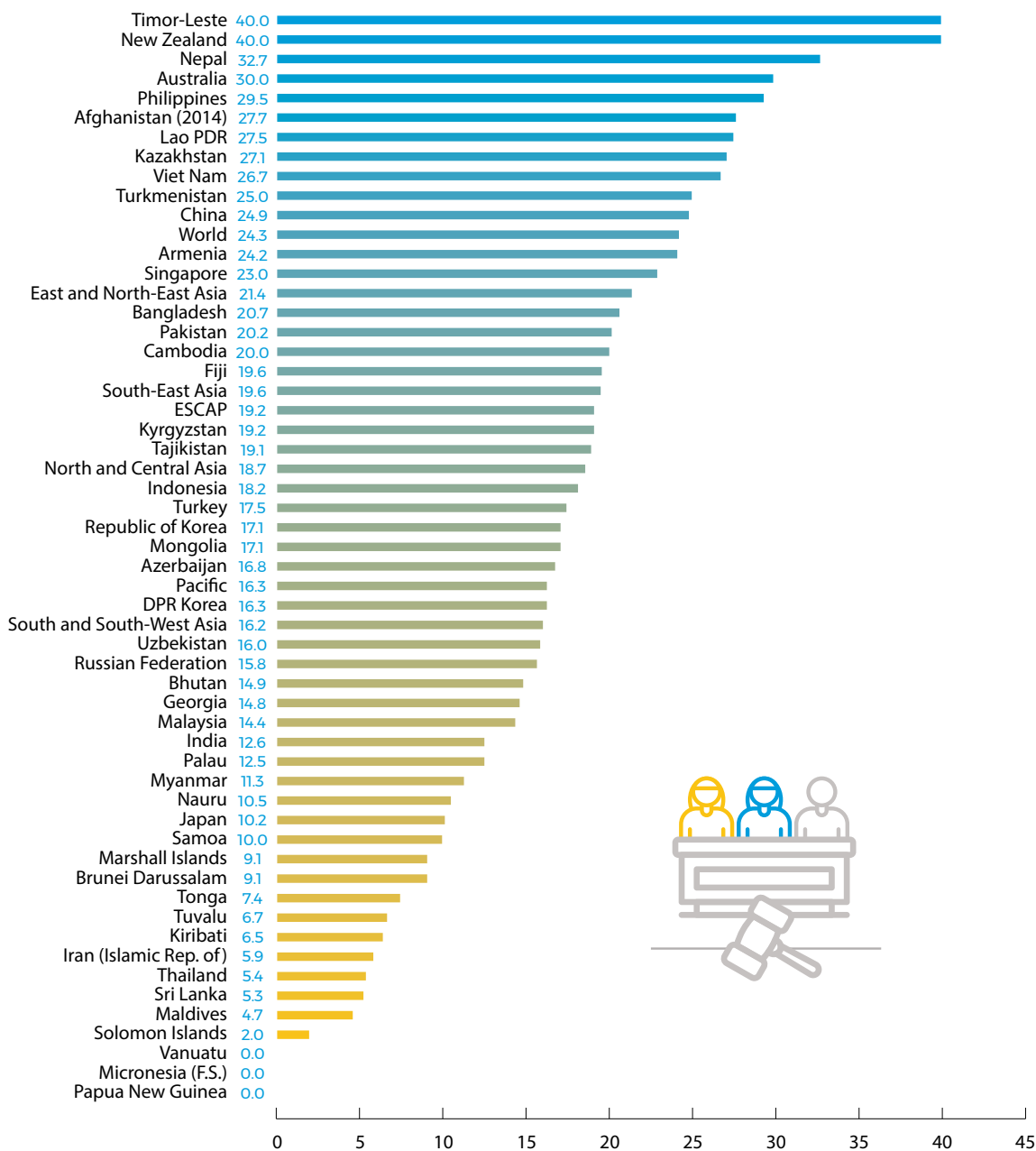
# Women in public life and decision-making

## Women in national parliaments

While women’s political participation in Asia and the Pacific has increased since 2000 on average, change has been uneven across countries. The increase was not enough to reach even the still

low global average of 24 per cent in national parliaments.<sup>388</sup> SDG data from 48 countries show that in 2019, New Zealand and Timor-Leste had the region’s highest shares of women in national parliaments, at 40 per cent in both countries<sup>389</sup> (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1 Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, 2019 or most recent year**

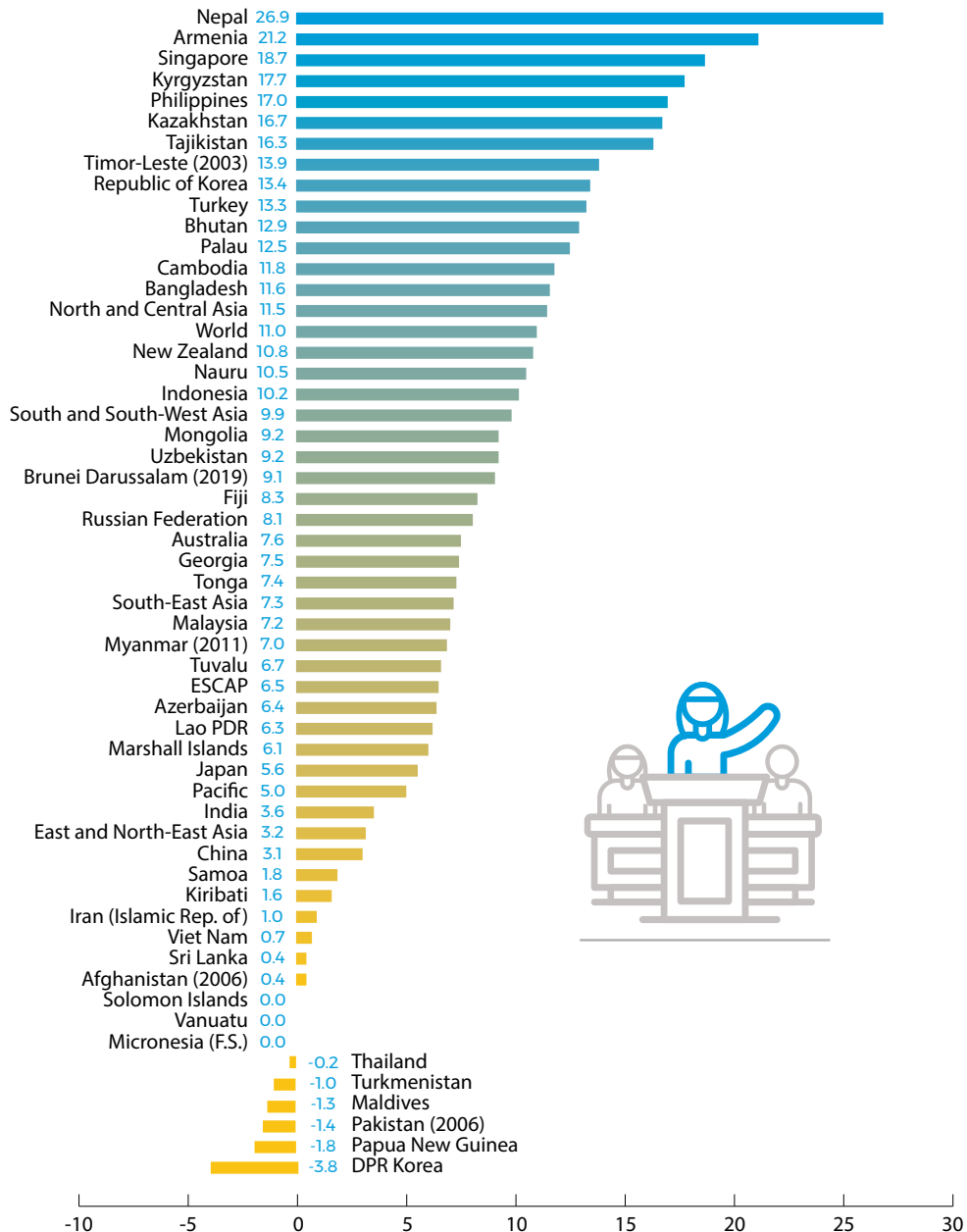


Source: ESCAP database, based on IPU and UN Women data, SDG 5.5.1. Accessed 10 September 2020.

In 2019, women held 20 per cent or more of seats in the national parliaments of 18 countries. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, Armenia and Nepal showed the greatest change, on average, in women's share of seats between 2000 and 2019, with gains of 21.2 per cent and 26.9 per cent, respectively. The overall regional figure indicates that, on average, the majority of countries are seeing progress in this area, but three countries saw no change (the Federated States of Micronesia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and six showed negative trends. While

these figures represent endpoints for the years 2000 and 2019 (without accounting for the changes in between), more detailed data highlight the uneven quality of progress across the region. More recently, seven countries at least doubled women's share of seats in parliament between 2014 and 2019, with five of the seven being in the Pacific (Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Samoa and Tonga).<sup>390</sup> In 2019, however, three Pacific countries (Federated States of Micronesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu) had no women in parliament at all.

**Figure 4.2 Changes in the proportion of seats held by women by country, 2000 to 2019**

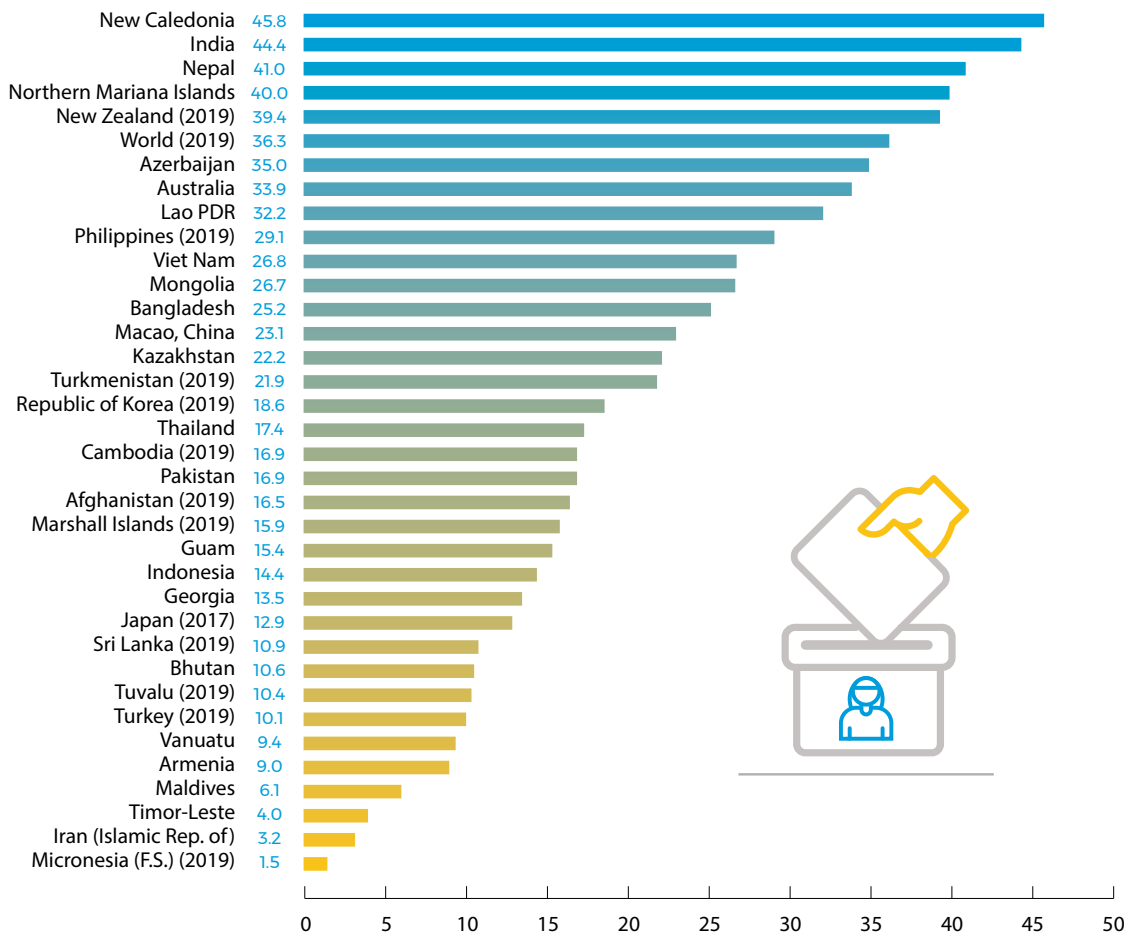


Source: Author calculation, ESCAP database, based on IPU and UN Women data, SDG 5.5.1. Accessed 10 September 2020.

While women’s representation in deliberative bodies of local government has seen improvement on average, such progress is not as notable as it is for women’s representation in national parliaments. Among the 35 countries with available data, women’s representation exceeds 20 per cent in the deliberative bodies of local governments in 15 countries, while 5 countries and territories

(India, New Caledonia, Nepal, Northern Mariana Islands and New Zealand) have surpassed the world average of 36.3 per cent (see Figure 4.3). Notably, Australia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, Turkmenistan and Viet Nam have achieved the 20 per cent threshold for women’s representation at both the local and national levels.

**Figure 4.3: Proportion of elected seats held by women in local deliberative bodies, 2020 or most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on IPU and UN Women data, SDG 5.5.1. Accessed 10 September 2020

Throughout the reporting period, countries made other notable achievements in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment in political life. In 2016, for example, the Marshall Islands elected its first female president. In 2018, all upper chambers in Asia saw an increase in women parliamentarians, including in Bhutan, India and Pakistan, with Bhutan doubling women’s representation from 8 to 16 per cent.<sup>391</sup> These achievements are likely to

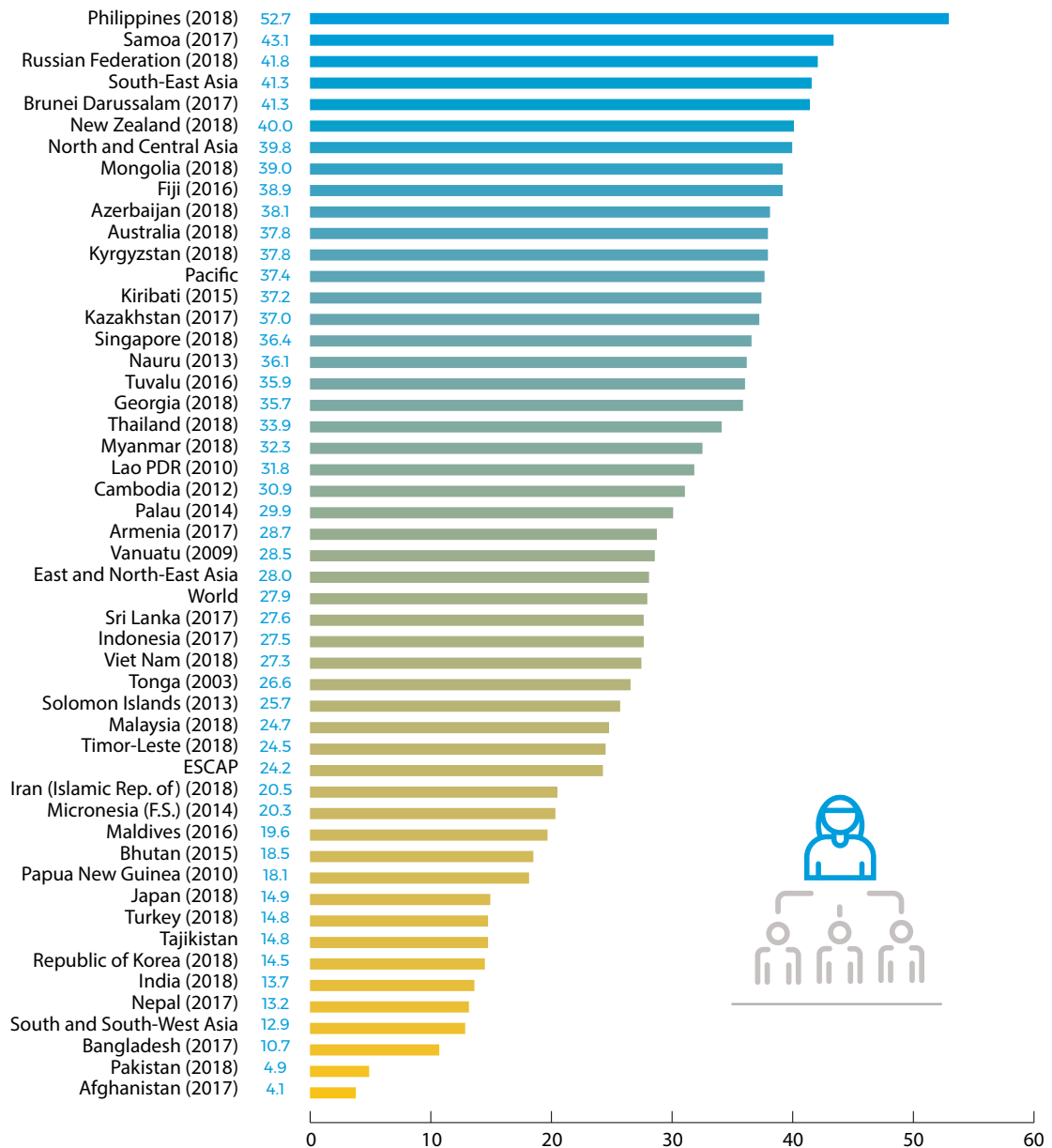
have follow-on impacts for women in public life in these countries, as the presence of women in all levels of government and the private sector has a positive impact on female voter turnout and political participation.<sup>392</sup> Unfortunately, changes are not happening quickly enough to set the region on track to meet the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda. Currently, only the North and Central Asia subregion is on track to realize these targets.<sup>393</sup>

Women continue to face challenges to their full participation in public life<sup>394</sup> driven by discriminatory social norms, which curtail efforts to promote women’s political participation as candidates, representatives or voters. Women’s time poverty due to unpaid care and domestic responsibilities (Cluster 1), perceptions of leadership as a male domain, and related threats of gender backlash and harassment (Cluster 3) are all factors constraining political participation.<sup>395</sup>

### Women in managerial positions

On average, women occupy 24.2 percent of managerial positions in the region, compared to the global average of 27.9 per cent (see Figure 4.4). All subregions except South and South-West Asia, however, have rates higher than the global average. In 2018, the Philippines had the highest proportion of women in managerial positions at over 50 per cent. There is significant variation, however, with women occupying less than 5 per cent of managerial seats in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Figure 4.4: Proportion of women in managerial positions, 2019 or most recent year



Source: ESCAP database, based on ILO data, SDG 5.5.2. Accessed 10 September 2020

Between 2014 and 2019, increases in the representation of women in managerial positions in the region, from 23.4 per cent in 2014 to 24.2 per cent in 2019, were driven by increases in all subregions. Countries in Asia and the Pacific have exceeded global gains since 2000, seeing an average progress rate of 3.4 per cent, compared with a world average of 2.6 per cent. East and North-East Asia has seen the largest increase since 2000 (8.9 per cent), followed by the Pacific and South-East Asia (5.2 per cent), North and Central Asia (4.9 per cent), and South and South-West Asia (0.9 per cent).<sup>396</sup>

As is true around the world, the share of women in managerial positions decreases at higher levels. Data from 19 countries show that the region is making progress in increasing the share of women in senior and middle-management positions. Between 2014 and 2019, global gains for women at these levels averaged 1.1 per cent, compared with 2.1 per cent in East and North-East Asia, 1.6 per cent in South-East Asia and 1.2 per cent in the Pacific. Trends from North and Central Asia and South and South-West Asia were also positive, but smaller (0.2 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively).

Women represent 10 per cent or less of senior managers and around 5 per cent of CEOs in publicly listed companies.<sup>397</sup> This trend continues despite the “business case” for increased women’s representation in managerial levels, which refers to the notion that gender diversity in workplace leadership can driver stronger business performance and results.<sup>398</sup> Research in the Republic of Korea, for example, associates higher numbers of female managers (chajangs) with higher profitability.<sup>399</sup> Many factors influence the extent to which women assume leadership roles in business, however, including obstacles to women’s recruitment, retention and promotion; gender barriers in the school-to-work transition (see Cluster 2); occupational segregation and the gender pay gap; and women’s unpaid care and domestic responsibilities (see Cluster 1).

## State responses to promote women’s participation in public life

In their national review reports, member States reported taking a variety of actions to promote women’s participation in public life and decision-making. The most common measures included encouraging the participation of minority and young women, implementing capacity-building and skills development, and collecting data on women’s political participation. Six countries (Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) reported taking actions in all three areas.

- ✓ **Promoting the participation of young and minority women:** Twenty-nine countries reported promoting the participation of minority and young women in political processes, including through sensitization and mentorship programmes. Grounded in the idea of the “role model effect”, the **Philippines** and **Thailand** have provided young women with opportunities to engage with community members and women leaders in order to foster more participation. **Malaysia** started a youth parliament in 2015 to encourage the participation of young people in decision-making and discussions on national development issues. **Fiji** launched an informational voter guide targeted at young women voters.
- ✓ **Capacity-building and skills development of young women, women candidates and women leaders:** Twenty-five countries reported implementing measures to build skills and capacities among young women and women in politics. For example, **Afghanistan’s** Women’s Leadership Development Programme provides six months of leadership training and development to young women. **Armenia** and **Kiribati** have launched initiatives to support women candidates in cultivating skills before and after elections.

- ✓ **Collecting and analysing data:** Twenty-three countries reported collecting and analysing data on women’s political participation, including on appointed and elected positions. **Japan** and the **Philippines** conducted research on factors that obstruct women’s political participation in order to identify conditions that enable participation in local and national assemblies.
- ✓ **Working with political parties:** While the questionnaire did not ask about engaging political parties, member States reported working

with political parties as they play an important role in women’s political participation.<sup>400</sup> This engagement took the form of formal gender quotas in party nominations (**Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives** and **Mongolia**) as well as informal or voluntary quotas (**Cambodia** and **Japan**). **Nepal’s** 2016 Constitution and Local Bodies’ Election (Procedure) Act and **Vanuatu’s** 2015 Municipalities Amendment Act No. 5 instituted quotas for women’s representation in each political party, including those elected in municipal, rural and local bodies.

## Spotlight on

### Temporary special measures to promote women in politics

A small number of countries in the region have established temporary special measures, such as quotas and capacity-building initiatives, to increase women’s representation in managerial and leadership positions. Legislated candidate quotas and reserved seats have had an important positive impact on women’s political representation. Even **Uzbekistan**, which has the lowest proportion of women in parliament among countries in the region with quotas, still has a higher proportion of women in parliamentary and/or local government seats than over 80 per cent of countries with no quotas.<sup>401</sup>

Rates of women’s representation in post-conflict countries tend to be higher than the regional average, including in **Timor-Leste** (38.5 per cent) and **Nepal** (32.7 per cent).<sup>402</sup> **Timor-Leste** addressed barriers to women’s political participation through a multifaceted approach. Starting in 2014, the Secretary of State for Equality and Inclusion, the country’s national gender machinery, held women’s congresses at the municipality level with the goal of identifying and training women with potential for leadership.

These efforts prepared municipalities for implementation of the Electoral Law for the Village (established in 2016), which stipulated that at least one woman must stand for election in each village. The Government credits this approach with the increased participation of women in village political life, which has risen from 2 per cent in 2009 to 5 per cent in 2016.<sup>403</sup>

Quotas alone, however, are insufficient. This strategy requires complementary actions, such as placement mechanisms or sanctions to enhance implementation.<sup>404</sup> Research in South-East Asia, for example, suggests that quotas have not generated meaningful or intended outcomes because the structural and institutional barriers that discourage women from pursuing political office remain unaddressed.<sup>405</sup> Some national review reports support this. The Government of **Indonesia**, for example, reports that the lack of an effective implementation framework stymies the transformative potential of its quota system.<sup>406</sup> Similarly, the national review report from **Kyrgyzstan** noted that it is common for women to be “ousted” from political parties following elections.<sup>407</sup> The Government responded by enacting a special measure to ensure that their seats are filled by other women.<sup>408</sup>

*Source: Governments of Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Uzbekistan, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

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### Multi-level approaches to women's participation

The Government of **Tonga** is implementing programmes to increase women's political participation through multiple levels of engagement. In the 2010 elections, women comprised 10 out of 147 candidates, or 6.8 per cent.<sup>409</sup> In 2014, a Practice Parliament for Women was carried out to expose women to parliamentary processes and inspire wider participation in lawmaking. The programme was specifically intended to address discriminatory social norms that position men as appropriate leaders and decision-makers.<sup>410</sup> Following this event, women represented 15 per cent of candidates in the 2014 national elections. A second Practice Parliament was held in 2018 for youth.

In 2016, political candidacy trainings were integrated into International Women's Day celebrations. Following this event, local elections saw women candidates comprising 17 per cent of the total candidate pool. While still a low share, it was the highest to date. These elections resulted in the first elected female officers at the district and town levels. In 2017, King Tupou VI appointed Tonga's first woman Law Lord (a national judicial adviser), signalling top-down support for women's roles in political and public life.

Taken together, these initiatives indicate a multifaceted effort to promote women's participation and leadership in public life. The Practice Parliament and political candidacy trainings simultaneously tackle discriminatory social norms around leadership by identifying women as appropriate participants in political arenas, and addressing capacity development issues by offering technical training and knowledge required for leadership positions. The public visibility of these events, along with the clear and supportive actions by King Tupou VI, have sent powerful messages that can shift discriminatory social norms otherwise insisting on women's exclusion.

*Source: Government of Tonga, national review report.*

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**In 2014, a Practice Parliament for Women was carried out to expose women to parliamentary processes and inspire wider participation in lawmaking.**

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## Spotlight on

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### Promoting women's voter participation in Pakistan

Elections in **Pakistan** can be contested or subject to a revote if women do not comprise at least 10 percent of voters casting ballots in each constituency. In response to low women's voter turnout for the elections in 2013, Pakistan's Election Commission developed and implemented a plan of gender mainstreaming targeting women voters in addition to reforming electoral processes and legislation. The Election Commissions Strategic Action Plan (2014-2017) included the establishment of a Gender and Disability Electoral Working Group at the national, provincial and local levels. The group assesses election experiences for women and other marginalized groups, and provides recommendations for improving inclusion in subsequent elections.

As a result of these efforts, reforms were enacted for the 2018 elections to encourage women to participate in general elections, including through ensuring gender-responsive polling stations that offer adequate sanitation facilities, are secure and accessible for voters of all abilities and identities, and are staffed by female personnel and members of the security forces who have completed gender sensitization trainings.

These efforts illustrate a recognition of how discriminatory social norms and perceptions of women (and others) in public spaces can threaten their ability to exercise their right to vote.

The Election Commission is also campaigning to increase women's voter registration and participation through public outreach and awareness raising. Through partnerships with media and the use of mobile vans to provide information and opportunities for voter registration, the commission is reaching out to women in rural and remote areas to ensure that they have access to information about elections and voting options, and can register to vote.

By taking a gender mainstreaming approach to its operations, the commission is affirming that women voters are key to gender-responsive governments, and that women's voting opportunities and political participation are linked to their capacity to be agents of change in national development.

*Source: Government of Pakistan, national review report.*

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**By taking a gender mainstreaming approach to its operations, the commission is affirming that women voters are key to gender-responsive governments.**

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A woman raises her hand at an event in Kabul, Afghanistan.  
Photo: UNAMA/Fardin Waezi.

### Going further to promote women's participation in public life

The presence or absence of a formal or informal framework for women's equal representation in political and public life is not the only factor influencing their participation. Creating gender-responsive political processes requires establishing measures to build women's capacities, counter discriminatory norms, address violence against women in political and public life,<sup>411</sup> and remove infrastructural barriers.<sup>412</sup> A UN Women study on the characteristics and drivers of violence against women in politics and public life in **India, Nepal** and **Pakistan** found that patriarchal attitudes, a culture of silence and a near denial of the existence of the issue in the wider political system intersect to keep such violence outside of popular discourse.<sup>413</sup> Measures are needed to address the findings of studies such as these. Unfortunately, only four national review reports (**Afghanistan, Bhutan, Pakistan** and **Tuvalu**) included actions addressing this problem.

Going further to promote women as leaders requires ensuring that legal frameworks and formal policies tackle discriminatory social norms and gendered dynamics in societies and institutions.<sup>414</sup>

In **Georgia** and the **Marshall Islands**, efforts to pass quota protections for women's representation in national political bodies have been defeated. And in **Kyrgyzstan** and the **Solomon Islands**, entrenched norms concerning women's roles at home shape voter behaviour in ways that reduce women's electability. Further, women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities restrict their ability to participate in politics. To advance women's participation, **Bhutan** introduced Mobile Polling Booths in the 2018 elections that increased accessibility to voting facilities. In the **Philippines**, the Commission on Elections (Resolution No. 10110, 2016) requires daycare centres to be open on election days to encourage female voters with childcare responsibilities to vote.

Investments in quality public childcare to help reduce women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities (Cluster 1) and investments in safe public transportation (Cluster 6) to address mobility barriers, especially for women in rural areas and in lower socioeconomic groups, are also needed. Measures must be designed bearing in mind the barriers that arise when gender intersects with other potentially discriminatory factors, such as income level, caste, ethnicity, religion, education, geographical location and age, among others.

# Strengthening national gender machineries

## National gender machineries

National gender machineries usually refer to formal government structures assigned to promote gender equality and/or improve the status and rights of women, including through a women's ministry or other government department. Effective national gender machineries enable States to develop and implement their commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda. Yet the capacity of these machineries to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment considerations and priorities throughout all government policies and actions remains weak across Asia and the Pacific.

In 2016, UN Women reported that most national gender machineries in the region require stronger mandates and more resources.<sup>415</sup> National review reports confirmed that national gender machineries lack high-level support, and are underresourced and siloed, all issues constraining their authority and capacity to effectively drive progress on gender equality and women's empowerment. As a result, gender equality and women's empowerment are more likely to be approached through stand-alone technical projects rather than through significant tranches of work that apply a gender analysis across government programmes and systems.<sup>416</sup>

The national review report for the Solomon Islands, for example, indicated that the national gender machinery is increasingly reliant on donor funding, making sustainable, long-term planning difficult.<sup>417</sup> Similarly, the Government of Vanuatu reported that a lack of financing and political will constrain monitoring and evaluation of existing initiatives, undercutting evidence-based policies.<sup>418</sup> The Government of Tuvalu reported that the budgetary allocation for the Gender Affairs Department is only sufficient to cover human resource and operating costs, so project funds must be solicited from donors, which makes sustainable and strategic planning difficult.

## Gender-responsive budgeting

Gender-responsive budgeting is a powerful tool for gender mainstreaming as it ensures that the benefits of government actions reach women and girls as much as men and boys. Rather than a pure accounting exercise, gender-responsive budgeting is an ongoing process that prioritizes gender perspectives in policy, planning and programme development, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. It ensures that gender commitments are translated into budgetary commitments, on both the expenditure and revenue sides.<sup>419</sup> The Asia-Pacific Declaration emphasizes institutionalizing gender equality and women's empowerment in all processes, including financial management. The call for gender-responsive budgeting was echoed in the global 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development.<sup>420</sup>

Progress on the adoption and implementation of gender-responsive budgeting in Asia and the Pacific has been uneven. In some cases, countries with more than 10 years of experience with it (e.g., Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nepal and the Republic of Korea) have had the time and space to develop tools to integrate it into government processes. Other countries even with a decade of work are still calibrating their tools (e.g., Fiji, Pakistan, Samoa, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam).<sup>421</sup> This calibration will reflect the particular circumstances of each country, for example, by establishing a baseline gender analysis of the accessibility and impact of public goods and services for men and women, or through an accounting of whether sufficient resources are being committed to gender equality and women's empowerment departments and programmes.

Some persistent challenges exist even where gender-responsive budgeting has been in place for a decade or more. These include lack of political will and technical capacity, and national gender machineries that wield insufficient influence over changes in public financial management principles, practices and budgetary allocations that could advance gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>422</sup> Some countries, such as Malaysia

and Thailand, introduced gender-responsive budgeting in the early 2000s but have not seen the approach translate into consistently positive results for women and girls, which may stem from a lack of centralized support.<sup>423</sup>

## Partnerships with civil society organizations

Partnerships between governments and women's civil society organizations are key to channelling the perspectives, experiences and priorities of women and girls into government agendas and decision-making processes. Such partnerships need to be strengthened, such as through closer collaboration, to reinforce evidence-based prioritization, planning, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Effective efforts depend on ensuring and safeguarding spaces for civil society to engage with the government and other development stakeholders. These organizations also need access to more resources to fulfil their roles.

While many countries in the region have vibrant civil societies, the space has been "shrinking" for some.<sup>424</sup> Actions taken against civil society organizations negatively impact women's human rights and space for advocacy. They undercut calls for government accountability to commitments, hinder the provision of evidence (including data) on ways of advancing women's human rights, and constrain collaboration in responding to articulated needs. Women's civil society organizations have played critical parts as service providers, especially for marginalized women, yet concerns have been expressed about state-controlled surveillance and censorship, including of social media platforms used for advocacy.<sup>425</sup>

Strengthening and expanding partnerships and collaboration with women's civil society organizations is crucial in building gender-responsive institutions. Twenty-eight out of 45 countries surveyed reported having instituted formal mechanisms for including government and non-governmental stakeholders in monitoring related to the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Only 16 of these countries reported establishing mechanisms to ensure that women and girls from marginalized groups could

participate and have their concerns reflected in these processes, however. Moving forward, such mechanisms will need to be strengthened to accelerate inclusive progress on gender equality and women's empowerment.

## State responses to strengthen national gender machineries

The national review reports showed that between 2014 and 2019, member States adopted the following measures to strengthen national gender machineries and the work of civil society organizations.

- ✓ **National action plans for gender equality:** Thirty countries reported having a national action plan for gender equality. **Samoa** developed and implemented the Samoa Women Shaping Development programme to strengthen institutional capacities and implementation mechanisms within the national gender machinery.
- ✓ **Gender-responsive budgeting:** Fourteen countries reported implementing gender-responsive budgeting. **Bhutan** bolstered existing processes through gender assessments and the mainstreaming of gender-responsive budgeting throughout key ministries. **Bangladesh** implemented policies to improve gender-responsive budgeting at the local government level. Fifteen countries indicated that gender-responsive budgeting is a priority for the coming five years.
- ✓ **Supporting women's civil society organizations and media networks:** Nine countries<sup>426</sup> reported supporting women's civil society organizations and media networks. This number is low, in light of concerns over shrinking space for civil society and women's organizing. Countries that reported actions included **Pakistan**, which stated it had extended protections to women's human rights defenders through collaborations with national civil society organizations, and **Afghanistan**, which described strengthening partnerships between civil society and provincial government offices.

## Going further to strengthen national gender machineries

Going forward, actions geared towards implementing gender-responsive institutional mechanisms, gender-responsive budgeting and temporary special measures are necessary to ensure that appropriate frameworks are in place to drive progress in line with the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Above all, political will is needed to strengthen national gender machineries, both in terms of allocating the financing and human resources they need to do their work well, and in enabling collaboration with other government institutions to achieve gender mainstreaming.

With 15 member States indicating that gender-responsive budgeting will be a priority in the coming five years, efforts should focus on strengthening technical capacities and resources to support institutionalization and sustainability. Cumulatively, the reports illustrate that member States in the region have an underdeveloped understanding of the purpose and practice of gender-responsive budgeting, incorrectly seeing it as mainly reporting total spending on programmes that target women. Partnerships with international financial institutions and United Nations entities such as the World Bank or UN Women, and regional organizations such as ASEAN, as well as cooperation with other member States, will be important to ensure successful capacity-building and sustainable implementation of gender-based budgeting.

Propelling progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda requires strengthening multistakeholder partnerships, including with international organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector, religious institutions and academia, among others. Information in the reports pointed to how multistakeholder partnerships can benefit women. In **Afghanistan**, for example, the Government, media organizations and civil society groups are working together to promote women's political participation. In **Fiji**, bilateral partnerships have secured sound technical expertise in gender-responsive budgeting practices. **Georgia** is making specific efforts to include civil society gender focal points as critical actors in gender mainstreaming at the local level.



Participants of a 16 Days of Activism bicycle rally, Maldives.  
Photo: UN Women/Lara L. Hill.

A few member States enumerated formal mechanisms they are using to facilitate the meaningful inclusion of women from hard to reach communities in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda. There were some notable examples of diverse mechanisms. For instance, **Afghanistan** reported holding meetings in different regions, including in remote and rural areas, to ensure geographical representation. The **Philippines** described efforts to ensure that rural women, migrant workers and union members can participate. **Bangladesh's** Citizens Commission (consisting of 57 civil society organizations and women's groups) and **New Zealand's** International Women's Caucus (including groups of refugee and indigenous women) offered promising examples of how multistakeholder engagement efforts can shift from "one off" to more institutionalized forms. These formal commissions are regularly consulted during the development of national laws and policies.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Increases in the participation and representation of women in political and public life are notable across the region. Yet in all countries, women continue to contend with discriminatory social norms that hinder their access to public spaces, especially as voters, candidates, leaders and managers. To counter rising forces that threaten the reversal of gains women have made in political and public life, there is an urgent need to invest in national gender machineries, gender-responsive budgeting and partnerships with women's civil society organizations. Creating and

strengthening partnerships between national gender machineries and women's networks, as well as with other relevant stakeholders, will be key to making further progress.

The following recommendations to jumpstart faster and broader progress in the region are based on the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda, analysis of available SDG data and the Asia-Pacific Declaration. They seek to ensure that women fully enjoy participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions.



**Enhance partnerships and collaboration, especially with the women's civil society organizations, to better inform, develop, implement and monitor gender-responsive policies and programmes** that address discriminatory social norms, attitudes and practices impeding women's human rights more broadly, and that also specifically promote women's participation in public and political life.



**Bolster the positioning of and human and financial resources** for national gender machineries, and prioritize and facilitate intragovernmental collaboration that furthers the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment across all government institutions, including through the establishment of gender-responsive budgeting mechanisms and capacity, in sustainable ways.



**Strengthen quantitative and qualitative data collection** on women's participation in political life (SDG indicator 5.5.1), including data on all levels of political, civic and economic life, and on women's voting behaviours.

379. UNDP 2012.
380. ESCAP database, SDG 5.5.1, seats held by women in national parliaments (percentage of seats), 2020. Accessed 10 September 2020.
381. Afghanistan (27 per cent), Australia (30.5 per cent), Kazakhstan (27.1 per cent), Lao PDR (27.5 per cent), Nepal (32.7 per cent), New Zealand (40.8 per cent), the Philippines (28 per cent), Timor-Leste (38.5 per cent), Turkmenistan (25.0 per cent), Uzbekistan (32 per cent) and Viet Nam (26.7). Ibid.
382. Brunei Darussalam (9.1 per cent), Iran (Islamic Republic of) (5.9 per cent), Japan (9.9 per cent), Kiribati (6.5 per cent), Maldives (4.6 per cent), Marshall Islands (6.1 per cent), Micronesia (Federated States of) (0 per cent), Papua New Guinea (0 per cent), Solomon Islands (6.1 per cent), Sri Lanka (5.3 per cent), Tonga (7.4 per cent), Tuvalu (6.3 per cent) and Vanuatu (0 per cent). Ibid.
383. IPU 2018.
384. ESCAP 2019f.
385. ESCAP 2019g.
386. Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam.
387. ESCAP database, SDG 5.1.1, legal frameworks on gender equality, 2018. Accessed 18 October 2020.
388. ESCAP 2019g.
389. ESCAP database, SDG 5.5.1, seats held by women in national parliament (percentage of seats).
390. The remaining two countries are Bangladesh and Myanmar.
391. IPU 2018.
392. ESCAP 2019f.
393. ESCAP 2020.
394. ESCAP 2019i.
395. Ibid.
396. ESCAP database, SDG 5.5.2, proportion of women in managerial positions, 2019. Accessed 10 September 2020.
397. ILO 2015.
398. Barsh and Yee 2011.
399. Siegel, Pyun and Cheon 2019.
400. ESCAP 2019i.
401. Ibid.
402. ADB and UN Women 2018.
403. Government of Timor-Leste, national review report.
404. IPU 2018.
405. Choi 2019.
406. Government of Indonesia, national review report.
407. Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, national review report.
408. ESCAP 2019f.
409. See: [http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2317\\_10.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2317_10.htm).
410. Kingdom of Tonga, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Women's Affairs Division 2019.
411. Violence against women in politics and public life is defined as "the connotation of any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public life or private life." UN Women 2014c.
412. DFAT and the Asia Foundation 2018.
413. UN Women 2014c.
414. ESCAP 2019f.
415. UN Women 2016d.
416. Abou-Habib et al. 2020.
417. Government of the Solomon Islands, national review report.
418. Government of Vanuatu, national review report.
419. ESCAP 2019a. The full Declaration is available in Annex 3.
420. Gender-responsive budgeting can include: (1) using gender-responsive analysis to understand access to public goods and services by female and male citizens, and the impact that this access (or lack thereof) has on their welfare, (2) adjusting expenditure and revenue collection in ways that strengthen gender equality, and (3) ensuring adequate financing for implementation of laws and politics intended to promote gender equality. See Minoletti 2019.
421. UN Women 2016b.
422. Minoletti 2019.
423. UN Women 2016b.
424. ICNL 2019.
425. ICNL 2020.
426. Australia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Solomon Islands and Tonga.



# Cluster 5

## Peaceful and inclusive societies

Photos clockwise from top left: Woman at work in Rohingya refugee camp, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Allison Joyce; UN Peacekeeping nurse in south Lebanon. Photo: UN Laura Abrantes; APSTL prepping interviewees for interview about conflict transformation, Timor-Leste. Photo: UN Women/Aisling Walsh.



## Overview

Globally, instability, conflicts and humanitarian crises have become more complex and increasingly protracted since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995.<sup>427</sup> In 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1325 to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; to recognize the undervalued and underutilized contributions that women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peacebuilding; and to stress the importance of women's equal and full participation as active agents in peace and security.<sup>428</sup> Building from these principles, resolution 1325 serves as the foundation for the growing international normative agenda on women, peace and security. This agenda has been strengthened and clarified through subsequent United Nations Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1820 (2008), which recognizes sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war, and, more recently, resolution 2242 (2015), which calls for broadening women's access to justice and recognizes the role of the women, peace and security agenda in countering violent extremism and terrorism. Resolution 2467 (2019) calls on States to address root cause of sexual violence, including structural gender inequality and discrimination. Despite these measures, women remain underrepresented in peace processes globally.<sup>429</sup>

As a result of the increasing complexity and protraction of conflicts and humanitarian crises, more people are being affected by instability than ever before with particular consequences for women and girls. At the end of 2019, countries in Asia and the Pacific had an estimated 7.8 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations, representing 38 per cent of the global population of refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the largest refugee population in the world.<sup>430</sup>

Domestic sources of insecurity, including violent extremism and attacks on the rights of women and girls, pose serious threats to the progress of gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>431</sup> In response to these dynamics, member States in the region are strengthening the implementation of the multifaceted women, peace and security agenda within national policy and legislative frameworks, for example, through promoting women's participation in peace processes, and enhancing the capacity of national judicial and security sectors.

The Beijing Platform for Action<sup>432</sup> noted that “[i]n a world of continuing instability and violence, the implementation of cooperative approaches to peace and security is urgently needed”.<sup>433</sup> It highlighted that all women, including those displaced by conflict, violence and instability, need to be empowered, included and represented at all levels of decision-making, and in all efforts to prevent and resolve of conflict. Complementing SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, Cluster 5 tracks actions by member States to increase the leadership, representation and participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and humanitarian actions. It also considers the implementation of judicial and non-judicial accountability for human rights violations, including violations of the rights of the girl child.

This section focuses on peaceful and inclusive societies as they relate to gender equality and women's empowerment. Section 1, on the women, peace and security agenda, provides an overview of implementation and gender perspectives on conflict and insecurity. It also looks at some of the gender dimensions of violent extremism. Section 2 highlights trends in the region related to women's inclusion and representation in the justice, security and defense sectors.

# The women, peace and security agenda

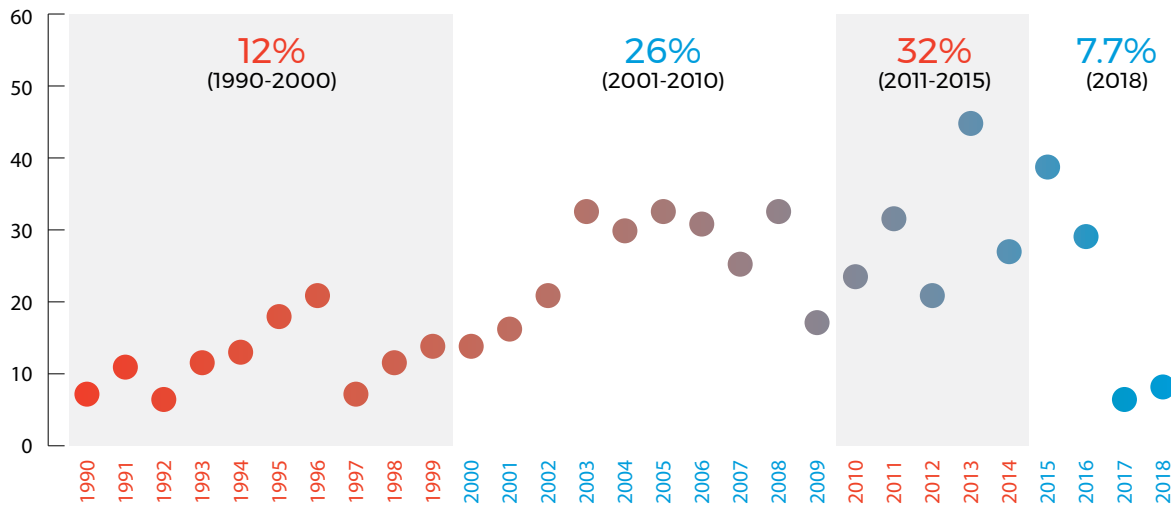
## Implementing the agenda

Despite growing international commitments to integrate gender-responsive perspectives and approaches to conflict prevention and resolution, this continues to be a challenge. Implementation of the women, peace and security agenda has been criticized for prioritizing the protection of women and girls over their meaningful participation, in ways that downplay women’s key contributions as rights-bearers and right-protectors in peace and security processes.<sup>434</sup> Women play critical roles as rights-protectors when they participate in the mediation of peace agreements, and globally, quantitative

analysis shows that women’s participation in peace negotiations contributes to the quality and durability of peace.<sup>435</sup>

Peace agreements signed by female delegates tend to put more emphasis on political reform and increased implementation of reform provisions.<sup>436</sup> Yet during the 2014 to 2019 reporting period, global long-term increases in women’s participation in peace processes have been reversed. As shown in Figure 5.1, only 4 out of 52 peace agreements globally included gender-responsive provisions in 2018. This underscores gaps in the inclusion of women at all levels and stages of peace negotiations.<sup>437</sup>

**Figure 5.1 Proportion of peace agreements globally with provisions on women, girls and gender issues (1991-2018)**



Source: University of Edinburgh, PA-X Peace Agreement Research Database.<sup>438</sup>

National action plans are important tools for operationalizing the women, peace and security agenda.<sup>439</sup> They also promote the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda by providing mechanisms that meaningfully integrate the interlinked agendas of development, human rights and peace.<sup>440</sup> Through the plans, governments express their commitments to promoting women’s equal participation in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.<sup>441</sup>

As of October 2020, 17 countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted national action plans for women, peace and security.<sup>442</sup> When plans are localized, they can strengthen the impact of peace and security policies.<sup>443</sup> For instance, Nepal’s Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction has established local peace committees to support peacebuilding activities at the district, municipal and village levels. These committees have instituted a 33 per cent quota for women’s representation and strive to secure the inclusion of

female ex-combatants and conflict-affected women, including those who were displaced, widowed or orphaned, and women and girls with disabilities. These populations were otherwise largely excluded from peace negotiations.<sup>444</sup> Nepal is also directly addressing female ex-combatants experiences of being left out of “male-centric” reintegration programmes and reducing their feelings of resentment at being pushed back into traditional gender roles after the conflict ended.<sup>445</sup>

A critical review of nine national action plans in the region showed that all included practical gender needs (related to food, shelter, work and water, etc.). They also reflected strategic gender needs (such as those related to inequalities in decision-making power and control, and ownership of critical resources), to differing degrees, with greater priority given to practical and institutional needs.<sup>446</sup> For example, a review of the plans from Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines and Timor-Leste found that actions related to addressing conflict-related sexual violence varied from 22 per cent of all proposed measures in Indonesia to 3 per cent in Timor-Leste.<sup>447</sup> Furthermore, there is a lack of substantive information and data on conflict-related sexual violence, including forced pregnancy and maternity, and on the needs of victims and their children.<sup>448</sup> This suggests that national action plans need to be more inclusive and reoriented around the specific rights and needs of women and girls.

## Violent extremism

There is a strong correlation between gender equality and the empowerment of women, and peaceful societies. Quantitative analysis has found that gender inequality increases the likelihood that a country will have internal conflict, and that the higher the level of gender inequality, the greater the likelihood of internal conflict.<sup>449</sup> This is supported by quantitative analysis that gender equality is associated with lower levels of armed conflict within a country, and that “more equal societies are less likely to go from peace to civil war and more likely to enter peace if a civil war is ongoing, compared with less equal societies”.<sup>450</sup> Given these findings, the women, peace and security agenda has been firmly established as a tool for combating violent extremism, and even codified as such in United Nations Security Council resolution 2245 (2015).

Violent extremism poses both direct and indirect threats to the women, peace and security agenda, and thus, to gender equality and women’s empowerment more broadly. Throughout the Pacific, violent extremism, along with political unrest and instability, is a barrier to peaceful sustainable development.<sup>451</sup> Direct attacks on the rights of women and girls have been identified as a “common thread in the strategies of extremist groups”.<sup>452</sup> Indirectly, States often impose restrictions on civil and political rights when countering violent extremism, with gendered consequences for women’s security in the household and community.<sup>453</sup>

The relationship between misogyny and the gender dynamics of violent extremism are important to understanding and responding to the women, peace and security agenda in the region.<sup>454</sup> Survey research in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines found that hostile and sexist attitudes towards women and support for violence against women are the factors most strongly associated with support for violent extremist groups.<sup>455</sup> Given the global trend of rising extremism,<sup>456</sup> recognizing such links is critical. Actions to build gender-sensitivity and awareness among national security actors and police are increasingly important to reducing insecurity for women and girls. Implementation of the women, peace and security agenda through local, participatory and inclusive processes can help decentralize masculine, statist and militarized images of security, and build gender awareness.<sup>457</sup> Women’s multifaceted contributions to political and public life, as discussed in Cluster 4, are important for promoting institutional behaviours and policies that are gender responsive. Women’s human rights defenders play a critical role in this process, yet they often face violent reprisals and backlash (see Cluster 3). In 2019, the United Nations Security Council recognized the contributions of and perils faced by women’s human rights defenders when it adopted resolution 2493. It strongly encouraged member States to create safe and enabling societies for civil society, including formal and informal women leaders in communities, women peacebuilders, political actors, and those who protect and promote human rights.<sup>458</sup>

## Refugees and IDPs

Countries in Asia and the Pacific are both sources of refugees (e.g., Afghanistan and Myanmar) and host countries for refugees (e.g., Iran (Islamic Republic of), Pakistan and Turkey). The region has experienced a 3 per cent overall increase in the number of refugees, mostly due to the outflow of 700,000 stateless refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh beginning in August 2017.<sup>459</sup> The increase also reflects the protracted plight of Afghan refugees in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.<sup>460</sup> In 2020, UNHCR reported that Turkey was host to the largest number of refugees in the world; an estimated 1 in every 23 people there was a refugee.<sup>461</sup> The total refugee population is estimated at 4 million, with 3.6 million from the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>462</sup>

Women and girls who are refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) experience gendered insecurities, including increased risk of abuse, exploitation and violence. Research on Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, for example, reveals high rates of violence against women and girls, reduced mobility and a lack of decision-making power in households.<sup>463</sup>

Conflict and humanitarian crises hinder progress for women and girls on a range of economic and social indicators, including access to food, education and health care.<sup>464</sup> The collapse of institutions and safe spaces, and the breakdown of community and family bonds, also produce and exacerbate vulnerabilities for women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.<sup>465</sup> Research in Georgia found that diminished economic livelihoods can act as a trigger for violence against women and girls during conflict and post-conflict moments, limit women's access to services, and reduce women's options to exit violent situations.<sup>466</sup>

For girls who are IDPs or refugees, and who face violence and discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity and disability, among other factors, there are additional protection gaps. IDP girls are less likely to be in school than IDP boys, are less likely to have access to health services (including sexual and reproductive health care) than adult women, confront greater risks of violence against women and girls, face restricted freedom of movement, and are at a higher risk of early, child or forced marriage.<sup>467</sup>

In countries with refugee and/or IDP communities, women-led and feminist civil society organizations that represent and/or form part of IDP communities are often the least likely to receive resources to effectively organize and advocate for their community's needs,<sup>468</sup> leaving such communities at increased risk of insecurity.

### State responses to implement the women, peace and security agenda

The national review reports indicated that member States are taking actions to integrate women, peace and security commitments into national and interministerial policy, planning and monitoring frameworks. They are strengthening related legislation and promoting women's participation in peace processes as well as humanitarian and crisis response. Some of the most common areas of action are as follows.

- ✓ **Integrating women, peace and security commitments into national policy and legislative frameworks:** Twenty countries reported adopting national action plans to guide implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. Some countries adopted a second or third generation plan during the reporting period. Eighteen countries reported taking action to integrate women, peace and security commitments into key national and interministerial policy, planning and monitoring frameworks.

- ✓ **Promoting and supporting women's leadership and participation in peace processes and in implementing peace agreements:** Seventeen countries described actions to promote and support women's leadership and meaningful participation. The **Republic of Korea** has ensured women comprise 15 per cent of participants in the inter-Korean dialogues.<sup>469</sup> The **Philippines** in 2014 saw its first woman peace negotiator signing a major peace agreement, one that ended 45 years of conflict.<sup>470</sup>
- ✓ **Increasing public awareness of the women, peace and security agenda:** Ten countries reported using communications strategies to increase awareness. Across the countries of the **Pacific** subregion, femLINKpacific,

a regional women's media network committed to promoting the agenda, plays a key role in communicating it to communities. The network also reports the views, concerns and challenges of women from remote and rural areas as well as women with disabilities to policymakers and officials in the Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Committee.

- ✓ **Protections for women's human rights defenders:** Seven member States noted actions to protect women's human rights defenders. **Pakistan** has identified them as a target group for hate crimes, including through trolling and digital abuse. **Thailand's** 4th National Human Rights Plan (2019-2023) lists human rights defenders as a target group requiring enhanced protection.

## Spotlight on

### Localizing the women, peace, and security agenda to combat violent extremism in Indonesia

**Indonesia** has taken steps to localize the women, peace and security agenda that respond to security needs at the subnational level. In 1998, the country established a National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Konbas Perempuan*). It is tasked with measuring and analysing annual trends in systemic violence against women that result from state violence, including violence related to armed conflict, trafficking, poverty and socioeconomic policies. The commission prioritizes addressing women's human rights violations related to both armed conflict and domestic violence, with a particular focus on village women living in poverty.<sup>472</sup>

In addition to this national institution, the Government has supported subnational governments to enact community peace programmes, along with educational initiatives on crisis management, conflict resolution and reconciliation in universities across the country.

As part of efforts to establish local mechanisms for preventing violent conflict, the Asia Muslim Action Network established the Women's School for Peace. It encourages women to take strategic roles in public life; connects progressive voices for social justice at the local, national and global levels; and advocates for policies that promote inclusivity, gender equality, justice and non-violence.<sup>473</sup>

These efforts represent a promising example of how the women, peace and security agenda can bolster efforts to build security through changing social norms, and building conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation skills at the community level. Indonesia's combined programming, which includes both government leadership and community-driven actions, creates an environment for implementing the women, peace and security agenda in ways that resonate at the community level.

*Source: Government of Indonesia, national review report.*

## Spotlight on

### Harnessing national gender machineries and working with civil society to implement national action plans on women, peace and security

During the 2014-2019 review period, **Georgia** adopted two consecutive national action plans for women, peace and security (2016-2017 and 2018-2020). The plans were crafted with insights generated through numerous consultations with diverse stakeholders and civil society organizations, and lessons gleaned from previous plans.

As part of implementation, the Government hosts regular information-sharing meetings with participants of the Geneva International Discussions, civil society organizations and women's rights activists to promote collaboration and monitor gendered forms of insecurity.

Particular attention is focused on the priorities and needs of IDP women and villagers living in and around occupied towns, as they relate to ongoing peace negotiations.<sup>471</sup> These processes have allowed the Government to track and respond to growing security threats – including those that led two women's organizations to close their operations. Georgia also reported that engaging with these groups highlighted the weak enforcement of domestic violence protections in occupied areas, owing to problems with national security forces.

In direct response to the unequal representation of women (currently at 30 per cent) in the negotiations, the Government has pledged to increase women's participation in the Geneva International Discussions to 50 per cent by 2020, and has committed to increasing the number of women negotiators overall. The rationale: Women's greater involvement is likely to render the outcomes more inclusive.

*Source: Government of Georgia, national review report.*

### Going further to implement the women, peace and security agenda

The national review reports indicated that insufficient attention is being directed towards the women, peace and security elements of the Beijing Platform for Action that go beyond conflict settings – for example, the promotion of women's contributions to fostering a culture of peace and the mobilization of "local communities to use appropriate, gender-sensitive, traditional and innovative methods of conflict resolution".<sup>474</sup> Of the myriad ways that the Beijing Platform for Action encourages States to enhance women's security, current actions indicate a limited understanding of the full scope of opportunities for catalysing progress on gender equality and women's empowerment across this area.

Given the emphasis on adopting and implementing national action plans, more efforts must be directed at ensuring effective implementation. The plans consistently suffer weaknesses in implementation

due to a lack of high-level political will, ineffective monitoring across sectors (ministries of justice, police, social services, education, etc.) and insufficient financial resources.<sup>475</sup> The Government of **Afghanistan** noted that despite adopting a national action plan, it still faces challenges carrying it forward due to weak financing, especially for activities in rural areas.<sup>476</sup> This experience echoes research in the Pacific, which suggests that more efforts need to be focused on taking concrete action and securing funding.<sup>477</sup>

Member States acknowledged that successful national action plans include mainstreaming into national processes, and effective coordination and alignment. More attention should go to underserved areas, including in terms of promoting cultures of peace; sustainable funding; monitoring and evaluation and data collection; localized approaches; complementary peacebuilding

initiatives and security sector reform; and peace education, especially at the community level.<sup>478</sup> Overall, the success of plans hinges on political will at the highest levels, full resourcing and survivor-centered response design.

Going forward, the women, peace and security community can promote efforts to include women who face multiple and intersecting inequalities, and to put a central emphasis on the experiences and perspectives of women who face discrimination based on indigeneity, race, sexuality, ability, income and geography.<sup>479</sup> Young women can be driving forces for the prevention of conflict and the construction of peaceful and tolerant communities, yet they are often considered passive victims and are overlooked in conflict prevention and resolution.<sup>480</sup> Their inclusion will be critical to effective implementation across the region.

In addition to strengthening women's leadership and participation, member States must accelerate efforts to integrate gender perspectives into humanitarian action and crisis response. Out of 19 countries reporting on measures to promote women's participation, only four countries<sup>481</sup> elaborated actions to promote *both* women's participation *and* the integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian action and crisis responses. This suggests that while women's participation may be accepted and even promoted in response efforts, gender mainstreaming strategies are not.

More needs to be done to collaborate with women's human rights defenders, and to ensure that policies and programmes go beyond protection to ensure that women can access needed support and resources, and build their leadership roles. Expanding funding to women's organizations is one way to promote women as actors in peace and security processes, especially in conflict settings. Between 2016 and 2017, however, only 0.2 per cent of total global bilateral aid to countries in fragile situations went directly to women's organizations.<sup>482</sup>



Photo: UN Women/  
Pathumporn Thongking.

Progress is possible. Within the region, some countries are promoting women's human rights defenders as frontline service providers for victims of violence (**Myanmar**) and trafficking (**Malaysia**). **Mongolia** is going further to support girls and women's human rights defenders by offering capacity development trainings on topics that include research, fundraising and an overview of human rights approaches. **Pakistan** and **Thailand** have recognized the security threats that women's human rights defenders face and have taken steps to protect them from abuse, including online.

Finally, and concerningly, no countries in the region reported actions to reduce military spending, or repurpose military funds for initiatives related to social and economic development, including for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Evidence outside of the national reports, however, shows that Sri Lanka has reported a reduction in defense spending, and that Thailand reorganized their national debt payments to channel additional funds to domestic social programmes.<sup>483</sup> While neither of these actions directly reallocates military funds for social and economic programmes, they might indicate an inclination to redraw government budgets.

## Justice and security sectors

### Women's inclusion and representation in the justice and security sectors

There has been a paradigm shift in the concept of security since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action. The notion of human security – the security of individuals and communities – has broadened understanding of security to include poverty, discrimination, violence against women and girls, lack of democracy and marginalization.<sup>484</sup> The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat's Human Security Framework prioritizes a multidimensional approach to peace and development based on the key principles of preventative, localized, collaborative, people-centered and inclusive interventions.<sup>485</sup>

United Nations Security Council resolution 2106 (2013) addressed the role of the justice sector in the women, peace and security agenda, and shed light on the importance of combatting impunity, ensuring access to justice for women, providing trainings on gender-based violence for justice and security sector personnel, and increasing women's representation at all professional levels in these sectors.<sup>486</sup> It also called for improving judicial proceedings to account for intersectional identities and create safe environments for women in the courtroom, thereby enhancing reporting and access to justice. Meaningful access to justice requires training police and legal professionals in gender-responsive investigative techniques, collection of evidence and victim support; training the judiciary; and providing safe and accessible police stations and courtrooms.<sup>487</sup>

Increasing women's leadership and participation is key to improving the operational effectiveness of law enforcement agencies, and ensuring that all members of the population have their rights realized and needs met by security services. Women are underrepresented in international peacekeeping forces, however, and in national police and military personnel. Data as of June 2020 show that women on average comprise only 9 per cent of peacekeepers contributed by countries in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>488</sup> When examining countries

that contribute more than 100 personnel, the average is only 5 per cent, far below the United Nations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy and United Nations Security Council resolution 2242 (2015), which called for women to occupy 15 per cent of positions in peacekeeping forces by 2028.<sup>489</sup>

The proportion of women in the police in ASEAN countries ranges from 6 per cent in Indonesia to 20 per cent in Lao PDR, a percentage that drops severely in remote locations, such as international border crossings. Higher representation of women in these institutions has the potential to reduce the risk of violations of the rights of women and girls.<sup>490</sup> Enhancing women's place in law enforcement will require concerted efforts to implement gender-responsive recruitment strategies, including those that recognize and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities; provide appropriate infrastructure, facilities and equipment; and ensure opportunities for women's promotion and leadership roles.<sup>491</sup>

Barriers to women's participation in the justice sector operate at the individual, social and institutional levels.<sup>492</sup> Women in the justice sector – serving as judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, paralegals and administrators – strengthen the legitimacy of the judiciary, and make courts more accessible to the communities they serve.<sup>493</sup> In the Pacific, despite relatively high numbers of women in the legal profession and equal numbers of male and female law school graduates, women judges and magistrates remain scarce.<sup>494</sup> Papua New Guinea is home to half of all female lawyers in the Pacific countries, yet only has three women as judges or magistrates.<sup>495</sup> In 2018, women made up only 13 of the 34 judges in Timor-Leste's formal justice system, and only 17 per cent of public defenders.<sup>496</sup>

In Pakistan, women judges remain underrepresented, despite a provision that mandates that at least one family court in each district be presided over by a female judge.<sup>497,498</sup> Still, there are signs of progress: In 2016, 5 per cent of Pakistan's high court judges were women. Several recent appointments have positioned women judges in breakthrough positions.<sup>499</sup>



Research shows that survivors are often revictimized by judiciary institutions and actors ill-equipped to adequately address women's needs and vulnerabilities, particularly in cases of violence against women and girls or human trafficking. To address this problem, Afghanistan has taken specific steps to drive the appointment of women to the High Council of the Supreme Court, thereby enhancing women's participation at influential levels of the judiciary. These steps include conducting training courses for female judges, and establishing the Female Judges Association. Between 2013 and 2016, the representation of women in the judiciary rose from 8.4 per cent to 11 per cent, with women managing subcourts adjudicating juvenile and family cases as well as cases of violence against women and girls.

### Women's access to justice

Beyond women's participation in the justice sector, it is important to examine how member States facilitate women's access to justice. Research in Timor-Leste illustrates that when police and judicial actors take violence against women seriously, and offer protection and support to survivors, community members show improved consideration for survivors' rights, feelings and wishes.<sup>500</sup>

Countries have addressed women's access to justice through the establishment of specialized courts for cases dealing with both conflict and non-conflict cases of violence against women and girls. For example, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia addresses the "multitude and complexity" of crimes committed during the Khmer Rouge regime, especially those related to forced marriage and rape.<sup>501</sup> The Chambers highlights progress towards gender-response justice systems, yet it stands out as an exception in the region, given an overall lack of transitional justice mechanisms for conflict-related violence against women and girls.<sup>502</sup>

Enhancing accountability for perpetrators of violence is a key component of the women, peace and security agenda that can be applied locally. Low conviction rates reflect widespread impunity enjoyed by men for violence against women and girls, and attendant shortfalls in the law and justice system.<sup>503</sup> Where countries have effectively tackled impunity, civil society has played a central role in

monitoring the implementation of laws, including judicial processes, policing and health services.<sup>504</sup>

### Women in security and defense forces

Countries in Asia and the Pacific have taken steps to increase the participation of women within their defense and peacekeeping forces in line with the United Nations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy and United Nations Security Council resolution 2242, with its target of having women comprise 15 per cent of peacekeeping forces by 2028.<sup>505</sup> Bhutan has already achieved a rate of 15 per cent among deployed peacekeepers.<sup>506</sup> Pakistan has also met the 15 per cent goal and has set a target for women to comprise 20 per cent of female police deployments by 2020.<sup>507</sup>

The creation of a professional security sector that is democratically accountable, well-managed and responsive to the needs of all citizens leads to better provision of security and justice for all.<sup>508</sup> Increasing the number of women in the security forces, including military, police and intelligence services, can accelerate institutional change from within. Increasing the number of women police officers can also improve responses to crimes involving domestic and sexual violence, which commonly are among the most prevalent crimes in both post-conflict and non-conflict settings.<sup>509</sup>

### State responses to enhance national justice and security sectors

The national review reports indicated that member States are prioritizing actions around implementing legal and policy reforms, strengthening the capacity of the security sector, and enhancing efforts to protect women's human rights defenders.

✓ **Implementing legal and policy reforms to increase access to justice:** Fifteen countries reported implementing reforms to redress and prevent violations of the rights of women and girls. **Cambodia** and **Georgia** established free legal aid services to ensure post-conflict justice (Cambodia), and protection of the rights of refugee and IDP communities (Georgia). **Myanmar** launched rule of law centres in 2014 to build the capacity of justice providers at the local level, and to foster trust between these actors and the community members they serve.

✓ **Strengthening the capacities of security sector institutions:** Twelve member States detailed efforts to strengthen capacities on human rights, and to prevent sexual and gender-based violence, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2018, the National Police in **Timor-Leste** launched a gender strategy (2018-2022) aimed at developing practices to support the

security needs of men and women in addition to maximizing and equalizing the participation of men and women within the police force. **Armenia, Australia, China, Thailand** and **Japan** reported conducting gender-responsive trainings for peacekeepers, while **Turkey** tailored similar trainings for responders working with refugees and other vulnerable groups.

## Spotlight on

### Female police officers and women's access to justice

Increasing women's representation in police forces is key to ensuring that a country has representative security sector institutions.<sup>510</sup> In some contexts, social norms restrict women from reporting violence to the police, due to a social preference to handle these matters within the family and/or community, or due to limitations on women's interactions with unrelated men.<sup>511</sup> In the **Philippines**, local clan conflicts, known as *rido*,<sup>512</sup> can decrease reporting of violence against women and girls, as reporting this behaviour has been known to incite clan retaliation.<sup>513</sup> In **Georgia**, research found that 82 per cent of women did not report gender-based violence to the police.<sup>514</sup> While women in **Georgia** said they would be more likely to report violence to female police officers, the latter remain relatively scarce (only 51 per cent of urban areas and 9 per cent of rural areas have female police officers).<sup>515</sup>

Some countries are responding to gaps in women's representation within police forces. For instance, **Pakistan** has established women police stations in different cities all over the country. Women's help desks have been set up at a number of police stations to assist women who feel reluctant to report crimes in male-dominated police stations.



UN community Police officers in Timor-Leste. Photo: UN Photo/Martine Perret.

While increasing women's representation in police forces can have an important effect on women's overall access to justice, it is also important to ensure that female officers have decent working conditions. Women in police forces often serve in difficult environments, where they may experience harassment and limited opportunities for advancement.<sup>516</sup> Research in **Timor-Leste** showed that sexual harassment is a serious concern and deterrent for women police officers, especially if they are the only female among male colleagues.<sup>517</sup> Women police officers and units are important, but cannot replace the need to train all police personnel on gender sensitivity and laws related to violence against women and girls.<sup>518</sup>

*Source: Governments of the Philippines, Georgia, Pakistan, and Timor-Leste, national review reports.*

## Spotlight on

### Formalizing customary and non-judicial accountability systems

An estimated 80 per cent of poor and disadvantaged populations in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific rely on customary justice systems for dispute resolution.<sup>519</sup> In contrast to the model of formal systems where the emphasis is on victims and perpetrators, customary justice systems typically focus on maintaining community security. Language and/or literacy barriers and limited mobility can influence women's decisions to use customary judicial systems over formal ones. Many women turn to customary justice for cases of violence against women, in conflict with CEDAW guidance that establishes State responsibility for ensuring that judicial decisions uphold the rights of women and girls.<sup>520</sup>

In **Timor-Leste**, non-formal judicial systems are an integral part of everyday life and play a central role in resolving land disputes, conflicts between communities, cases of domestic violence and differences around natural resource management.<sup>521</sup> Women trust the legitimacy of customary dispute resolution systems, but are less likely than men to report that outcomes are just.<sup>522</sup> Women and girls who report domestic violence are often pressured by family and community members to accept customary mediation instead of referring the case to the formal system.<sup>523</sup> Only 0.3 per cent of police and community leaders cited a role for the courts, judges and public prosecutor in the final resolution of domestic violence cases.<sup>524</sup> The Government is working to draft legislation to govern alternative dispute resolution processes to improve women's access to justice.

In **Afghanistan**, traditional justice mechanisms serve as the de facto legal system throughout most of the country. The traditional *jurgas* or *shuras* are usually composed exclusively of men, and women must be accompanied by a male to access justice mechanisms.<sup>525</sup>



A woman participant speaks during a TV Debate on Role of Women in administration of Justice, Afghanistan. Photo: UNAMA/ Mujeeb Rehman.

The Government of Afghanistan has taken a two-pronged approach to increase women's access to justice. First, it is integrating non-judicial mechanisms into the formal system by codifying the jurisdiction of *jurgas* and *shuras* through the Conciliation of Civil Disputes Law. Second, it is engaging in public awareness activities to increase women's and girls' knowledge of their legal rights.

These examples of non-judicial and customary accountability mechanisms in Timor-Leste and Afghanistan highlight the importance of developing context-specific strategies to improve women's access to justice. Establishing legal frameworks to criminalize violence against women is not sufficient, particularly if women cannot access or do not trust those formal justice systems. In working to incorporate customary, non-judicial systems into formal justice systems, and to improve women's awareness of their legally enshrined rights, these States are helping to craft justice systems that are more responsive to the contexts within which women live and experience injustice.

Source: *Governments of Timor-Leste and Afghanistan, national review reports.*

## Going further to enhance national justice and security sectors

Two elements are important for enhancing the national justice and security sectors. First, member States must increase women's participation and leadership in all areas of decision-making (Cluster 4), but particularly within national justice and security sectors. Only eight countries (18 per cent) reported strengthening institutional capacities as they relate to justice systems and transitional justice mechanisms. Establishing quotas for women in national police and military personnel is one option. For example, **Nepal** has instituted a 20 per cent quota for women in the police and the military, while **Cambodia** has a quota of 5 per cent for women in the military.

Second, member States must enhance the gender responsiveness of all security institutions and actors. In 2014, **Armenia** instituted a joint programme between the Ministry of Defense and UNFPA to promote women's leadership and participation in decision-making and policy development in

defense systems. **Japan** is training female military officers from other countries to enhance women's leadership in global peacekeeping forces. **Turkey** has introduced gender-responsive basic military training, including topics on violence against women, early marriage and education, and covering national legislation on women's rights and protections. **Vanuatu** has created a networking and mentorship programme for women in the justice sector to promote their participation and tenure.

To be accountable, the security and justice sector must recognize the agency of women and girls and take steps to promote their meaningful inclusion in security and justice institutions, and decision-making.<sup>526</sup> Going forward, all personnel in these sectors should receive specialized training and capacity development support on gender issues, including appropriate responses to violence against women and girls in all its forms, and gender-based discrimination. This would help reduce the impact of stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, which otherwise pose barriers to accessing justice.<sup>527</sup>



**Turkey has introduced gender-responsive basic military training, including topics on violence against women, early marriage and education, and covering national legislation on women's rights and protections.**

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## Conclusion and recommendations

The convergence of Beijing+25, the twentieth anniversary of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, and five years of the 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to highlight the ways in which countries can localize the women, peace and security agenda. National action plans on women, peace and security are being adopted and implemented, but enhanced financing, monitoring and evaluation, and localization are needed to accelerate their impacts. Greater women's participation in women, peace and security measures, and in the security and justice sectors is necessary to move away from institutional mindsets that see women only as victims, and towards promoting women as actors who make meaningful contributions to peaceful and inclusive societies. While governments report taking some steps to include women more meaningfully in the justice and security sectors, these often come in the form of ad hoc measures that tackle discrete issues, rather than those that push for structural and long-term change.

Beyond conflict settings, the women, peace and security agenda requires that governments account for the different dynamics that shape women's experiences with insecurity at the national, subnational and community levels. Accelerating progress on a localized agenda, however, will not be possible unless States are willing to acknowledge and address specific gender dynamics, including systemic gender inequality and discrimination that provide "fertile ground" for radicalization and extremist violence.<sup>528</sup> Localization also calls for increased attention to the role of national women's rights organizations and human rights defenders, and their growing insecurity as extremism and backlash spread across the region.<sup>529</sup>

Member States reported fewer and more diverse actions across Cluster 5 when compared to other cluster areas. The national review reports indicated that there is no domain in which more than 50 per cent of reporting countries took actions in the reporting period. This likely reflects the perception that women, peace and security agendas are only relevant for conflict contexts or humanitarian zones, which feeds an incorrect assumption that they do not apply if a country is not currently experiencing conflict.



**Develop, integrate and communicate localized women, peace and security perspectives into national frameworks, processes and institutions**, including security and judicial systems, and in communities. Localized efforts can focus on identifying and determining effective solutions for country-specific drivers of extremism and violence, and their relationship to gender inequalities and women's rights.



**Strengthen partnerships with women's civil society organizations and prioritize efforts to protect and promote the leadership of women's human rights defenders**, especially in fragile contexts. Such partnerships must include seeking to increase resources for women's organizations and to enhance security protections for women's human rights defenders.



**Gather, disseminate and analyse data on women's representation in the security sector, including the police, military and all levels of the judicial system**, in order to strengthen monitoring of progress on SDG target 16.6 on building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions.

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## Cluster 6

### Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

Photos clockwise from left: Woman holding plants, Tajikistan. Photo: UN Women/ Janarbek Amankulov; A woman water harvesting – sustainable development, Vietnam. Photo: UN Women Viet Nam/Pham Ke Toai; A woman solar engineer, India. Photo: UN Women/Gaganjit Singh.

## Overview

In the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, the gender-environment nexus has evolved in scope from considering the relationship between “women and the environment”, to grappling with climate change and the dynamics of a climate crisis that threatens to disproportionately impact women’s livelihoods, health outcomes and access to energy.<sup>530</sup> The gender-environment nexus includes women’s rights to land, natural resources and biodiversity; access to food, energy, sanitation and water; sustainable production and consumption; and health and well-being.<sup>531</sup> Evidence shows that climate change has severe adverse impacts on women’s livelihood opportunities, enhances their paid and unpaid workloads, and forces them to undertake high-risk and hazardous activities.<sup>532</sup>

Countries in Asia and the Pacific are among the most disaster-prone in the world.<sup>533</sup> Women in the region are already active participants in climate change management and disaster risk reduction, working in sectors that position them as integral to natural resource management and conservation efforts. In 2019, women’s employment in agriculture was 17 per cent in Eastern Asia, 27 per cent in South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, and 57 per cent in Southern Asia.<sup>534</sup> As discussed in Cluster 1, land is a critical economic asset, yet owning it remains tied to cultural and legal systems that constrain women’s ownership rights.<sup>535</sup> For the 14 countries with available data, female employment in the tourism sector is 5.5 per cent of total female employment. Yet in many countries, this employment is mostly informal, including own account workers. In Cambodia, Fiji, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, women outnumber men in tourism jobs.

Critically, women remain underrepresented in all levels of environmental decision-making,<sup>536</sup> even as they face many vulnerabilities in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. They are overrepresented in industries shifting as a result of a changing climate as well as pollution

and deforestation, such as agriculture and fisheries. They are also more likely to directly confront declining or polluted natural resources due to a disproportionate responsibility for gathering food, water and fuel. Member States reported measures to increase women’s participation in natural resource management and disaster risk reduction, to strengthen gender-responsive laws, and to enhance evidence on gender-specific vulnerabilities to environmental hazards and climate change.

Cluster 6 encompasses Beijing Platform for Action critical areas of concern around women and the environment,<sup>537</sup> and SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and SDG 13 (climate action). It tracks the integration of gender perspectives and women’s participation in environmental and disaster risk reduction policies, including those aimed at climate change resilience, adaptation and mitigation. The integration of gender into disaster risk reduction policies is guided by the implementation of the Sendai Framework at the regional level, for example, through the Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030,<sup>538</sup> and the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific.<sup>539</sup> Each of these implementation frameworks calls on governments to lead the development of gender-responsive preparedness and response plans, and ensure women’s participation in decision-making systems.

This section considers issues related to women’s participation in environmental conservation and protection, disaster risk reduction and climate mitigation. Section 1, on women and the environment, provides an overview of women’s participation in natural resource management and access to labour-saving infrastructure (i.e., clean energy, water and sanitation). Section 2, on women in disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation, highlights trends in women’s experiences of food insecurity, natural disasters, and gendered vulnerabilities during and after disasters.



# Women and the environment

## Women's participation in natural resource management

Approximately 58 per cent of economically active women in Asia and the Pacific work in the agricultural sector, with subregional variations from 18 per cent in Central Asia to 67 per cent in the Pacific.<sup>540</sup> Women in the region outnumber men as workers in many natural resource-reliant industries. They comprise 66 per cent of total workers in large-scale marine fisheries, 54 per cent of workers in small-scale marine fisheries<sup>541</sup> and 94 per cent of people engaged in fish farming.<sup>542</sup> The situational knowledge of climate change and environmental degradation that women in these industries possess is a valuable resource in climate management and disaster risk reduction. Women have proven to be proactive agents of natural resource management and climate change adaptation.<sup>543</sup>

Strengthening women's participation in ensuring environmental sustainability not only elevates their role in public life but is also important for addressing drivers of inequality in policies and programmes that respond to climate change and environmental degradation. More needs to be done to generate a clear understanding and responses to the ways that gender norms, expectations and power structures shape how men and women experience, contribute to and respond to climate-related security risks.<sup>544</sup>

Women's situational knowledge is underutilized, however, relative to the magnitude of the impact it can have in informing gender-responsive environmental policies and disaster risk reduction strategies. In India and Nepal, empowering women in local decision-making around the conservation of forests and fisheries has led to better resource efficiency and conservation.<sup>545</sup> In north-western India, tree cover increased by 75 per cent where women were included in protecting forests.<sup>546</sup> In the Indian state of Rajasthan, women have developed crop varieties suitable to the arid climate and constructed rainfall collection mechanisms for times of drought.<sup>547</sup>

Despite clear evidence of women's positive impact on natural resource management, their formal participation in natural resource management has been traditionally low. An analysis of 13 countries in Asia showed that only one third reported women's participation in climate change and national disaster risk reduction platforms.<sup>548</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, women head only 2.4 per cent of community-based forest and pasture management organizations.<sup>549</sup>

At the same time, women's experiences of the impacts of environment degradation are exacerbated by discriminatory gender norms.<sup>550</sup> Loss of vegetation, degradation of soil and pollution of water put extra pressure on women, especially in rural and underserved areas, where they rely more heavily on natural resources for income generation.<sup>551</sup> Formal credit for agricultural inputs that would make women more resilient to disasters and climate shifts is often inaccessible or restricted due to their lack of land ownership or title (see Cluster 1).<sup>552</sup>

Enhancing women's participation and leadership in environmental platforms is critical for harnessing the important roles that women already play in managing natural resources for their families and communities. In Bangladesh, women seek shelter for their families in response to rising water levels, source decontaminated water and store seeds in higher locations to protect them.<sup>553</sup> In Papua New Guinea, indigenous women have traditionally engaged in small plot agriculture and forest management to provide for their families. Such roles on the front lines of climate change have implications for food security and natural resource management.<sup>554</sup>

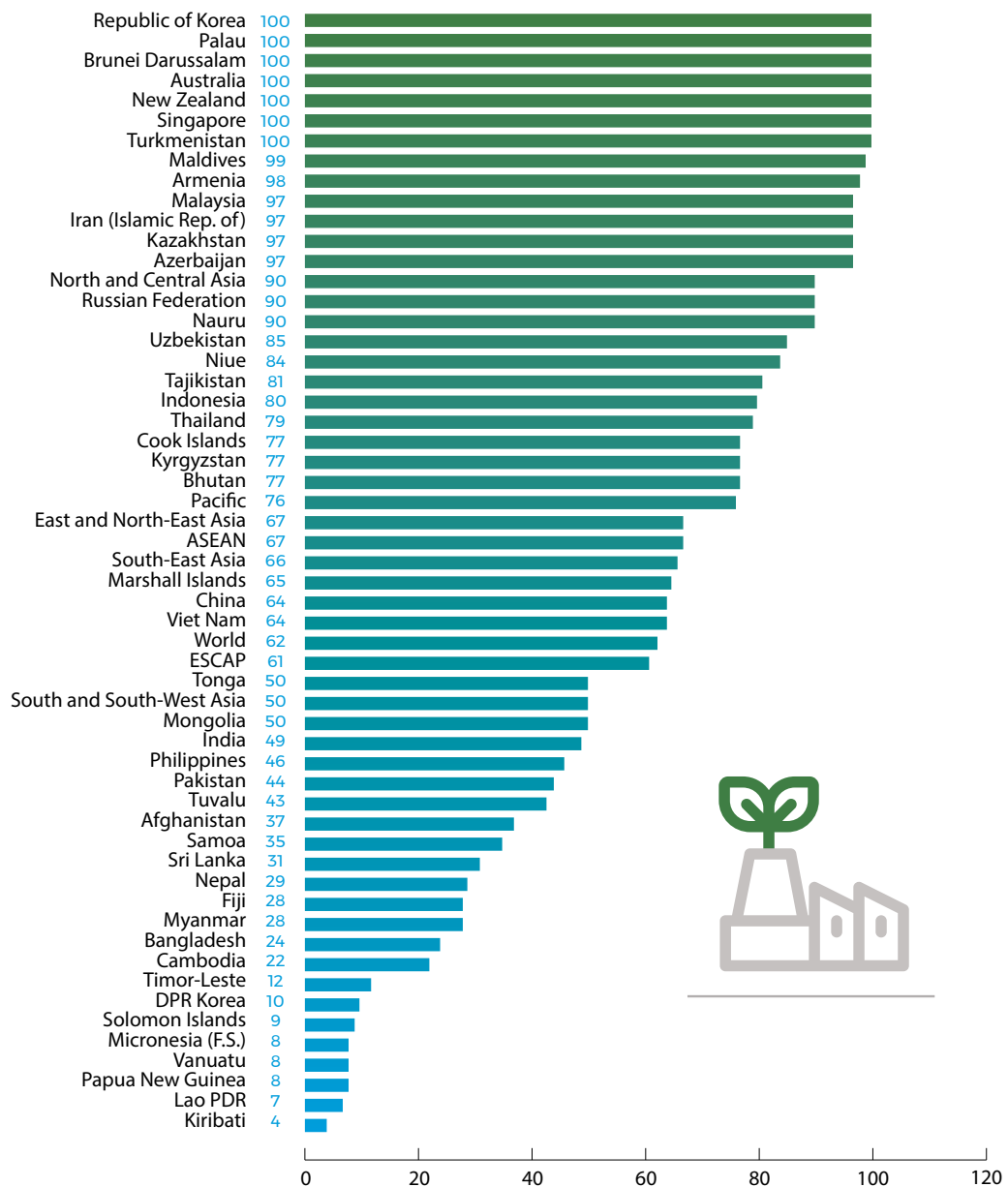
## Access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

Women's access to basic infrastructure and services directly impacts the amount of time they spend on unpaid care and domestic work. Good access to quality infrastructure can free time for educational and productive activities

as well as leisure.<sup>555</sup> Collectively, member States have extended access to basic drinking water to 93 per cent of the regional population. Urban-rural inequalities persist, however, with a nearly 10-point gap in access between urban and rural residents (97.1 per cent and 88.7 per cent have access to water, respectively).<sup>556</sup> Women’s lack of access to infrastructure and services, and their disproportionate reliance on natural resources as sources of livelihoods, particularly in rural areas,<sup>557</sup> increase their vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation.

As shown in Figure 6.1, countries in the region nearly match the global average in terms of the proportion of the population with primary reliance on clean energy (62.4 per cent globally compared to 61 per cent in Asia and the Pacific). Many countries in the region have expanded access to clean energy to their entire population (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand, Palau, the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Turkmenistan).

**Figure 6.1 Proportion of the population with primary reliance on clean energy, 2018**

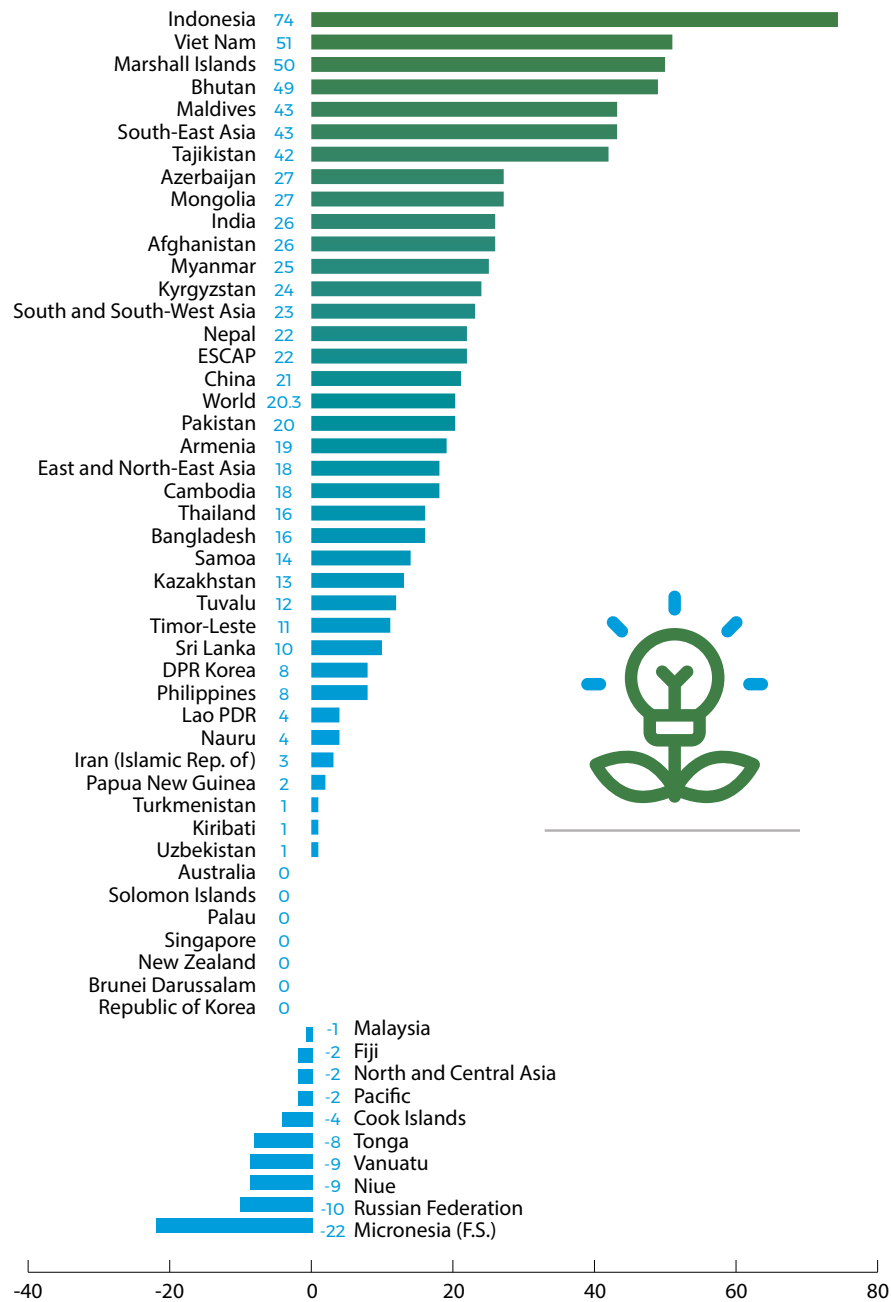


Source: ESCAP database, based on GTF\_SEA4AL and WHO data, SDG 7.1.2. Accessed 17 October 2020.

Since 2000, countries in Asia and the Pacific have outpaced global progress in expanding the proportion of the population with access to clean fuels and technologies (see Figure 6.2). Indonesia, Viet Nam and the Marshall Islands have shown notable progress,

expanding access by 74 per cent, 51 per cent, and 50 per cent of their populations, respectively. Conversely, subregional averages in North and Central Asia and the Pacific suggest a decline in the population share with access to clean energy.

**Figure 6.2 Change in the proportion of the population relying on clean fuels and technologies between 2000 and 2018**



Source: Author calculation based on ESCAP database, based on GTF\_SEA4AL, WHO data, SDG 7.1.2. Accessed 17 October 2020.

Across the region, 455 million people lack access to electricity, leading to a reliance on unsafe cooking fuels, which have negative impacts on women's health.<sup>558</sup> In rural households, women often manage energy access, and may spend significant portions of their day collecting fuel for heating and cooking. Environmental degradation can increase the time and distance that women and girls must travel to acquire fuel and firewood, with related increased security risks when they are forced to take unstable and unfamiliar routes. Furthermore, exposure to household air pollution linked to solid fuel is the cause of 4.3 million premature deaths globally, of which 60 per cent are women and children.<sup>559</sup> Rural women and girls have a higher exposure, as more than 80 per cent of rural households in Asia and the Pacific use mainly biomass, compared to only one quarter of urban homes.<sup>560</sup> In areas without electricity, reliance on traditional cookstoves is a cause of respiratory diseases in women and girls.<sup>561</sup>

Facilitating access to health, energy and sanitation services would reduce such vulnerabilities, particularly in agricultural and rural contexts.<sup>562</sup> For example, strengthening women's access to quality transportation infrastructure not only reduces the time women spend collecting firewood and water, but can also improve their access to markets, schools and workplaces.<sup>563</sup> In India, women farmers who had access to agricultural technologies and

services reported that not only had these reduced their time use while increasing crop yields, but they also increased their status and decision-making power in their households and agricultural communities.<sup>564</sup> On the other hand, lack of access to these types of services produces negative impacts that tend to be disproportionately felt by women who face multidimensional and intersecting forms of discrimination. Research in India, for instance, highlighted that lack of access to basic services and infrastructure – specifically, poor sanitation, and inadequate water supplies and health care – disproportionately impacted lower-caste women, who were found to be at greater risk of dying due to these gaps compared to women from higher castes.<sup>565</sup>

### Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene

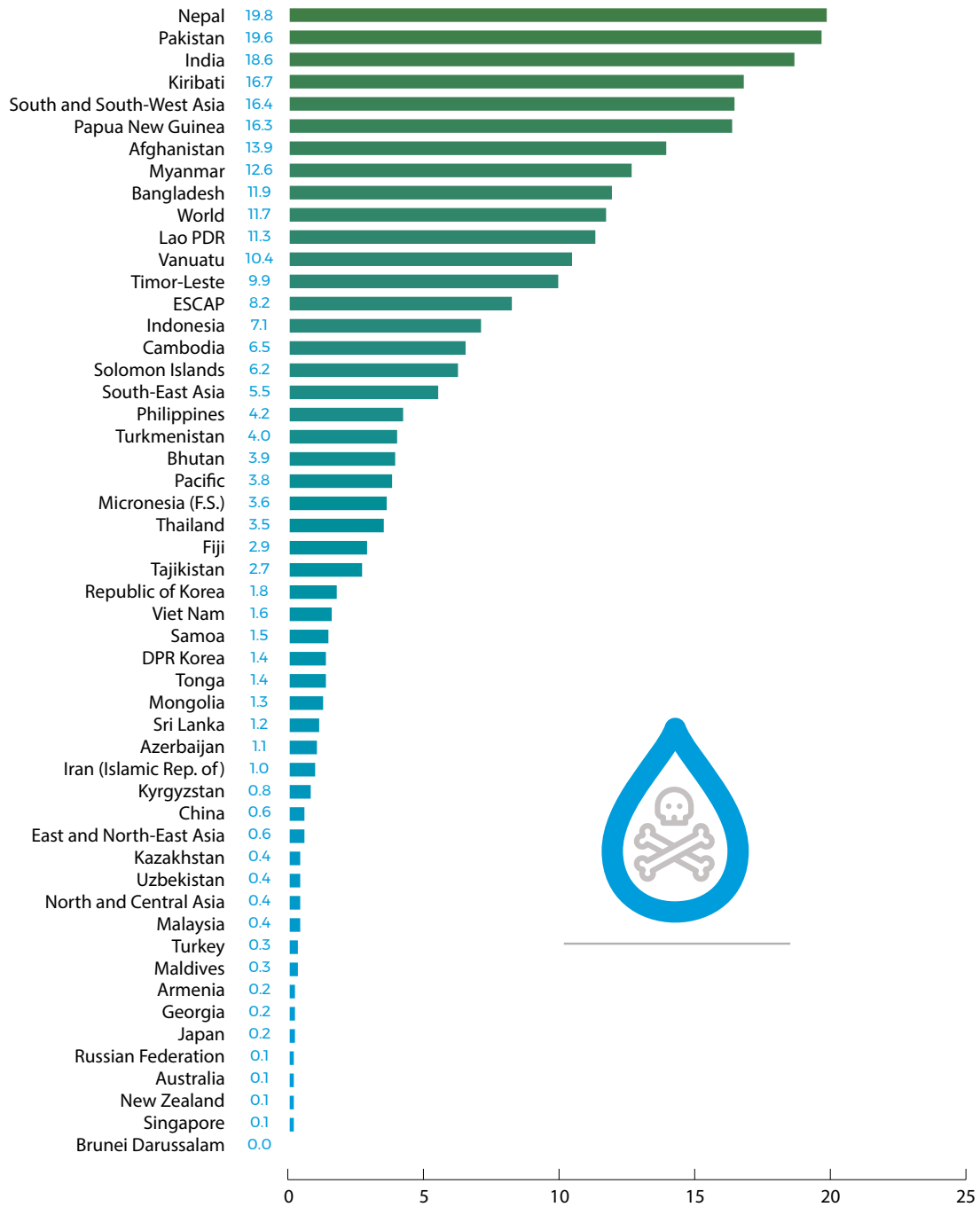
In 2016, most countries had a lower mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene than the world average (see Figure 6.3). The mortality rate was high in some countries, however, including India, Kiribati, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Pakistan. Unequal access to improved sanitation between urban and rural areas continues to be a challenge; rural-urban gaps in access can be as high as 40 per cent within a country.<sup>566</sup>



**Exposure to household air pollution linked to solid fuel is the cause of 4.3 million premature deaths globally, of which 60 per cent are women and children.**

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**Figure 6.3 Mortality rates attributed to unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene services per 100,000 population, 2016**



Source: ESCAP database, based on WHO data, SDG 3.9.2. Accessed 17 October 2020.

While SDG indicator data on mortality rates attributed to unsafe WASH services are not sex-disaggregated, the household roles of women and girls, including to collect, use and manage the water supply, mean that barriers to clean water and sanitation have undue impacts on them. When households lack access to safely managed drinking water, a severe time burden results and is felt mainly by women and girls, who are in charge of water collection in more than 80 per cent of these households.<sup>567</sup> Furthermore, women and girls often face shame, physical discomfort and insecurity when they do not have access to safe, hygienic and private sanitation facilities.<sup>568</sup>

### Promoting women's access to income-earning opportunities

Loss of vegetation, degradation of soil and pollution of water put extra pressure on women, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, who rely on such natural resources for livelihoods.<sup>569</sup> Ensuring women's long-term integration into sustainable economic opportunities requires promoting women and girls in STEM fields and the green economy. Women should have options as entrepreneurs and employees in green businesses, along with chances to engage in climate change action and disaster risk reduction at all levels.<sup>570</sup> Pacific countries took half of all actions reported by member States to promote the education of women and girls in STEM fields and other disciplines related to the natural environment, and to ensure that women benefit equally from decent jobs in the green economy.<sup>571</sup>

So-called "green" sectors are often male-dominated or have a high representation of women in low value-added positions, suggesting that the benefits of a green economy may not be automatic for women. Actions are needed to address gender barriers, such as insufficient access to quality education (in particular in STEM), limited access to productive inputs and finance, time poverty, a lack of land rights, and so forth. There are concerns that emerging jobs in key green sectors tend to be highly skilled, and women may not be eligible or qualified to fill them. While support is required to help both women and men learn new skills for green jobs, if current education, hiring and employment practices remain, women will be more excluded due to harmful stereotypes, gender-blind employment

patterns and discrimination. Women have already long been marginalized in the energy sector, where they now constitute merely 20 per cent of employees overall, and 32 per cent in renewable energy.<sup>572</sup> Agriculture and forestry are predicted to be the source of at least 2 million green jobs (for example, in organic agriculture, biofuels and forest conservation), but women comprise less than 20 per cent of the workforce in these sectors. Member States will need to take meaningful actions to ensure that women gain opportunities to develop skills, and access jobs across the green economy, as otherwise they will be left even further behind.

### State responses to promote gender perspectives in environmental policies

The national review reports indicated that over the past five years, member States have taken some actions to promote women's participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management, to improve women's access to resources, to strengthen evidence and/or raise awareness about gender-specific environmental and health hazards, and to protect women's traditional knowledge.

✓ **Promoting women's participation and leadership:** Twenty-four countries reported actions to support women's participation and leadership in environmental and natural resource management and governance. In the **Philippines**, for example, the Expanded National Integrated Protected Systems Act (2018) requires that women comprise a minimum of 40 per cent of the members of protected area management boards. **Australia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tonga and Vanuatu** established quotas for women's participation in environmental decision-making, including for forest management (Bangladesh and Nepal), renewable energy projects (Tonga), rural water committees (Vanuatu) and executive roles in the national environmental machinery (Australia). In **Viet Nam**, the Enhancing Capacity in Forest Management programme trains women on their rights and obligations as forest owners, discusses climate change, and promotes access to solar energy to address infrastructure shortfalls and impacts on women's domestic labour burdens.

✓ **Promoting women's access to land and labour-saving infrastructure and services:**

Sixteen member States reported steps to improve women's access to and control over land, water, energy and other natural resources. **Bangladesh** and **Timor-Leste** strengthened joint land titling programmes and inheritance laws to increase women's access to land ownership. **India** launched the *Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana* Scheme to safeguard the health of poor women and children by providing 80 million free liquefied petroleum gas connections issued in women's names to ensure their control.

✓ **Generating evidence of gender-specific environmental and health hazards:**

Sixteen member States described efforts to strengthen evidence and/or raise awareness about gender-specific environmental and health hazards. **Armenia** conducted regular training sessions to raise awareness of the undue impacts of organic pollutants and hazardous chemicals on the health of vulnerable groups of the population, including women and children. The **Republic of Korea** is conducting a long-term study (2016-2035) to investigate environmental impacts on the health of pregnant women and their children.<sup>573</sup>

✓ **Protecting traditional knowledge:**

Thirteen member States reported measures to protect and preserve the knowledge and practices of women in indigenous and local communities related to traditional medicines, biodiversity and conservation techniques. **Bhutan** created an inventory of traditional knowledge to preserve these practices and the traditional medicines used by women and indigenous communities. In **Vanuatu**, the 2018 Traditional Practices Act established intellectual property protections for women's traditional knowledge, techniques and handicrafts.

**Going further to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies**

It is concerning that only three countries reported measures to strengthen women's participation in ensuring environmental sustainability. Only three member States indicated that this will be a priority in the coming five years. Analysis of regional reporting indicates an urgent need to strengthen the implementation of policies and programmes that enhance women's participation at all levels of natural resource management and environmental policymaking and implementation. The lack of data quantifying various aspects of the gender-environment nexus is a key challenge to effective policy responses, as informed decisions cannot be made without sufficient high-quality data, and the extent and dynamics of current problems remain unclear. Only six national review reports indicated actions to monitor and evaluate the impact of environmental policies and sustainable infrastructure projects on women and girls. Further actions are needed to enhance regional cooperation and partnerships to ensure that all member States accelerate actions to integrate gender perspectives into environmental policies, and promote gender and environment statistics in national statistical systems.

Taking concrete steps to enhance women's participation and leadership within environmental institutions and decision-making bodies can help further the inclusion of gender perspectives. The governments of **Bhutan**, the **Philippines** and **Vanuatu** are among the countries<sup>574</sup> that have emphasized women's representation in environmental decision-making. In the **Philippines**, the Expanded National Integrated Protected Systems Act (2018) requires that women comprise a minimum of 40 per cent of the members of protected area management boards. The Government of **Vanuatu's** 2017 National Water Policy set a minimum quota of 40 per cent for women on rural water committees, and in **Bhutan**, women's participation on the executive committees of community forest management groups serves to launch women into political life, including elected positions in local government and as village leaders.<sup>575</sup> In **Cambodia**, the **Philippines**

Woman installing solar panels, Fiji.  
Photo: UN Women/ Laura Cleary.



and **Vanuatu**, “gender lite” approaches to climate change and disaster programming, however, have weakened the transformative potential of integrating gender perspectives and concerns into environmental analysis and policies.<sup>576</sup> These examples further highlight that state actions must go beyond instrumental or tokenistic inclusion practices to truly implement gender responsive environmental policies.

The world is not on track to meet SDG target 7.1 on universal energy access. In 2030, 650 million people are likely to be without electricity and around 2.2 billion people without clean cooking solutions.<sup>577</sup> Women make up the majority of people in low-income rural areas in developing countries where these gaps are greatest. Meeting the energy needs of these communities calls for transformational efforts by governments and non-state actors in the next 10 years. Achieving universal energy access will require aligning national energy policies with women’s and men’s energy needs, assets, skills, limitations and capabilities.

Moving forward, decentralized renewable energy will play a central role in meeting universal

energy goals, especially for those in off-grid areas. Currently, women constitute about a quarter of the labour force in renewable energy.<sup>578</sup> One approach to ensuring energy access for all could be to promote women as entrepreneurs, selling and servicing renewable energy technologies, especially at the “last mile” level. Besides helping to address energy access gaps, this approach builds women’s leadership and expands economic opportunities, thereby helping to overcome poverty, reduce inequalities and promote environmental sustainability.

National gender-environment statistics are an opportunity to illuminate progress towards the SDGs and to advance understanding of gender equality and its intersections with disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation and mitigation. The United Nations Environment Programme reports that enabling national statistics systems to produce gender and environment statistics depends on widely endorsed national gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies, coordination and cooperation among ministries, and multisector institutional capacity and knowledge.<sup>579</sup>



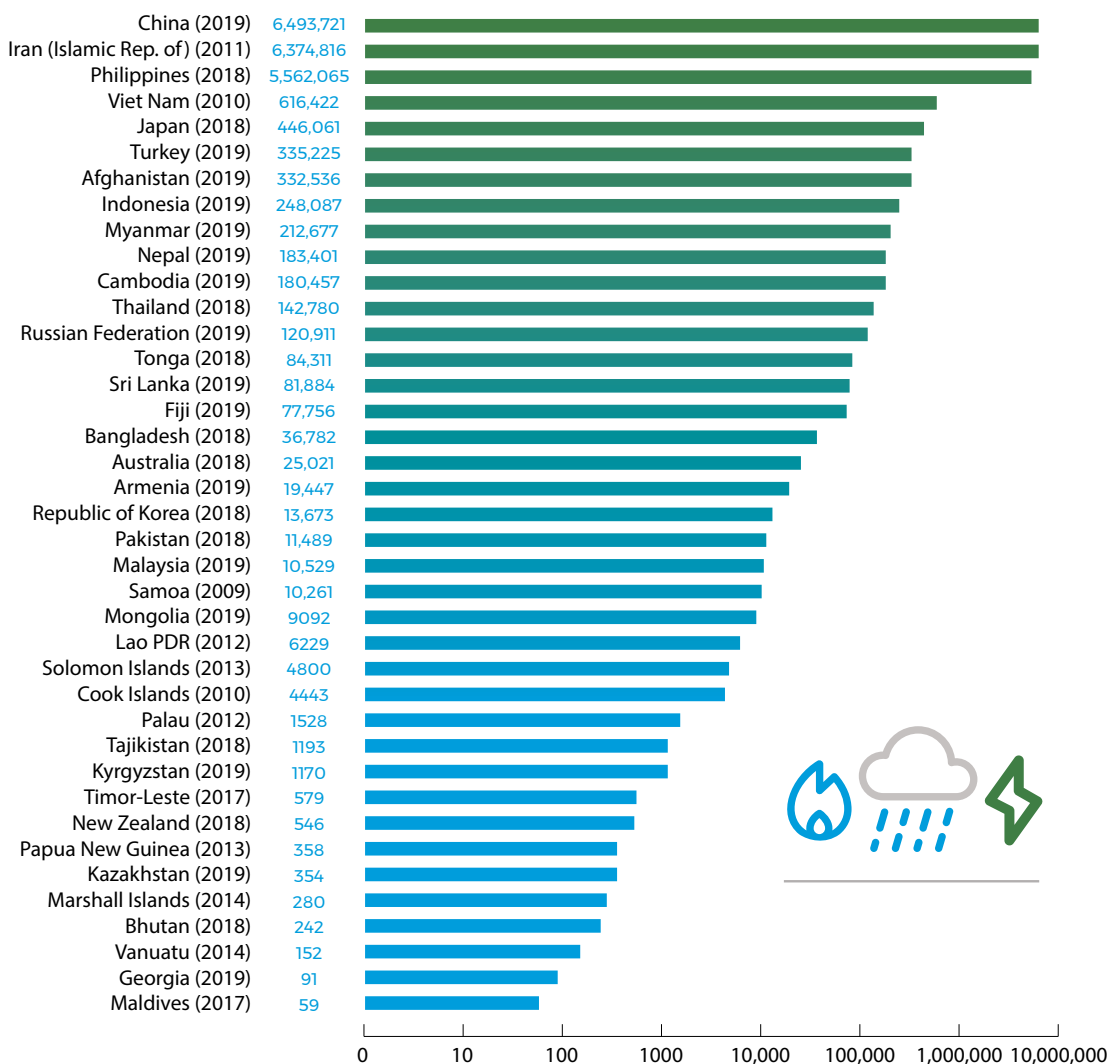
# Women and disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation

## Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters

Asia and the Pacific faces acute vulnerability to climate change, and has the world's highest number of hazardous events and related deaths.<sup>580</sup> Over 500 million poor people are currently living at medium to high disaster risk, and climate change could force more than 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.<sup>581</sup> Seven countries (Bangladesh, Myanmar,

Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) are among the top 10 countries worldwide in terms of being affected by climate risks between 1999 and 2018.<sup>582</sup> The 2019 World Risk Report lists nine countries in Asia and the Pacific as among the top 15 most at risk of natural disasters globally, up from five countries in the region in 2016.<sup>583</sup> Five of these States are in the Pacific subregion. Figure 6.4 illustrates that China, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and the Philippines have the largest populations directly impacted by disasters.

**Figure 6.4 People directly affected by disasters, per 100,000, most recent year**



Source: ESCAP database, based on UNDRR data, SDG 13.1.1. Accessed 17 October 2020.



A female worker at a plant producing energy-efficient bricks as green construction materials, China. Photo: Deng Jian/Xinhua News Agency.

In 2018, climate-related events linked with environmental degradation were responsible for 42 per cent of total deaths and 96 per cent of the number of people affected by disasters in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>584</sup> Yet data collected on those affected, killed or displaced by these disasters is not sex-disaggregated, which prevents a full accounting of their gendered impacts. The lack of sex-disaggregated data hampers the ability of governments to design gender-responsive disaster prevention and response policies.

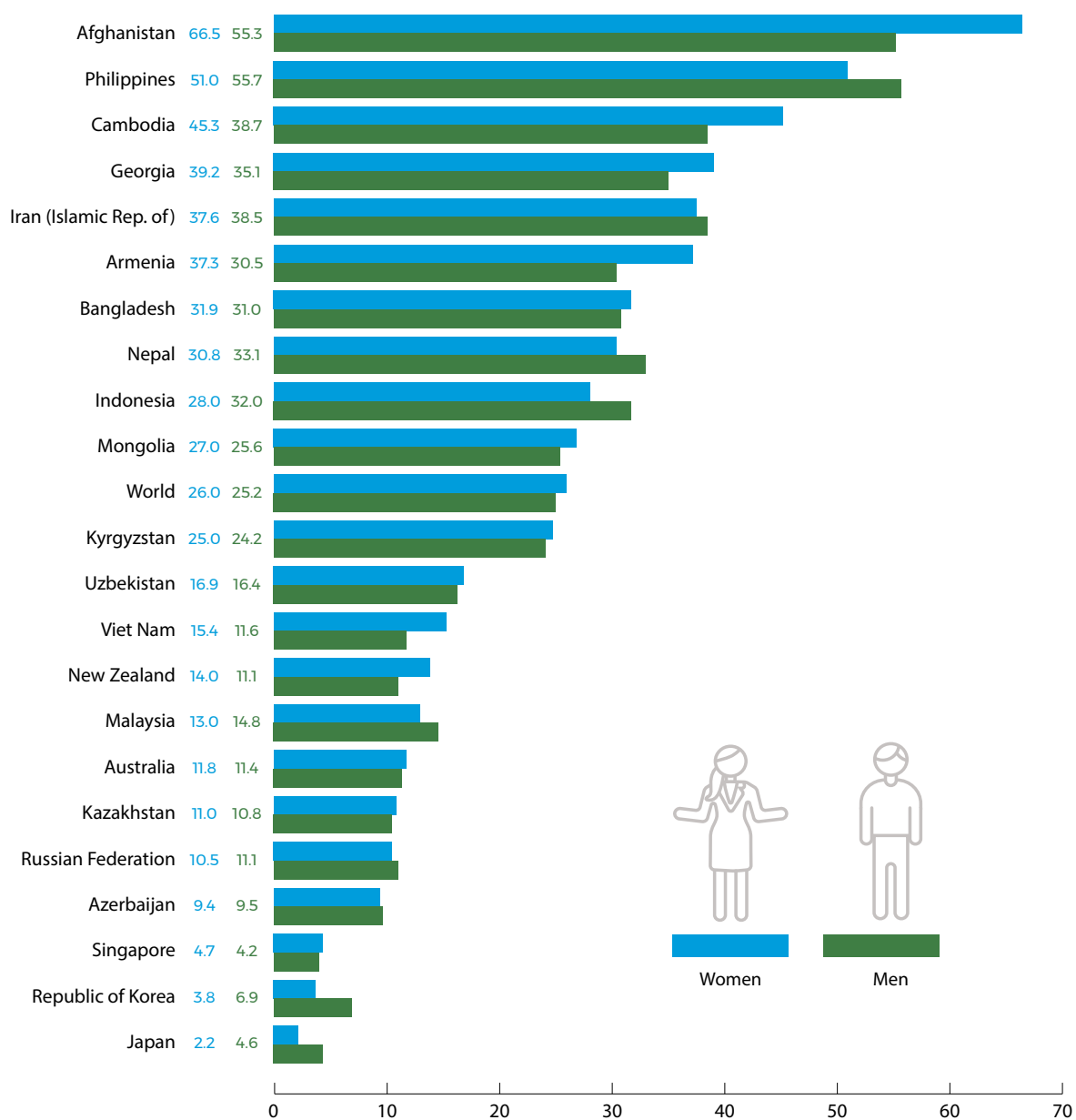
Natural disasters are more likely to lower the life expectancies of women than men, especially in areas where women are socially and economically disadvantaged.<sup>585</sup> For example, 55 per cent of victims of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal were women and girls.<sup>586</sup> This imbalance results from many factors, including women's likelihood of being in homes that are poorly constructed (compared to men's work in open spaces and offices with better construction), and women's reduced access to information, including technology, which limits their access to early warning systems. Restrictive social norms pertaining to how women and girls can or should spend their time also have a bearing on their risk to climate-related events. They are less likely than men and boys to swim or climb trees, which can be important skills to escape flooding, for example.<sup>587</sup>

### Climate vulnerabilities and food insecurity among women and girls

Despite substantial progress in Asia and the Pacific towards eliminating hunger and malnutrition overall, this progress has slowed recently. In a region where nearly half a billion people are undernourished, the gender gap in access to food has increased.<sup>588</sup> Reduced subsistence cropping because of a changing climate as well as reductions in available agricultural areas due to coastal erosion and intrusion in low-lying areas are directly affecting food supplies.<sup>589</sup> This shift is contributing to a decline in agricultural production and a corresponding increase in susceptibility to global supply shocks in foodstuffs.<sup>590</sup>

Figure 6.5 shows that many countries, notably Afghanistan, Cambodia and the Philippines, struggle with high rates of severe and moderate food insecurity. The figure also illustrates the complexity of gendered food insecurity, with some countries having higher rates of women who are food insecure compared to men (e.g., Afghanistan, Armenia and Cambodia) and others showing higher insecurity among men (e.g., Indonesia, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea).

**Figure 6.5 Proportion of the population with moderate or severe food insecurity aged 15 and over (by sex), 2018**

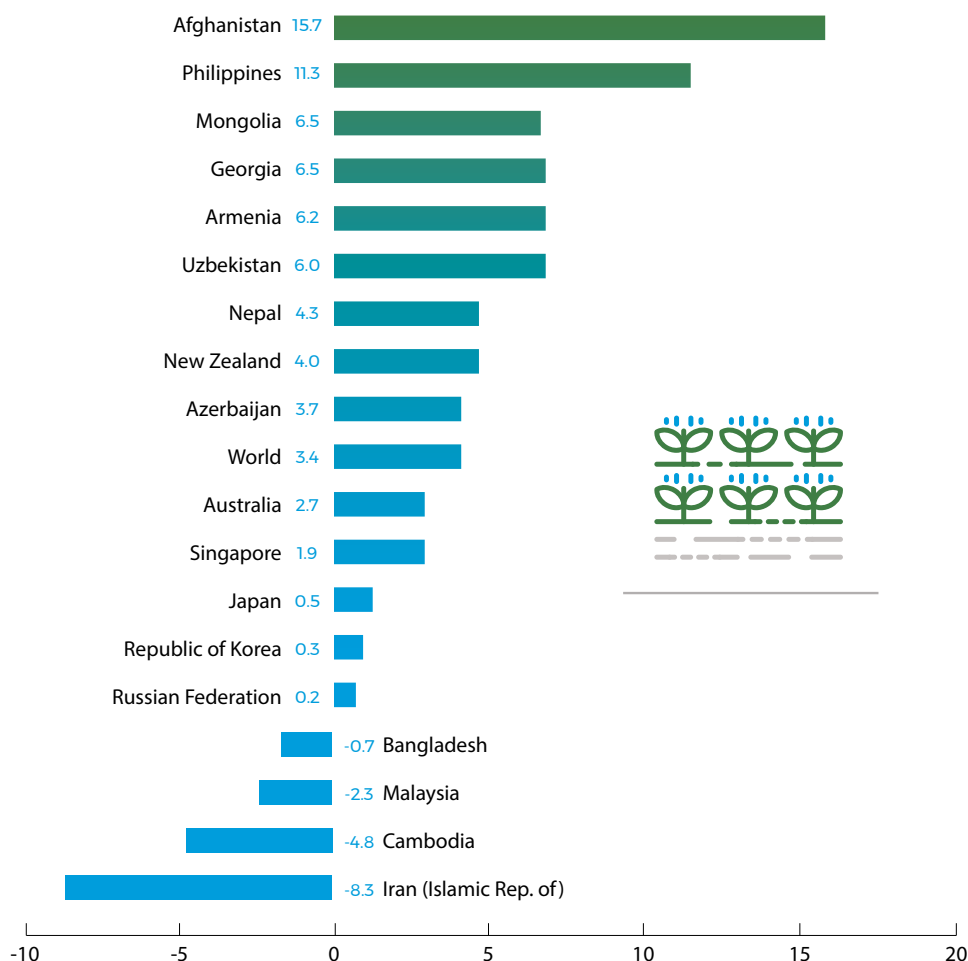


Source: ESCAP database, based on FAO data, SDG 2.1.2. Accessed 17 October 2020.

During the reporting period from 2014 to 2019, many countries in the region saw increases in food insecurity, including Afghanistan, Georgia, Mongolia and the Philippines (see Figure 6.6). Others, notably Bangladesh, Cambodia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Malaysia, have decreased the

proportion of the population that is food insecure. In Cambodia, this progress had a greater impact on women, with women’s food insecurity dropping from 51.8 per cent in 2015 to 45.3 per cent in 2018. Men’s rates declined by a smaller margin, from 42.8 per cent to 38.7 per cent.<sup>591</sup>

**Figure 6.6 Change in the proportion of the population with moderate or severe food insecurity, total population, 2015-2018**



Source: Author calculation from the ESCAP database, based on FAO data, SDG 2.1.2. Accessed 17 October 2020.

As environmental disruptions to livelihoods become more regular, formal and informal governance systems are likely to be overwhelmed – with destabilizing impacts on peace and development structures (Cluster 5).<sup>592</sup> For example, much of the recent increase in food insecurity can be attributed to the greater number of conflicts, often exacerbated by climate-related shocks.<sup>593</sup> In

the Pacific, for example, conflict prevention and human security face a triple threat of reduced economic potential, depleted environmental reserves and greater food insecurity.<sup>594</sup> In North and Central Asia, disputes over water – and their implications for water security – contribute to escalating tensions and conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>595</sup>

## The gendered vulnerabilities of women and girls in disasters

Emerging evidence suggests that climate change has a host of undue impacts on women's well-being and livelihoods. Research from South Asia, for example, indicates that climate change may enhance women's unpaid workload, and push women to undertake high-risk and hazardous activities.<sup>596</sup> After disasters, time spent on unpaid care and domestic chores increases due to the destruction of relevant infrastructure and interrupted services, including for education, care for children and older people. Traditional links between agriculture and livelihoods are often overlooked in disaster response and recovery programmes, many of which focus narrowly on feminized and low-productivity activities, such as handicrafts, cooking and sewing.<sup>597</sup> After the 2015 Nepal earthquake, women were more likely to lose livestock assets and workdays than men.<sup>598</sup>

During and after disasters, risks of violence against women and girls increase, including sexual violence, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and trafficking. This increased risk is due to a combination of factors, including women and girls' reduced access to services, resources and social protection programs, combined with factors such as economic stress and insecurity.<sup>599</sup> For example, violence against women increased in the Philippines during and after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, including violence perpetrated by partners in the home, and by military and police personnel stationed to protect and support survivors.<sup>600</sup> In Vanuatu, the Tanna Women's Counselling Center reported a 300 per cent increase in domestic violence cases after two tropical cyclones hit the island in 2011.<sup>601</sup> Services to prevent sexual and gender-based violence are important to all disaster risk management plans, yet disaster responders and actors addressing the needs of survivors are not working in a coordinated fashion to reduce risks.<sup>602</sup>

Environmental degradation, climate change and natural disasters can also exacerbate early, child and forced marriages, especially among poor and vulnerable families. Such marriages become a coping strategy for families at risk of losing homes and assets to environmental events and disasters.<sup>603</sup> Displacement and loss of assets can build economic stress that can also result in children being removed from school, often to care for other children, or to be put to work for supplementary household income.<sup>604</sup>

Women participate in national disaster risk reduction platforms in only a third of 13 countries in Asia.<sup>605</sup> Increasing their participation will be key to ensuring that their needs and gender-based risks are taken into account during disaster preparation, response and recovery phases. For example, in the Solomon Islands floods in 2014, women and girls in evacuation centres did not have access to single-sex toilets and bathrooms with locks and functional lights.<sup>606</sup> Infrastructure considerations such as these are not minor details. Rather, they are central to the safety and security of women and girls in the aftermath of a disaster.

### State responses on women and disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation and mitigation

Analysis of the national review reports found that member States' efforts to reduce women's vulnerability to disasters and climate change are concentrated in actions to enhance women's participation, introduce or bolster gender-responsive policies and laws, and generate a more robust evidence base. Seven out of 45 countries surveyed (Afghanistan, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, the Federated States of Micronesia and Vanuatu) reported actions in all three areas.

✓ **Promoting women's participation and leadership:** Twenty-five member States reported supporting women's participation and leadership, including women affected by

disasters. Measures encompassed disaster risk reduction and the development of climate resilience and mitigation policies, programmes and projects. **Viet Nam** established the first women-led biogas mason enterprise to promote women's participation in climate mitigation, clean energy and green economy jobs.

- ✓ **Gender-responsive laws and policies:** Twenty-two countries reported introducing or strengthening gender-responsive laws and policies related to disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation. In **Cambodia** and **Lao PDR**, gender and climate change action

plans have been developed and implemented in partnership with civil society partners.

- ✓ **Building evidence and raising awareness:** Twenty countries said they strengthened the evidence base on and raised awareness about the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to the impacts of environmental degradation and disasters. **Tuvalu's** gender assessment following Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015 found that when emergency supplies were delivered late and were insufficient to meet the needs of affected communities, women were expected to assume the stressful burden of providing protein-rich food for their families.

## Spotlight on

### FemLINKpacific's Women's Weather Watch model

Women's Weather Watch is an initiative of FemLINKpacific that promotes the inclusion of women in all aspects of disaster preparedness, response and recovery throughout the Pacific Islands. With the support of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and various national and international partnerships, FemLINKpacific provides real-time information on approaching storms and shelter locations through community radio and SMS transmissions as well as social media.

The service aims to reach marginalized communities, including women in rural and remote communities, people living with disabilities and LGBTQI groups. Two-way communication collects data on women's experiences before, during and after natural disasters to document the lived experiences of disaster-affected communities, and to support the leadership of women in humanitarian responses, and gender-inclusive disaster-preparedness and planning.<sup>607</sup>

The FemLINK platform also empowers local women as front-line workers in climate change, recognizing women's skilled management of agricultural and other food stocks, and their ability to detect minor disruptions that may foreshadow longer-term changes.

*Source: Government of Fiji, national review report.*

**FemLINKpacific provides real-time information on approaching storms and shelter locations through community radio and SMS transmissions as well as social media.**

## Going further to integrate gender perspectives into disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation

Analysis of the national review reports indicates that promoting women's access to response and recovery services such as relief payments, disaster insurance and compensation is low on the list of member State priorities. Given that women's unequal access to assets, unfair burden of household responsibilities and exposure to violence constrains their ability to recover after disasters, efforts to ensure access to appropriate support services are vital. **Indonesia** is going further than many member States to address this issue by establishing a data system to track violence against women in conflict and disaster-prone areas. **Pakistan** and the **Philippines** have developed guidelines and procedures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies and humanitarian crises.

In the **Marshall Islands**, a gender-sensitive vulnerability mapping led to the creation of action plans that address the impacts of climate change on livelihood insecurity for women and families. In **Nepal**, the Livelihood Promotion, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Department has been added to the post-earthquake Reconstruction Authority to create options for affirmative action for vulnerable groups (including women, Dalits and older persons), particularly when it comes to accessing recovery payments and livelihood programmes. By ensuring that women have access to economic opportunities during times of insecurity, these countries are providing services that can reduce violence against women and girls stemming from economic insecurity.

Investing in health, education, and basic infrastructure and services (Cluster 2) is critical to upholding food security<sup>608</sup> and building resilience to environmental degradation and climate change.<sup>609</sup> Increasing agricultural productivity through modern technology, quality seeds and fertilizer, and agricultural infrastructure can boost food security through greater production and higher rural incomes, thereby promoting long-term food security and poverty reduction (Cluster 2). Conflict-sensitive resource management is needed to prepare for global challenges related to climate change, including rising rates of migration and intensified competition for resources (see Cluster 5). The **Solomon Islands** is driving gender-responsive approaches with its Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security Research Programme on Aquatic and Agricultural Systems to increase food security and protect livelihoods.

An imperative is better data on the impacts of disasters and climate change on women and girls in all communities (such as indigenous, rural communities, and among migrants, IDPs and refugees). Data should capture their situations before, during and after major environmental events, quick-onset natural disasters, and slow-onset environmental and climate change-related crises. The lack of women's inclusion in decision-making around environmental and disaster risk reduction poses a challenge to progress in this area. **Kyrgyzstan** reports that neither the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry nor the Ministry of Agriculture and Melioration have any women in policymaking positions, a barrier to creating gender-responsive policies and programmes.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The review of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation highlights an urgent need to increase women's participation and leadership in climate change and disaster risk reduction. Women's vulnerability to climate change is shaped by gender inequalities in access to resources, their dependence on agricultural livelihoods, and their responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work. These vulnerabilities are reinforced by the relative absence of gender-responsive environmental policies.

Moving forward, additional measures are required to ensure that environment, climate change and disaster risk reduction processes and programmes are gender responsive, and address the needs and

vulnerabilities of women and girls. To this end, investments must be made in building a robust evidence base and raising awareness of gender-specific vulnerabilities, which in turn can drive more equitable and effective disaster response and recovery processes. Government efforts to address the immediate impacts of climate change and environmental degradation must be complemented with efforts to reduce gender-based vulnerabilities over the long term.

The following recommendations to catalyse faster and broader progress in the region are based on the Beijing Platform for Action, and seek to ensure that women are enabled to influence policies and programmes related to the environment, climate change and disasters, as these will shape the future of the region.



**Establish mechanisms to ensure women's inclusion and decision-making power in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of adaptation and response frameworks** for environmental degradation, climate change and disaster risk reduction. Appropriate planning and policy implementation require participatory and inclusive processes that reflect the knowledge and experiences of women in rural and remote areas as well as indigenous populations.



**Develop appropriate, gender-responsive and labour-saving investments in quality, accessible and affordable public services and infrastructure**, including as part of climate adaptation and disaster response planning.



Ensure the collection, analysis and dissemination of **sex-disaggregated data on the number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters** (SDG 13.1.1). Build the qualitative and quantitative evidence base on the gender dynamics of environmental degradation, climate change and disasters, and use it to drive evidence-based



530. EmPower 2020.
531. UNEP and IUCN 2018.
532. Yadav and Lal 2017.
533. WMO 2020.
534. ILO 2018d. The ILO defines Eastern Asia as China; the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Macao, China; Mongolia, Republic of Korea and Taiwan Province of China. South Eastern Asia and the Pacific comprises Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu and Viet Nam; and Southern Asia covers Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
535. UNEP et al. 2013.
536. UNEP and IUCN 2018.
537. Critical areas of concern relevant to Cluster 6 are the human rights of women (I), women and the environment (K) and the girl child (L).
538. UNISDR 2016.
539. SPC 2016.
540. ESCAP 2017b.
541. Ibid.
542. ESCAP 2017b.
543. Yadav and Lal 2017.
544. UNEP 2020a.
545. ESCAP 2017b.
546. Agarwal 2009.
547. Yadav and Lal 2017.
548. UN Women 2016a.
549. Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, national review report.
550. ESCAP 2017b.
551. Yadav and Lal 2017.
552. UNEP et al 2013.
553. UN Women 2016a.
554. UNEP 2020a.
555. UN Women 2019a.
556. ESCAP database, SDG 1.4.1, population using basic drinking water services (percentage of the population), 2017. Accessed 8 October 2020.
557. Serrao et al. 2019.
558. Ibid.
559. ESCAP 2017b.
560. Ibid.
561. ADB and UN Women 2018.
562. FAO et al. 2019.
563. ADB 2015.
564. Ganguly et al. 2016.
565. Arauco et al. 2014.
566. ESCAP 2017b.
567. UN Women 2018c.
568. ESCAP 2017b.
569. Yadav and Lal 2017.
570. ADB and UN Women 2018.
571. Pacific countries represented 7 out of 15 and 4 of 8 countries, respectively.
572. IRENA 2019.
573. Government of the Republic of Korea, national review report.
574. The Governments of Australia, Bangladesh, Nepal and Tonga also established quotas for women's participation in environmental decision-making, including for forest management (Bangladesh and Nepal), renewable energy projects (Tonga), and executive roles in the national environmental machinery (Australia).
575. Government of Bhutan, national review report.
576. UNEP 2020a.
577. UNEP 2020b.
578. IRENA 2019.
579. UNEP and IUCN 2018.
580. WMO 2020. The WMO defines Asia as including Afghanistan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Democratic People's Republic of Korea; Hong Kong, China; India; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Maldives; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; Pakistan; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Sri Lanka; Tajikistan; Thailand; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan and Viet Nam; all ESCAP members; as well as Iraq; Kuwait; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The South-West Pacific region includes Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Cook Islands; Fiji; French Polynesia; Indonesia; Kiribati; Malaysia; Micronesia (Federated States of); Nauru; New Caledonia; New Zealand; Niue; Papua New Guinea; the Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu and Vanuatu; all ESCAP members; in addition to the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
581. ESCAP 2017e.
582. The Global Climate Risk Index 2020.
583. Countries identified are Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga and Vanuatu.
584. ESCAP 2019c.
585. Neumeyer and Plumper 2007.
586. UN Women 2016a.
587. Ibid.
588. FAO et al. 2019.
589. FAO et al. 2020.
590. Naupa and Brien 2020.
591. ESCAP database, SDG 2.1.2, moderate or severe food security in the population, by sex, aged 15 and over (percentage of the population), 2018. Accessed 17 October 2020.
592. Naupa and Brien 2020.
593. FAO et al. 2020.
594. Naupa and Brien 2020.
595. Suleimenova 2020.
596. Yadav and Lal 2017.
597. UNEP et al. 2013.
598. Women lost an estimated 50.63 workdays due to the impact of the earthquake compared to men's estimated loss of 44.19 million workdays. See UN Women 2016a.
599. Camey et al. 2020.
600. Nguyen and Rydstrom 2018.
601. UN Women 2014b.
602. ICRC and ASEAN 2018.
603. HRW 2015.
604. UN Women 2014b.
605. UN Women 2016a.
606. UN Women 2014b.
607. Government of Fiji, national review report.
608. ADB 2012.
609. FAO et al. 2019.

A woman with her family, Philippines.  
Photo: Louie Pacardo / UN Women.



## Chapter 3

### Gender data for action: Making women's and girls' experiences visible in Asia and the Pacific

16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence Campaign for 2014, Solomon Islands. Photo: UN Women/ Patrick Reoka.



## Key messages



- 1. Gender data gaps hinder the abilities of member States to track progress on gender equality and women's empowerment indicators, and to use evidence-based policies to promote sustainable development.** Financial and technical capacity shortfalls in national statistical systems also present significant barriers to gender data production. These often stem from a lack of buy-in at managerial levels within data-producing organizations, as well as limited priority given to gender statistics in national policies and development plans. Addressing these issues can help close gender data gaps.
- 2. Even where gender data exist, they often fail to be widely used.** This may be due to a lack of technical capacities among data users to analyse and interpret available data. It may also be due to a disconnect between the data produced and actual data needs. Ensuring periodic dialogue between data users and producers can help tackle this challenge.
- 3. Notable regional progress has been made in generating new gender data and statistics.** Examples in the national review reports often emerged as stand-alone efforts, however, rather than as connected to broader national strategies to mainstream gender across data collection systems.
- 4. Disconnects between data collection and use need to be addressed moving forward.** In addition to bolstering investments in national statistical systems and strategies, member States need to prioritize actions to strengthen communication and collaboration between gender data producers and users.

## Gender data at the intersection of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda

The ability of governments in Asia and the Pacific to craft public policies that address gender inequalities and tackle the barriers to progress on women's empowerment is shaped by the availability of high-quality data and gender statistics (or "gender data"). Gender data are necessary on multiple fronts:<sup>610</sup> to identify where action is needed, to design policies that respond to those areas of need and to assess the impacts of policies. Gender data are also crucial tools for women's civil society organizations to evaluate efforts to achieve normative commitments and member State obligations, and the progress being made (or the lack thereof). Gender data are particularly critical to shedding light on the experiences of women who face multiple forms of discrimination. For this, sex disaggregation is necessary but insufficient to the task of making sure that women with distinct backgrounds and experiences are visible to policymakers, and that they can then work towards realizing the 2030 Agenda's promise to leave no one behind. Multiple and simultaneous disaggregation by sex and other variables, such as age, location and ethnicity, is necessary for this.

Gender data are one of the central means by which member States and other gender equality advocates can work together to catalyse progress across both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. The key role of data in driving evidence-based policies and programmes has long been understood by gender equality and women's empowerment advocates. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action included an explicit recommendation that States needed to regularly produce and disseminate sex-disaggregated statistics, noting that data gaps would hinder gender-responsive policymaking. Reflections at the 20-year mark after the Beijing Platform for Action foreshadowed ongoing challenges in tracking the direction and pace of progress on gender equality due to limited capacity within official gender data and statistical systems.<sup>611</sup>

Data are central to monitoring implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. The conceptual mapping of the SDGs across the 12 critical areas of concern for the Beijing+25 review has offered a chance for member States to think through the intersections and synergies between the two frameworks. Looking at how the SDGs overlap with the Beijing Platform for Action also illustrates opportunities to close gender data gaps and catalyse progress on both. This makes the regular collection and analysis of high-quality, comparable data a "cross-cutting" and urgent regional priority for Asia and the Pacific.<sup>612</sup>

In its original formulation, the 2030 Agenda contained 54 gender-specific indicators,<sup>613</sup> far exceeding the scope and ambitions of any previous development agenda.<sup>614</sup> Although these indicators are scattered across numerous goals, they tend to be concentrated under social and economic goals, with shortfalls under environmental goals. As a result, data availability to measure progress on social and economic measures from a gender perspective has increased since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, but the environment remains largely unmeasured from a gender angle.<sup>615</sup>

The 2030 Agenda and its accompanying SDG framework enhanced the expectations – and burdens – of data collection for everyone. It has highlighted the financial and technical capacity gaps of national statistical offices in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>616</sup> Furthermore, as evidenced by increases in the availability of some SDG data, but a lack of consistent sex-disaggregation across data production activities, these gaps have highlighted the insufficient priority given to gender statistics in national development strategies and budgets.

One central lesson gleaned from the national review reports is that the lack of gender data and data capacities is impeding the ability of member States to effectively operationalize and track progress on both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. As shown in Chapter 2, with some exceptions, not enough gender data required for the SDG indicators are being collected regularly enough to enable national and regional trends analysis. Where data do exist, they are often "snapshot" data (i.e., only one data point in time),

which hampers efforts to identify if an issue is progressing or regressing, and stalls policymaking efforts.

The national review reports suggested an acknowledgment within the region that gender data collection and use needs improvement, including through the regular production of sex-disaggregated statistics, and by strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices. What was relatively lacking across the reports was a baseline recognition of the need to mainstream gender across national statistical strategies in order to move the gender data agenda forward. Where there was this recognition, it still missed a clear articulation of how to implement this vision, including the need to earmark specific funds for it.

This chapter underscores the need for sustained investment in national statistical systems and data collection strategies across the region. This includes strengthened partnerships and collaboration between producers and users of gender data, including national gender machineries and research organizations. Rather than presenting data gaps as merely a significant regional challenge, this chapter encourages a more hopeful view and call to action. It highlights key strategic policy areas where “transformative pathways” for change exist,<sup>617</sup> including women’s time use, violence against women and girls, and the environment. This chapter frames the closing of gender data gaps in these areas as an opportunity for Asia and the Pacific to accelerate progress on both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

Drawing on Chapter 2, the first section of the chapter highlights six key gaps in the availability of data disaggregated by sex and gender statistics in Asia and the Pacific. It links monitoring implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The second section draws from the national review reports to identify areas of progress on gender data collection and use. This section points to promising regional efforts to cast light on violence against women and girls, and women’s unpaid care and domestic work through new surveys and knowledge products. It also notes that the prioritization of some thematic areas is an indication of the regional acknowledgment that

gender data can be leveraged to craft evidence-based policies to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. Next, the chapter provides an overview of some of the financial and technical challenges encountered by member States in their efforts to collect, analyse and take action on gender data. This section also identifies areas where member States’ reported priorities do not necessarily align with what is needed to accelerate progress for women and girls in the region. The chapter concludes with three recommendations for strengthening capacities to close existing gender data gaps, and to bolster monitoring and tracking of efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-related SDG targets.

## Gender data gaps and key areas of opportunity

The capacity of member States to monitor implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda, and to craft evidence-based policies that leave no women or girls behind, depends to a great extent on the production and use of high-quality official statistics.<sup>618</sup> Despite notable progress on the collection and use of gender data in Asia and the Pacific, less than 50 per cent of the gender indicators in the SDG monitoring framework currently have sufficient available data in the region.<sup>619</sup>

Gender data are typically generated using data from a wide variety of national official statistical sources. These include administrative records and registries (including civil registration and vital statistics), household surveys and population censuses. Data to monitor the SDGs and Beijing Platform for Action are therefore largely produced by national statistical offices and other producers within national statistical systems. These data form the backbone of public policymaking.

Gaps in gender data across the Asia-Pacific region emerge due to a twofold problem. First, national statistical offices are chronically underfunded, which leads to shortfalls in technical capacities to regularly collect, analyse and disseminate gender data.<sup>620</sup> Second, and relatedly, the prioritization and mainstreaming of gender into national statistical strategies remains sparse. These difficulties are

connected to a wider issue concerning the lack of communication and partnerships between official data producers and users, which often translate into low levels of gender data use even when it exists.<sup>621</sup> The relative absence of collaboration complicates the development of gender data strategies that ensure the production of estimates that respond to existing data needs among policymakers and other users. It limits data use for decision-making even when the right estimates are available, as users may fail to find, interpret or use existing data correctly.




A comprehensive mapping of data availability in the region in 2018 identified widespread gaps across the gender-related SDG indicators.<sup>622</sup> On the positive end, data were widely available (two thirds or more of the region) for 26 per cent of these indicators. They were moderately available (one third to two thirds) for 21 per cent. This means that for almost 50 per cent of all the gender-related indicators, there was a rich enough data picture to understand regional trends and identify entry points for policy action. On the more concerning end, there were no data available for up to 41 per cent of gender-related SDG indicators. For an additional 12 per cent of indicators, data were only somewhat available, often only one data point, and for less than one third of the region.

Some data gaps can be explained by the lack of relevance or applicability of particular indicators for a country.<sup>623</sup> For example, the incidence of malaria may not be relevant in countries with temperate or cold weather, and thus no data need to be produced for that indicator. Other gaps, however, are due less to the lack of national or local relevance than they are to the lack of prioritization, which often comes hand in hand with technical capacity gaps and financial shortfalls.

As reflections at the global level have noted, monitoring implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is linked with the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda.<sup>624</sup> The synergies between the two monitoring frameworks mean that every effort to close a gender data gap presents an opportunity to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment as well as on sustainable development. For instance, national efforts to improve monitoring of progress around Critical Area of Concern D (violence against women) can strengthen parallel efforts to ensure the gender-responsive implementation of SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), among others.

Table 3.1 highlights some of the key gaps in the availability of sex-disaggregated statistics and other forms of gender data in the region, and illustrates how these cut across the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDG indicator framework. The table also highlights where blended research methodologies<sup>625</sup> (e.g., time use data complemented with qualitative research on women's unpaid care and domestic work) can help to shed light on dynamics that may be otherwise obscured by quantitative data collection methods.<sup>626</sup> This includes dynamics besides gender that are relevant to a particular context. What follows is not an exhaustive list of gender data and statistics gaps in the region.<sup>627</sup> Instead, building on the discussion in Chapter 2, the table directs strategic attention to select gender data gaps. Closing these is paramount for galvanizing positive changes for women and girls across Asia and the Pacific. Moreover, and as elaborated in the next section on member State actions, two of the main opportunity areas flagged here – data on time use, and on violence against women and girls – are also reflected in the national reports, which reported efforts to make women's unpaid care and domestic work more visible, as well as different forms of violence affecting women and girls. This suggests a broader regional acknowledgment of “transformative areas” where data can accelerate progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs.

**Table 3.1 Opportunity areas: Key data asks across the six clusters**

Relationship to Beijing Platform for Action clusters and critical areas of concern	Data ask and related SDG target or indicator	Why are these data important for regional progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda?	Data availability (ESCAP calculation out of 58 countries, based on the global SDG indicators database, July 2020)
<p><b>Cluster 1: Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work</b></p> <p><b>Other relevant clusters: 2, 4</b></p> <p>Critical Area of Concern F. Women and the economy</p> <p>Critical Area of Concern A. Women and poverty</p> <p>Critical Area of Concern I. Human rights of women</p>	<p>Prioritize the regular collection of <b>internationally comparable time use data</b> to make visible the time burdens faced by women in the Asia and the Pacific region. In addition to sex, age and location, additional forms of disaggregation are key for ensuring that policies and programmes account for the distinct realities and needs of the most vulnerable women in the region.</p> <p><b>SDG Indicator 5.4.1:</b> Proportion of time on unpaid care and domestic work, by sex, age and location.</p>	<p>Time use data are critical for challenging the invisibility of women’s social and economic contributions through unpaid care and domestic work. These data can in turn increase policy support and inform policymaking across several transformative areas of action for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>628</sup> Specifically, time use data can provide a springboard for gender-responsive family leave, child and eldercare services, social protection policies, and investments in infrastructure, technology and services.</p>	 <p><b>SDG 5.4.1:</b></p> <p><b>Sufficient data: 10</b>  <b>Insufficient data: 11</b>  <b>No data: 37</b></p>
<p><b>Cluster 2: Poverty eradication, social protection and social services</b></p> <p>Critical Area of Concern C. Women and health</p> <p>Critical Area of Concern I. Human rights of women</p> <p>Critical Area of Concern L. The girl child</p>	<p>Invest in data collection strategies to capture women’s and men’s relative coverage by social protection floors or systems. Enhance data collection efforts on <b>women’s access to sexual and reproductive health services</b> by migration status to ensure that policymaking accounts for the needs of female migrants, IDPs and refugees.</p> <p><b>SDG indicator 1.3.1:</b> Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable.</p> <p><b>SDG indicator 3.7.1:</b> Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods.</p>	<p>Sex-disaggregated data on the proportion of populations covered by social protection floors are key for identifying and tackling gaps in women’s access to comprehensive social security systems. Such data will be important for gender equality and women’s empowerment actors to identify where greater investments are needed.</p> <p>Data on women’s access to sexual and reproductive health in humanitarian settings is key for ensuring adequate resource allocation and dignified, timely service delivery. Currently, national governments in the region are not prioritizing actions to facilitate access to sexual and reproductive health care for refugee women and other women in humanitarian settings. While the absence of high-level political will may be part of what is driving this inaction, the lack of data compounds the invisibility of this group of women and hampers advocacy efforts for adequate resource allocation and appropriate service delivery.<sup>629</sup></p>	 <p><b>SDG 1.3.1</b></p> <p><b>Sufficient data: 48</b>  <b>Insufficient data: 4</b>  <b>No data: 6</b></p>  <p><b>SDG 3.7.1:</b></p> <p><b>Sufficient data: 25</b>  <b>Insufficient data: 20</b>  <b>No data: 13</b>          (not disaggregated by migration or humanitarian status)</p>

Relationship to Beijing Platform for Action clusters and critical areas of concern

Data ask and related SDG target or indicator

Why are these data important for regional progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda?

Data availability (ESCAP calculation out of 58 countries, based on the global SDG indicators database, July 2020)

**Cluster 3: Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes**

**Other relevant clusters: 6, 4**

Critical Area of Concern D. Violence against women

Critical Area of Concern C. Women and health

Critical Area of Concern I. Human rights of women

Critical Area of Concern L. The girl child

Strengthen data collection and **evidence base on violence against women and girls.** Prevalence data should be disaggregated by factors such as age, disability, income, marital, employment or migrant status.

Data on violence against women and girls are most useful for policy advocacy when they **align with the national context** (demographics) and with the **concerns of relevant data users**, in this case, women's rights organizations, service providers, and academics and researchers.

**SDG indicator 5.2.1:** Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.

**SDG indicator 5.2.2:** Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence.

**SDG indicator 16.1.3:** Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months.

**SDG indicator 16.2.3:** Proportion of young women and men aged 18 to 29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18.

Violence against women and girls is widespread across the region, and reliable data are needed to channel efforts towards interventions to eliminate it in all forms.<sup>630</sup> Such data provide evidence to mobilize resources, make policies and conduct advocacy, such as by identifying common forms of violence, or identifying service implementation gaps that result in exclusions.

Gaps in political will, rather than data, are often the greater impediment for action on violence against women and girls.<sup>631</sup> But reliable data can empower women's civil society groups and service providers to push for action and hold decision-makers accountable.



**SDG 5.2.1:**

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 28**  
**No data: 30**

**SDG 5.2.2:**

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 0**  
**No data: 58**



**SDG 16.1.3:**

**Sufficient data: 4**  
**Insufficient data: 6**  
**No data: 48**

**SDG 16.2.3:**

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 12**  
**No data: 46**



Relationship to Beijing Platform for Action clusters and critical areas of concern

Data ask and related SDG target or indicator

Why are these data important for regional progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda?

Data availability (ESCAP calculation out of 58 countries, based on the global SDG indicators database, July 2020)

#### Cluster 4: Participation, accountability and gender responsive institutions

Other relevant clusters: 3, 6

Critical Area of Concern G. Women's power in decision-making

Critical Area of Concern D. Violence against women

Critical Area of Concern I. Human rights of women

Critical Area of Concern J. Women and the media

In order to identify the dynamics that create barriers to women's meaningful participation in public life, data on women's political participation need to be complemented with **data on the prevalence and drivers of violence against women in politics.**

Collaboration and partnerships with national and local women's civil society and research organizations are essential to these efforts.

**SDG indicator 5.5.1:** Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments.

In the context of shrinking civil society spaces for women and backlash against women's human rights defenders,<sup>632</sup> research on the social norms and other barriers to women's participation in public life and politics is urgently needed.

Alongside the available official data (e.g., SDG targets 5.2 and 5.5, and indicator 5.5.1), such research can be leveraged to craft context-specific interventions. These might include media and online campaigns to combat stigma around women's political participation, or programmes that provide leadership training and protection for women involved in civil society organizations and human rights spaces.



#### SDG 5.5.1:

**Sufficient data: 49**  
**Insufficient data: 4**  
**No data: 5**

#### Cluster 5: Peaceful and inclusive societies

Critical Area of Concern E. Women and armed conflict

Critical Area of Concern G. Women in power and decision-making

Invest in data collection efforts on **women's representation in the security sector, including the police and military, and at all levels of the judiciary,** to strengthen monitoring of progress on SDG targets 16.6 and 16.7.

**SDG indicator 16.7.1:** Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service and judiciary) compared to national distributions.

**SDG indicator 16.7.2:** Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group.

Enhancing women's representation across the justice and security sectors is key to building institutions that are accountable to women and gender equality concerns.<sup>633</sup>



#### SDG 16.7.1:

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 0**  
**No data: 58**

#### SDG 16.7.2:

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 0**  
**No data: 58**

Relationship to Beijing Platform for Action clusters and critical areas of concern

Data ask and related SDG target or indicator

Why are these data important for regional progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda?

Data availability (ESCAP calculation out of 58 countries, based on the global SDG indicators database, July 2020)

**Cluster 6: Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation**

Critical Area of Concern K. Women and the environment

Data on the number of deaths, missing persons, and persons directly affected by disaster **(SDG indicator 13.1.1) should be sex-disaggregated**, in order to buttress gender-sensitive responses to the impacts of environmental degradation, climate change and disasters in the region.

Bolster data collection efforts on land ownership and secure tenure **(SDG indicator 5.a.1)**, which are key components of the broader framework around gender and the environment.

**Context-specific gender analysis** and sex-disaggregated data can help to identify emergent vulnerabilities and tailor climate actions to meet the diverse needs of women and men in countries at particular risk of climate-related disasters.

**SDG indicator 13.1.1:** Number of deaths, missing persons, and persons directly affected by disaster per 100,000 people.

**SDG indicator 5.a.1:** Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure.

Qualitative research that uses gender analysis can provide critical insights while quantitative data indicators across gender and the environment are developed.<sup>634</sup>



**SDG 13.1.1:**

**Sufficient data: 39**  
**Insufficient data: 4**  
**No data: 15**

13.1.1 does not call for disaggregation by sex.<sup>635</sup>



**SDG 5.a.1:**

**Sufficient data: 0**  
**Insufficient data: 2**  
**No data: 56**

## Actions taken by member States to improve gender data and statistics

According to the 45 national review reports, areas of the most progress on gender statistics between 2014 and 2019 were: producing knowledge products (e.g., reports, policy briefs) in 21 countries; conducting new surveys to produce national baseline information on specialized topics in 21 countries; and reprocessing existing data (e.g., censuses and surveys) to produce more disaggregated data and/or new gender statistics in 14 countries. Thirty-three member States reported that they have a defined national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs, while 34 reported that data collection and compilation on SDG 5 indicators and on gender-specific indicators under other SDGs had begun.

A handful of member States (Japan, Kiribati, the Republic of Korea and Palau) reported that they had enhanced the resources and capacities of their national statistical offices in the past five years. For example, one of the main tasks prioritized in the Republic of Korea's First National Statistics Development Plan (2015) was gender mainstreaming, for which a council to improve the gender responsiveness of statistics was established. Under the plan, two ministries are selected annually to receive dedicated technical and capacity-building support to develop gender statistics. The national statistical office in Kiribati developed a strategic plan to close data gaps in gender statistics. The country's national statistical strategy included capacity-building workshops focused on methodologies for gender data collection.

Other member States (Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of)), New Zealand and Uzbekistan) referred to efforts to mainstream gender into national statistical strategies and databases. The Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, established a Women and the Family Atlas, which includes 40 indicators on the status of women at the national and subnational levels. In 2018, the Government of Georgia's main statistical office, Geostat, launched an electronic gender data portal. This has been accompanied by efforts to publicly disseminate

data and bolster the capacity of data users in the country, with future plans to train journalists, non-governmental organizations and civil servants in gender data interpretation and use. Statistics New Zealand's integrated data infrastructure database is a compelling example of a centralized database on gender statistics. It holds de-identified and linked microdata across a range of topics, including education, income, benefits, migration, justice and health. It has become a rich source of information for data users (including the Ministry for Women and researchers) to undertake gender analysis for policy advocacy around, for example, the gender wage gap and parental leave.

In addition to these country-specific advancements, a range of encouraging and more widespread efforts have emerged through the analysis of member State reports. Notable efforts across much of the region have sought to make violence against women and girls, and women's unpaid care and domestic work increasingly visible, including through the development of new surveys and knowledge products. The prioritization of these themes is promising in that it indicates regional acknowledgment of "transformative areas" where data can be used to accelerate progress on the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs. As governments in the region develop data collection capacities around these areas, data can in turn be used to drive policies to address and end violence against women and girls, and reduce, redistribute, and recognize unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>636</sup>

### Member State efforts to make violence against women and girls visible

Eliminating violence against women and girls would transform life for women and girls across the region,<sup>637</sup> opening pathways for them to fully exercise and enjoy their rights to quality education, good health and decent work, among a host of other areas that cut across the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action warned that inadequate documentation and research on violence against women and girls across private and public spaces hindered efforts to design appropriate intervention strategies.<sup>638</sup> Twenty-five years later, the Asia-Pacific Declaration also places special

emphasis on the need to strengthen data collection and evidence on the phenomenon, and ties this directly to state capacities to accelerate progress on ending all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including in the digital realm.<sup>639</sup> It is therefore encouraging that in the past five years, many member States dedicated data collection efforts towards closing gaps related to this issue.

In the past five years, nine countries reported that they had conducted new surveys focused on violence against women and girls. Two countries conducted new surveys focused on violence against children. Two surveys focused specifically on attitudes towards violence. The examples offered by member States were compelling and diverse. For instance, Lao PDR reported on their high-level commitment to improve gender data production and dissemination. They not only conducted prevalence surveys on violence against women, but accompanied this effort with a survey on attitudes in relation to violence and abortion. In another encouraging development, the Government added new indicators based on the survey data (e.g., on unsatisfied demand for contraception) to produce a baseline for future policy decisions.

Noting the “vacuum of national representative data” on violence against women, Bangladesh conducted its second national survey in 2016,<sup>640</sup> while Indonesia in 2018 conducted two new surveys, one on violence against women and another on violence against children. The Republic of Korea also reported conducting a new survey on violence against women and family status, and noted that the survey included updated typologies of violence and family types.

Samoa undertook two comprehensive national studies on violence. The first, The Samoa Family Safety Study (2017), was commissioned by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and identified the high prevalence of violence against women, and also against children, older persons and people living with disabilities. The second major study involved a national inquiry into family violence over two years (2016 to 2018). It is promising too that the Government of Samoa is prioritizing capacity-building efforts to strengthen the use of gender data and statistics, which suggests

that surveys and any related knowledge products will be tapped for policy and advocacy action.

Mongolia has relied on partnerships to build its evidence base on violence against women and girls. For example, in 2017, the Government worked with UNFPA and conducted a qualitative and quantitative study on gender-based violence, using a WHO methodology to ensure comparability with other countries in the region. In efforts to better use administrative data sources to close data gaps, the Philippines reported it had harmonized client intake forms at centres that provide services for survivors. Bhutan implemented a national study on violence against women that included 2,000 participants.

Several countries reported that they had established an interagency coordination mechanism on gender statistics (Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand and Turkey). One of the more compelling examples came from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which released a national data collection and reporting framework designed to improve the evidence base for family, domestic and sexual violence, and improve the scope of national-level gender indicators. This framework, produced in partnership with the Department of Social Services, was integrated into Australia’s National Plan. It will inform efforts to use more gender-responsive data in formulating policy and implementing programmes in the future.

Reflecting on the national review reports, one area given less attention than collecting data on violence against women and girls was the use of such data. Member States were not always explicit about their strategies or plans to apply data that they are collecting now or plan to collect over the next five years. Disconnects between data collection and use need to be addressed moving forward. Further, such data should only be collected where all necessary ethical and safety guidelines<sup>641</sup> have been followed,<sup>642</sup> and where there are plans (developed in partnership with women’s civil society groups, service providers and researchers) for how the data will be used to inform budgetary allocations, policy design and service delivery, and thus improve the lives of victims and survivors, and women and girls at risk.

## Member State efforts to account for women's time use

Time use survey data provides, among other types of information, a key foundation from which to craft policies and programmes that reduce, redistribute and recognize women's unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>643</sup> As the discussion in Cluster 1 highlighted, however, data on women's time use is very limited in the region.<sup>644</sup> Fewer than half of countries have collected time use data at least once, and only six have mainstreamed time use surveys in their national statistical systems and collect the data regularly.<sup>645</sup>

Encouragingly, a number of countries reported that they had conducted time use surveys or national studies in the past five years (Bhutan, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Thailand and Turkey), indicating that important steps are being taken at the regional level to address the lack of data so governments can track progress on SDG indicator 5.4.1, on the proportion of time on unpaid care and domestic work, by sex, age and location. Kyrgyzstan reported that it conducts time use surveys on a regular basis (once in five years) among households participating in the Kyrgyz Integrated Household Survey. The data collected enable country-level analysis of gendered differences in the distribution of time spent on paid work as opposed to unpaid care and domestic work, and include information on the proportion of time spent on rest and leisure. As part of an effort to improve data use and communications, the results of time use surveys are posted on the Government's official statistics website. China reported conducting the second round of its national time use survey in 2018, which has been crafted in alignment with international methodologies to enable comparisons. The Government plans to integrate a survey on women's social standing in the next round of the survey.

While time use surveys are still sparse in the region, and the examples offered by member States for the past five years were relatively thin on detail, the growing level of regional awareness of the importance of collecting time use data in the next five years points in a promising direction.<sup>646</sup> Twenty countries stated that moving forward, they plan to prioritize the production of new surveys to support

the collection of gender data, and the bulk of these will focus on time use data (Australia, Bangladesh, China, Nepal, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Australia plans to continue developing its highly detailed time use survey, including to capture time spent checking work emails, caring for a sick child, preparing dinner or even standing on the sidelines at a child's sporting event. Bangladesh is planning a time use survey to help address gender data gaps in SDG indicators. Many countries that reported on plans to develop new time use or other surveys in the coming five years highlighted that their capacity to move forward would be subject to adequate resource allocation (e.g., Lao PDR, Marshall Islands, New Zealand and Palau).

## Ongoing challenges and areas needing further action

Despite notable progress over the past five years in improving data on violence against women and girls and time use, ongoing challenges persist in data collection and use. Sixteen of the 45 national review reports explicitly stated that gender data gaps and related financial, technical and institutional capacity shortfalls within national statistical offices were key impediments to overall progress on monitoring and implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs. While these issues were not as explicit in other national review reports, evidence of the same challenges appeared in varying degrees in all reports with written responses to the section of the questionnaire on data and statistics. When asked to reflect on overall progress and attendant challenges in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, only two member States (the Federated States of Micronesia and Mongolia) highlighted improvements in gender data collection, access or quality as enabling factors. In contrast, more than 10 member States (Bhutan, Cook Islands, Georgia, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Lao PDR, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Pakistan, Palau, Samoa and Uzbekistan) described significant shortfalls in financial, technical and human capacity to collect sex-disaggregated statistics; these gaps undercut access to and use of gender data for decision-making.

Overall, most member States reported minimal progress over the past five years in making improvements to administrative or alternative data sources; using more gender-responsive data in the formulation of policies, and implementation of programmes and projects; and developing centralized web-based databases or dashboards on gender statistics. These areas of stagnation suggest that member States are struggling with implementing more systemic approaches to gender data and statistical system improvements. Many new surveys and knowledge products mentioned in the national reviews (e.g., around violence against women and girls or time use) were reported as standalone efforts, rather than as connected to broader national strategies to mainstream gender in data collection and data use.

In addition to identified financial and technical capacity limitations, two additional but interrelated challenges that emerged from the analysis of the national review reports pertained to multidimensional disaggregation, and connecting data producers and users.

### **Multidimensional disaggregation to leave no women or girls behind**

While sex-disaggregated data are key to making sure that women and girls in Asia and the Pacific are visible, the 2030 Agenda's commitment to leave no one behind entails a more ambitious vision of disaggregation. The United Nations' Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics<sup>647</sup> highlight that multidimensional disaggregation is needed to reflect experiences and outcomes for women and girls across income, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location.<sup>648</sup> This level of disaggregation requires capacity-building, particularly in countries that still struggle to collect sex-disaggregated data. Relatively few countries<sup>649</sup> reported that they include demographic data on disability (17 countries), migratory status (18 countries) or race/ethnicity (20 countries) in their national surveys. This suggests that progress is still needed to meaningfully "operationalize intersectionality"<sup>650</sup> in data collection for such a diverse region.

As research on SDG monitoring in the region emphasizes, multidimensional disaggregation is

critical for identifying groups of women and girls most at risk of being left behind.<sup>651</sup> Shedding light on the experiences of vulnerable groups via data is a necessary first step prior to any action to address that vulnerability.<sup>652</sup> Policies and programmes need to be informed by data disaggregated beyond sex. Otherwise, member States will not be able to monitor whether national efforts to address barriers to equality and empowerment are reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized women. The national review reports, however, offered few explicit examples of how governments have used gender data to craft evidence-based policies aligned to the unique needs and interests of diverse women.<sup>653</sup>

### **Fostering collaboration between gender data producers and users**

Developing a disaggregation strategy (and any gender data strategy) requires that member States invest in meaningful partnerships and collaboration with gender equality and women's empowerment actors.<sup>654</sup> The contributions of national gender machineries, within and beyond national governments, as well as researchers and other data users are key to helping governments identify which demographic factors are most relevant and useful. As the Beijing Platform for Action recognized 25 years ago, in order to strengthen gender data and analysis, women's civil society organizations (as both data users and non-official data producers) need to be included in the development of appropriate research and data collection strategies.<sup>655</sup>

It is therefore concerning that not a single country in the region planned to prioritize actions to bolster communication and collaboration between gender data producers and users in the coming five years. Fostering meaningful dialogue requires the creation of institutional mechanisms (e.g., regular forums) whereby official data producers, including national statistical offices, sit at the same table as potential data users (though more often as "data producers"), including women's civil society organizations, front-line service providers and practitioners, researchers and private sector service providers.<sup>656</sup> This regional gap in partnerships with gender data users stands in contrast to the relatively widespread reported intentions of 20 member States to use more gender-sensitive data in the coming five years.<sup>657</sup>

## Conclusion and recommendations

The regular collection, analysis, dissemination and use of sex-disaggregated data and other gender statistics is an urgent regional priority for governments in Asia and the Pacific to effectively monitor progress on the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as parallel commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda.<sup>658</sup> To enhance the availability and use of gender data, regional efforts should focus on **leveraging established strategies that can address the financial, technical, and political and institutional shortfalls** that are largely at the root of gender data gaps.

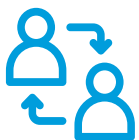
This chapter concludes with **three recommendations** for enhancing the capacities of national governments to close existing gender data gaps, and strengthen the monitoring and tracking of efforts to implement the Beijing Platform for Action and gender-related SDG targets. These recommendations focus on strategic levers to mainstream gender into national statistical strategies and prioritize it in data collection.<sup>659</sup> Closing financial and capacity shortfalls depends significantly on high-level commitment and political will to improve gender data and leverage them for action.<sup>660</sup>



**Boost investment in national statistical systems, with specific resources allocated for gender statistics.** For developed countries in the region, domestic resource mobilization will be key. For less developed countries, efforts to strengthen gender data and statistical systems will depend in large part on targeted international development assistance and other capacity-building support.<sup>661</sup> To boost investments, national strategies to enhance statistics and for national development more broadly must specifically prioritize gender statistics.



**Increase communication, collaboration and partnerships between producers and users of gender data.** This includes dialogue between national statistical offices, national gender machineries and policymakers in other areas of government, women's civil society organizations, academics and research institutions. Investments in national statistical systems should "correspond to resource requirements for the statistical products and services demanded by users".<sup>662</sup>



**Ensure that existing gender data are widely used.** Although gender data availability is on the rise, evidence shows that gender statistics are still not consistently making it into policy decisions. Existing statistics should be widely used, including both quantitative and qualitative data, and data generated through non-traditional sources. To enhance data use, besides continued dialogue, centralized gender data hubs can play an important role. By collating all existing gender data in a single location, along with qualitative research, reports, infographics and other communication products, these hubs facilitate user searches and provide an opportunity to reach data users with different levels of statistical literacy.

610. Gender statistics include, but are not limited to, statistics disaggregated by sex, as well as data that may not be disaggregated by sex but that reflect the specific experiences and needs of women and girls, such as data on violence against women and girls.
611. UN Women 2015a.
612. ECOSOC 2019a.
613. As outlined by UN Women, the indicator framework is “gender-sensitive” in 6 out of 17 goals (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 16), “gender-sparse” in other critical areas (SDGs 2, 10, 11, 13 and 17) and “gender-blind” in the rest (SDGs 6, 7, 9, 12, 14 and 15). See UN Women 2018c.
614. Fuentes and Cookson 2020.
615. See [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP.CST\\_.2020.INF\\_.10\\_Gender\\_Environment\\_Statistics.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/ESCAP.CST_.2020.INF_.10_Gender_Environment_Statistics.pdf) on mainstreaming gender in environment statistics.
616. ESCAP 2017d.
617. ADB and UN Women 2018.
618. ESCAP 2018a.
619. UN Women 2020l.
620. ESCAP 2017f.
621. ADB and UN Women 2018.
622. There are 85 unique gender-related indicators (54 core gender indicators and 31 additional gender-related). This total excludes the two indicators that repeat across the framework. See ADB and UN Women 2018.
623. ESCAP 2017d.
624. ECOSOC 2019a.
625. ESCAP 2019a.
626. Cookson 2018b.
627. For a comprehensive mapping of regional data gaps, see ADB and UN Women 2018.
628. Ibid.
629. CanWaCH 2020.
630. Harr 2018.
631. Fuentes and Cookson 2020.
632. ECOSOC 2019a.
633. UN Women 2019b.
634. Seager 2019.
635. Enumerating methodologically coherent gender-related indicators related to the environment and climate change is a pressing issue at the global level. It is perhaps nowhere more urgent than across Asia and the Pacific, the most disaster-prone region in the world. This makes the general dearth of gender-responsive or sex-disaggregated data on the impacts of environmental degradation and climate change all the more concerning. While there are two gender-relevant indicators under SDG 13 on climate action, there are virtually no data to monitor this goal from a gender perspective in the region. Understanding the impact of environmental degradation and climate-related disasters on gender equality and women’s empowerment should be an urgent priority.
636. UN Women 2018c.
637. ADB and UN Women 2018.
638. United Nations 1995.
639. ESCAP 2019a.
640. Government of Bangladesh, national review report, p. 79.
641. UNFPA Asia-Pacific’s kNOwVAWdata initiative is producing rich guidance and knowledge products in this area, working with countries to build capacities for data collection, interpretation and use (including technical assistance for prevalence surveys, training, mentoring, South-South collaboration, communities of practice and more). For more info, see: <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/decision-tree-data-collection-violence-against-women-and-covid-19>.
642. Harr 2018.
643. ILO and UNDP 2018.
644. In ESCAP’s database, only six countries in the region (Japan, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Pakistan, Republic of Korea and Thailand) have reported on time spent on unpaid domestic chores (SDG 5.4.1) since 2000.
645. ILO and UNDP 2018.
646. Ibid.
647. ECOSOC 2013.
648. ESCAP 2017d.
649. On the other hand, there were a few notable examples to suggest that some member States are prioritizing data collection on demographic factors relevant to their national contexts. Australia on indigeneity; Cambodia on mother tongue/religion; New Zealand, including labour force status, household composition and family type; Tonga on labour force and religion; Turkmenistan on family status; and Uzbekistan on nationality and citizenship.
650. ESCWA 2019.
651. ADB and UN Women 2018.
652. ESCAP 2017d.
653. One notable exception was the Marshall Islands. Their three-year strategy for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy was crafted based on available research and data (including sex- and age-disaggregated data).
654. United Nations General Assembly 1995.
655. Ibid.
656. UN Women 2018c.
657. Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Samoa, Timor-Leste, Turkey, Vanuatu and Viet Nam.
658. ADB and UN Women 2018.
659. These recommendations also align with the ESCAP SDG Progress Report. See: 2020. [https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP\\_Asia\\_and\\_the\\_Pacific\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_2020.pdf](https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/publications/ESCAP_Asia_and_the_Pacific_SDG_Progress_Report_2020.pdf).
660. UN Women 2018c.
661. United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force for Financing Development 2016.
662. ESCAP 2018a.



Girls' football teams in Gaziantep, Turkey played for solidarity against gender-based violence. Photo: UN Women.



# Chapter 4

## Conclusion: The Way Forward

## Overview

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and five years into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, member States in Asia and the Pacific have reaffirmed their commitment to achieving gender quality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and ensuring women's human rights.<sup>663</sup> Across the chapters in this report, there is clear evidence of progress towards these goals. Yet advances remain uneven across and within countries, especially where women and girls face intersectional barriers due to their income, geography, age, race, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation.

This review has presented a synthesis of progress on gender equality and women's empowerment as reported by ESCAP member States between 2014 and 2019. Writing this report, however, occurred as the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding and threatening to overturn hard-won gains on gender equality and women's empowerment. Across every cluster area, the impacts of COVID-19 will likely be amplified for women and girls as a result of their lower access to resources and assets (clusters 1 and 6), unpaid care and domestic responsibilities (cluster 1), more limited access to social protection and gender-responsive health care (cluster 2), deepening isolation and gender-based violence (cluster 3), unequal representation in all areas of political and public life (cluster 4), and by virtue of their vulnerabilities in contexts of migration, conflict, displacement, insecurity and environment-related crises (clusters 1, 5 and 6).<sup>664</sup>

During crises, whether related to the economy, health or security, women and girls face increasing risks of being left behind as commitments to guaranteeing women's rights erode.<sup>665</sup> Confronting these risks requires mainstreaming the rights and needs of women and girls in all policies and programmes so that these address the specific gendered impacts of COVID-19 and establish a foundation for a just recovery. As this report makes clear, the extent to which women and girls have

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**During crises, whether related to the economy, health or security, women and girls face increasing risks of being left behind as commitments to guaranteeing women's rights erode.**

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access to social protection, quality and affordable health care, economic opportunities and public services has an enormous bearing on their life opportunities and well-being.

Bearing this in mind, government response and recovery plans must not only protect gains for women from the past 25 years, but must seize the opportunity to "build back better" with gender-responsive national systems that address systemic barriers and catalyse structural changes towards the goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. On this front, it will be imperative that member States resist the urge to implement austerity measures that will reverse achievements to date.<sup>666</sup>

This chapter begins by reviewing the findings of this synthesis reports and establishes these as important inputs for member States as they endeavour to tackle the challenges of COVID-19, which are likely to endure long after the virus is under control. The second section presents member States' reported priorities for the coming five years, and considers these in the context of the rapidly unfolding impacts of COVID-19, and the need to continue making progress on gender equality and women's empowerment ahead of the Beijing+30 review and the 2030 endpoint of the SDGs.

## Synthesizing 25 years of progress

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, 20 years after United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and five years into the 2030 Agenda, notable but often uneven progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment has been made across Asia and the Pacific.

### Despite progressive efforts to promote rights at work and the right to work, adverse social norms persist

Progress in strengthening legal frameworks and workplace policies that support women's labour force participation and opportunities for decent work include family leave (maternal, paternal and family), equal pay policies, non-discrimination laws and protection against violence in the workplace. Women's right to work and their rights at work, however, are constrained by high levels of informal and vulnerable employment in the region, and often hinge on the willingness of employers to ensure decent work and equal opportunities.<sup>667</sup> While member States have expressed commitment to supporting women's entrepreneurship, further action is needed to increase women's access to productive assets, to establish and/or strengthen gender-responsive labour and social protections, and to expand their access to online and offline marketplaces so entrepreneurship offers opportunities for decent work.

Where labour and workplace policies are gender blind, discriminatory social norms, unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and limited (or no) protections shape women's experiences and capacities to enter, remain or progress in the workplace. Promoting rights to work must be balanced with efforts to address social norms around gender pay gaps, occupational segregation and vulnerable employment.

### Efforts to empower women must factor in unpaid care and domestic work

Supporting unpaid care and domestic work and caregivers requires investments, not only in high-quality health and social care services, but also in infrastructure to support access to clean energy, clean and reliable water, and sanitation services. As it currently stands, women's unpaid care and domestic work subsidizes formal health-care systems, and ensures that the routine needs of children, older persons and persons with disabilities are met. More ambitious action towards achieving universal health coverage is warranted, including access to sexual and reproductive health services. Greater investments are also needed to ensure that women and their families have access to quality and affordable public childcare and eldercare services.

### Social protection should be crafted in a gender-responsive manner

The increased provision of social protection, infrastructure and basic services for women and girls must be balanced by efforts to improve the scope, quality, safety, accessibility and affordability of these services.<sup>668</sup> There is a need to expand gender-responsive social protection programmes for women, including income security, health care, maternity and child benefits, and pension programmes. Cash transfer schemes are a key mechanism through which member States are extending social protection coverage.

### Efforts to enhance sexual and reproductive health-care services must address persistent barriers

Sexual and reproductive health services are a key catalyst for sustainable development across the region. The capacity of women and girls to access these services has implications for rights related to life, health, privacy, education and non-discrimination. Financial and geographical barriers to accessing such services are often

exacerbated for women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. A paramount priority is to adopt additional measures to guarantee access to health care, especially sexual and reproductive health services, for women and girls whose access to them is hampered by language, lack of information, insufficient resources, political instability or fear of discrimination.<sup>669</sup>

### **Educational attainments need to be translated into decent work opportunities for women**

Significant regional progress has been made in closing gender gaps in secondary education, yet women's labour force participation remains low. Greater regional efforts are needed to enable the school-to-work transition; reduce the numbers of young women (and men) who are not in education, employment, or training; and ensure that decent work opportunities are available to young women.

### **Violence against women and girls continues unabated, despite progressive laws, action plans and policies**

Despite a notable focus on reducing violence against women and girls, and especially intimate partner violence, prevalence rates remain high across the region, which illustrates the need for additional action. Progress has been made in passing new laws and strengthening existing ones aimed at elimination of violence against women and girls, but more effective implementation is needed. Addressing discriminatory social norms can have a preventative and protective effect, particularly when men and boys are engaged. Member States also need to strengthen efforts to address the experiences of women in the media industry and the discriminatory portrayals of women in media, and to protect women and girls from violence in online spaces.

### **Discriminatory social norms hold back the leadership potential of women**

Despite women's greater participation and leadership in political and public life across the region, discriminatory social norms continue to hinder their access to public spaces, especially as voters, candidates, leaders and managers. To

push back against rising extremist forces that threaten the reversal of gains women have made in political and public life in the region, there is an urgent need to invest in strengthening national gender machineries, gender-responsive budgeting and partnerships with women's civil society organizations. Creating and strengthening partnerships between national gender machineries and women's civil society networks, as well as with other relevant stakeholders, including in the private sector, will be key to making further progress on gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **The women, peace and security agenda must engage with women in a sustained and empowered manner**

National action plans on women, peace and security are being adopted and implemented in the region, but enhanced localization, financing, monitoring and evaluation are needed to accelerate their impact. Greater women's participation in the security and justice sectors is necessary to migrate away from institutional mindsets that see women only as victims, and towards promoting women as actors who make meaningful contributions to the construction of peaceful and inclusive societies. While governments report taking some steps to include more women in justice and security systems, these measures are often ad hoc, tackling discrete issues and stopping short of a push for structural and long-term change.

### **Developing gender-responsive environmental policies with the participation of women stakeholder groups is critical to address climate change and disasters**

Women's vulnerabilities to climate change in the region are shaped by gender inequalities in access to resources, dependence on agricultural livelihoods, and unpaid care and domestic work. These vulnerabilities are reinforced by a lack of gender-responsive environmental policies. The review of progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the areas of environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation highlights an urgent need to increase women's participation and leadership in climate change and disaster risk reduction platforms.

## From infrastructure to ICTs: where further investments are needed

### Social protection

States have an opportunity to “build back better” through sustained investments in gender-responsive social protection and care systems.<sup>670</sup> In 2019, member States in Asia and the Pacific committed to ensuring gender-responsive and inclusive social protection systems, including social protection floors and access to public services for women and girls of all ages, without discrimination.<sup>671</sup> As detailed in Cluster 2, gender-responsive social protection systems go beyond the provision of basic necessities. They should be unconditional, based on gender-sensitive design and evaluation, and include accessible and reasonable mechanisms for women to register complaints.<sup>672</sup> Efforts must include persons in the informal sector, who make up the majority of the working-age population, migrant workers,<sup>673</sup> entrepreneurs<sup>674</sup> and the unemployed, all of whom typically lack social protection coverage.

As it currently stands, women’s unpaid care and domestic work subsidizes formal health-care systems and ensures that the routine needs of children, older persons and persons with disabilities are met.<sup>675</sup> More ambitious actions are needed to achieve universal health coverage, including access to sexual and reproductive health services.<sup>676</sup> Greater investments are also needed to ensure that women and their families have access to quality public childcare, care for family members with disabilities and eldercare services.

### Inclusive digital access and skills

As the world trends towards greater digitalization, more concerted efforts are needed to ensure that women are not left behind because of a lack of digital literacy, connectivity, or access to mobile phones or computers. In the context of COVID-19, access to critical services (including health and education) is increasingly dependent on the capacity to leverage ICT. Those without digital access and skills otherwise face interrupted service provision. The gender gap in ICT skills and access

effectively reduces women’s capacity to adapt to mobility restrictions, and in many contexts, the shift to online procurement of goods, services and information.<sup>677</sup> This includes access to services for violence against women and girls, many of which have now shifted to online service delivery models. Efforts to tackle the digital gender divide are thus vital for the educational and economic inclusion of women and girls as well as their safety and access to public life.<sup>678</sup> Furthermore, efforts to increase women’s digital inclusion must seek to ensure that barriers posed by factors such as geographic location, disability, income and language do not constrain use of ICT.

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**As the world trends towards greater digitalization, more concerted efforts are needed to ensure that women are not left behind because of a lack of digital literacy, connectivity, or access to mobile phones or computers.**

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Access to digital financial products and services, including grants and loans, is critical at a moment when so many formal and informal businesses, including own-account workers, are experiencing interruptions in productive activities and correlating declines in income. Yet as data from the Cluster 1 analysis made clear, women are less likely to have access to financial services of all kinds, such as credit and loans. The digital gender gap means that they are also less likely to have the capacity to transition to online systems.<sup>679</sup> Women-owned businesses therefore tend to be more reliant on self-financing, which increases their vulnerability to economic shocks.<sup>680</sup> Women use social capital and relationships to fill in for their lack of access to digital services and financial capital, but social distancing regulations can quickly break down these support systems. Within this context, it is vital that member States implement measures to support women-owned businesses to weather the pandemic and the recession that some predict will follow.

## Sustainable infrastructure

An increase in women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities has been a defining feature of the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>681</sup> This dynamic is not particular to this crisis. Women often increase time spent on unpaid care and domestic work when public services are not available, and where private support is prohibitively expensive.<sup>682</sup> While women, men, girls and boys in the region have reported an increase in time spent on care work during lockdowns, the impact has been greatest on women: 27 per cent reported time increases across at least three unpaid domestic work activities, compared to 14 per cent of men.<sup>683</sup>

In line with the Asia-Pacific Declaration, "building back better" requires establishing gender-responsive, accessible, affordable and quality basic infrastructure, and prioritizing investments that equalize sharing of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities between men and women.<sup>684</sup> Supporting unpaid care and domestic work and those who do it calls for investments not only in high-quality health and social care services, but also in sustainable public infrastructure such as electricity, running water and sanitation. Such investments are also critical to ensuring that individuals and their caregivers can practise recommended measures to reduce the spread of illness. Furthermore, gender-responsive and inclusive access to digital infrastructure is linked to employment and education outcomes, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and safety and support for women facing violence and insecurity. COVID-19 has driven many of these opportunities for support online, where existing digital gender gaps threaten to interrupt access, especially for women and girls in remote and rural areas, those with disabilities, and migrant workers, refugees and others facing language and/or literacy barriers.<sup>685</sup>

## The next five years: member State priorities for Beijing+30 and achieving the 2030 Agenda

Member States in Asia and the Pacific indicated that eliminating violence against women and girls, promoting women's political participation and enhancing women's access to decent work are the top priorities for the coming five years. Notably, areas for action presented in Chapter 2 were reported prior to the onset of the pandemic. Yet they remain important starting points for anticipating where progress can be accelerated for women and girls in the COVID-19 response and recovery in line with the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda.

**Promoting women's political participation** is critical to gender-responsive public policymaking and resource allocation. In the region, 80 per cent of policymakers and other key decision-makers are men. In the context of the pandemic, security-driven policy and legislative crisis responses, led by predominantly male decision-makers, have not only failed to engage women in leadership roles but also threaten to inflame existing gender inequalities and violent extremism.<sup>686</sup> Women's leadership is necessary to ensure that COVID-19 response and recovery plans meet the needs of women and girls.<sup>687</sup> Where democratic processes have moved online, safe spaces for women leaders, activists and women from marginalized groups must be created to ensure these processes are inclusive.<sup>688</sup> There is also encouraging evidence emerging that discriminatory social norms around perceptions of women's effectiveness as political leaders are changing in response to the relative successes of women-led governments in the COVID-19 response.<sup>689</sup> Such a shift offers an important opportunity to enhance and encourage women's participation in political life, and accelerate progress in this area now and beyond the global health crisis.



Discussion covering the SDGs with participants from Blind and Deaf Society of Turkmenistan. Photo: UN Women.

At the time of the writing of this report, calls to **eliminate violence against women and girls** resonate from around the world. This is due in large part to feminist activism urging attention to an unintended consequence of “stay at home orders” meant to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus: a “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence.<sup>690</sup> Restrictions to women’s mobility, loss of income and the classification as “non-essential” of services such as women’s shelters have increased women’s risk of and exposure to violence. Furthermore, as education, employment and the procurement of household goods and services moves online for many, women’s potential exposure to ICT-facilitated violence increases.<sup>691</sup>

Partnering with women’s civil society organizations can provide member States with important pathways for channelling resources to women and girls, mindful of inequalities based on race, disability, income, age, migration status and geographic location, among others. This is vital for correcting

a dangerous dynamic: As a result of the pandemic, 12 per cent of civil society organizations in the region working on eliminating violence against women have completely suspended their services, and 71 per cent are only partially operational.<sup>692</sup> Women’s rights organizations, including those that respond to gender-based violence, were grossly underfunded relative to the size of the population they served prior to the pandemic.<sup>693</sup> Member States must ensure that appropriate funding is earmarked for services that support prevention and protection, and will need to further develop measures to ensure that cyberviolence does not restrict women and girls’ educational and economic opportunities.<sup>694</sup> COVID-19 also brings additional risks and barriers in terms of data collection on violence against women and girls.<sup>695</sup> This calls for member States to provide meaningful support to gender equality and women’s empowerment actors as they try to find creative ways to shed light on the scope and nature of the problem, and craft appropriate responses.

Measures to **enhance women's access to decent work** will be critical as the world recovers from the pandemic. While the impacts of the health crisis in Asia and the Pacific are felt by both men and women, women may face stronger shocks as a result of their overrepresentation in sectors that are hardest hit, such as agriculture, fishing and tourism.<sup>696</sup> An estimated 66 per cent of women (and 57 per cent of men) farmers in the region have reported decreases in income from farming and fishing, threatening household income and food security.<sup>697</sup> Women in informal work and those in part-time and temporary work face additional insecurity where health and safety precautions, as well as social protection services, are not provided. Worryingly, an estimated 84 per cent of women in the region who lost their jobs or have not been working as a result of COVID-19 have lacked social protection benefits, including unemployment benefits or government financial support.<sup>698</sup>

Balancing paid employment and unpaid care through promoting flexibility in work arrangements is necessary for ensuring women's continued access to work, and towards transforming labour markets in line with human rights and well-being. Where workplaces have moved online, violence against women in the household infiltrates women's work. They must have the ability to prioritize their own safety and that of their children.<sup>699</sup> Furthermore, institutional support for parents, through early childhood education, daycare and childcare provisions, are critical components.

Plans to address the multifaceted, long-term fallout of COVID-19 must account for existing gender dynamics in order to avoid deepening inequalities.<sup>700</sup> Government budgets are already strained by the costs of the pandemic, including its adverse impacts on health and care systems, drastic halting of much economic activity, and the related need to keep individuals, families and businesses afloat through emergency social protection measures and relief benefits. As governments turn to revising budgets, there is a danger that the services that women rely on, such as pre- and postnatal care, sexual and reproductive health services, childcare and eldercare, and services that prevent and respond to violence, will face funding cuts.

"Building back better" must be more than a rhetorical promise, especially for the most vulnerable women and girls whose lives have been upended by COVID-19. Achieving these targets may require the reconfiguration of existing service models and the development of new models that transition away from "in-person" service provision and conditionalities. Indeed, ensuring a just and equitable response in the aftermath of the pandemic will require that governments across Asia and the Pacific go beyond verbal commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment, and make concrete investments in gender-responsive policy environments, gender data collection strategies to help drive evidence-based policies, and meaningful collaboration and partnerships with women's organizations and other actors who continue to put the rights of women and girls at the forefront.



663. ESCAP 2019a.
664. UNDP 2020a.
665. Gautam 2019.
666. UN Women 2020a.
667. Ibid.
668. Cookson 2018a.
669. ECOSOC 2019a.
670. UN Women 2020f.
671. ESCAP 2019a, para. 6(a).
672. Cookson 2018a.
673. UNDP and IOM 2020.
674. UN Women 2020a.
675. UN Women 2020f.
676. ESCAP 2019a.
677. UN Women 2020g.
678. UN Women 2020a.
679. UN Women 2020g.
680. UN Women 2020a.
681. UN Women 2020l.
682. UN Women 2020f.
683. UN Women 2020l.
684. ESCAP 2019a, paras. (d) and (f), respectively.
685. UN Women 2020g.
686. UN Women 2020n.
687. UN Women 2020d.
688. Ibid.
689. Taub 2020, UN Women 2020d.
690. UN Women 2020c.
691. UN Women 2020j.
692. UN Women 2020l.
693. UN Women 2020c.
694. UN Women 2020m.
695. For example, see the kNOwVAWdata, UNFPA, UN Women and WHO decision tree on “Data Collection on Violence against Women and COVID-19”. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/resources/decision-tree-data-collection-violence-against-women-and-covid-19>.
696. UN Women 2020l.
697. Ibid.
698. Ibid.
699. UN Women 2020c.
700. UN Women 2020a.

# Annex 1: Methodology for analysis of national review reports

The review of progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Asia and the Pacific is primarily drawn from national country reports submitted by ESCAP member States. A Beijing Platform for Action+25 Guidance Note and questionnaire were developed by UN Women and ESCAP to help member States prepare the reports (<https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw64-2020/preparations#national-level-reviews>).

Among the 53 regional ESCAP member States and 9 associate members invited to complete the survey, 45 returned reports, a response rate of 78 per cent. These reports were submitted by Afghanistan; Armenia; Australia; Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Cambodia; China; Cook Islands; Fiji; Georgia; India; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Japan; Kazakhstan; Kiribati; Kyrgyzstan; Lao PDR; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Marshall Islands; Micronesia (Federated States

of); Mongolia; Myanmar; Nepal; New Zealand; Pakistan; Palau; Philippines; Republic of Korea; the Russian Federation; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tajikistan; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Tuvalu; Uzbekistan; Vanuatu and Viet Nam. The 45 reports provided the basis for the analytical review and synthesis presented in this report.

The subregional response rates shown in Table A.1 indicate an improved response rate compared to the 69 per cent for the Beijing+20 review. Data limitations, however, stem from the incomplete nature of many submitted reports and/or inadequate or irrelevant evidence. **Only 33 per cent of submitted reports were filled completely** (all questions answered), with subregional variations from 11 per cent in South-East Asia to 56 per cent in South and South-West Asia.

**Table A.1 National report response rate and completeness**

Region	Report submitted, Beijing+25, percentage	Report submitted, Beijing+20, percentage	Beijing+20 report complete, percentage	Beijing+25 report complete, percentage
<b>ESCAP total</b>	78	69	33	33
<b>East and North-East Asia</b>	71	85.7	20	40
<b>North and Central Asia</b>	100	44.4	22	33
<b>Pacific</b>	62	76.2	46	54
<b>South-East Asia</b>	82	45.5	11	11
<b>South and South-West Asia</b>	90	80	56	56

The quantitative analysis presented in the review report reflects the responses by member States to the prompts given in the guidance note. Actions claimed by member States are the source of numerical claims in the “state policy responses” section in each cluster area (e.g., nine countries reported taking action in...). The evidentiary contents of the national review reports were further analysed for timeliness (i.e., did the action fall within the 2014 to 2019 review period) and gender responsiveness (including the analytical framework of gender-responsive, inclusive and intersectional approaches explained in Chapter 1). Responses with outdated or missing evidence, those that did not mention women and/or gender, those

with evidence irrelevant to the question prompt, and those where the evidence presented did not include the involvement of the national government were noted accordingly. The purpose of these codes was for the researchers to track the quality of the evidence given to substantiate the claims in the national review reports.

As shown in Table A.2, the most commonly occurring shortfalls in responses included making unsubstantiated claims (failure to provide appropriate or adequate evidence) and providing as evidence programmes that were not gender sensitive in design and/or targeted to women’s inclusion.

**TABLE A.2 Quality of report evidence  
(number of incidences of each evidence type across national reports)**

Region	Evidence outdated (outside of 2014–2019 timeframe)	No evidence provided	Not gender sensitive	Response not relevant to the question	Evidence of civil society project without government partnership/ involvement
East and North-East Asia	13	40	24	1	2
North and Central Asia	5	32	62	6	5
Pacific	0	28	75	0	2
South-East Asia	6	38	28	3	7
South and South-West Asia	17	105	42	7	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>22</b>

Even where reports were complete and answers were relevant, some countries did not follow the questionnaire prompts as laid out in the guidance document. As such, the provided narrative answers were not clearly linked with selections in the survey, leaving it to the researchers to select the most appropriate responses given the text provided (and text was not always provided).

### Analysis and triangulation

The evidence provided by the reports was then triangulated against available data (e.g., from the ESCAP sustainable development database, ILO, UNFPA, the World Bank, etc.), and secondary literature from academic and policy experts. The application of triangulation as a methodological tool ensures that data from different sources, as well as different types of data (i.e., quantitative and qualitative), are consulted and correlated as “checks” to ensure the quality of the analysis.

# Annex 2: Cluster descriptions and SDG mapping

This annex presents an in-dept discussion of the cluster areas used to define the organization of this report. Section 1 presents a short brief defining each cluster area. Section 2 presents the cluster overlaps and interlinkages as they relate to the report. Section 3 illustrates how the cluster areas are conceptualized in relation to the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern and the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

## Section 1: Defining the Beijing+25 Cluster Areas

To investigate progress on the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern in the context of the 2030 Agenda, UN Women developed six thematic cluster areas. As outlined below, the cluster areas overlap and intersect with each other in fundamental ways. This means that progress (and, indeed, reversals in progress) in any cluster area is often linked to progress (and setbacks) in other cluster areas.

These intersections are evident in many of the "spotlight" and other examples highlighted in this report. For instance, consider Bangladesh's recently established quota for 30 per cent of earthwork contracts to go to women. This is part of the country's efforts to not only ensure work opportunities (Cluster 1), but also to place women in positions to manage and maintain water and forest resources (Clusters 2 and 6).



### Cluster 1: Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Cluster 1 includes actions taken by governments to advance gender equality related to women's roles in paid work and employment, and to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, and promote work-family balance. It further supports the use of gender analysis in macroeconomic actions undertaken by States, especially in the context of financial consolidation and/or austerity measures.



### Cluster 2: Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

Cluster 2 investigates efforts by governments to reduce and/or eradicate poverty, and to bolster women's and girls' access to social protection. In addition, it tracks steps by member States to undertake gender-responsive actions that improve health and education outcomes for women and girls.



### Cluster 3: Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes

Cluster 3 includes thematic areas related to violence against women, including the forms of violence and prevention strategies prioritized by member States, with a particular interest in violence against women facing multiple forms of discrimination. Specific attention is paid to actions by member States in relation to the role of technology in facilitating violence against women and girls as well as discrimination and/or gender bias in the media.



### Cluster 4: Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Cluster 4 encompasses actions taken by member States to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making. There is a specific focus on expanding women's access to media and ICTs in facilitating participation, and on engaging media and ICT companies in equalizing women's representation as employees. Cluster 4 also tracks gender-responsive national institutions through gender-responsive budgeting and official development assistance, national action plans and strategies for the implementation of women's human rights.



### Cluster 5: Peaceful and inclusive societies

Cluster 5 tracks actions by member States to bolster the leadership, representation and participation

of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and humanitarian actions at all levels. Peaceful and inclusive societies require measures to uphold judicial and non-judicial accountability for human rights violations, including violations of the rights of the girl child.



### **Cluster 6: Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation**

Cluster 6 tracks member State integration of gender perspectives and women's participation in climate change action, and environmental and disaster risk reduction policies, including those aimed at climate resilience and migration.

## **Section 2: Cluster overlaps and interlinkages**

The Beijing Platform for Action highlights women's absence or underrepresentation in economic decision-making (critical area of concern F includes decision-making in the formation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay), and links the areas of women's access to work (as in Cluster 1) and women's roles in public life (as in Cluster 4). In addition, expanding women's access to decent work opportunities requires that women's priorities are addressed in public infrastructure investments and essential services, and that women beneficiaries are involved in strategic planning, establishing links with Clusters 2 and 6. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, poverty (Cluster 2) is characterized by lack of participation in decision-making, and in civil, social and cultural life (Cluster 4).

One major area of overlap is in women's entrepreneurship promotion. In this report, women's entrepreneurship is discussed both as an important element in women's economic opportunities, when combined with access to finance (Cluster 1), but also as an important component of poverty alleviation programmes and policies for poor and unemployed women (Cluster 2). Women's access to entrepreneurship is further supported by education and training programmes (Cluster 2) and access to natural resources and basic infrastructure and services (Cluster 6).

Women's unequal responsibility for and time spent in unpaid care and domestic work is another area with key cluster overlaps. Reducing and redistributing this work frees women to spend more time in work (Cluster 1), education (Cluster 2) and public life (Cluster 4). Educating men and encouraging shared responsibility in matters of sexuality and reproduction can also speak directly to women's decision-making in terms of their health (Cluster 2), and reduce stigmas and discriminatory social norms (Cluster 3). Additionally, environmental (Cluster 6) and health (Cluster 2) hazards associated with women's lack of access to energy and water infrastructure can make unpaid labour dangerous for women and girls who perform this work.

Women's experience of sexual and gender-based violence is another cross-cluster area. Human trafficking, labour exploitation, discriminatory treatment of migrant workers, sexual harassment and violence against women in politics are each examples of how women's experiences of violence (Cluster 3) can intersect with their work (Cluster 1), education (Cluster 2), access to public life (Cluster 4) and security (Cluster 5). Furthermore, women's access to mental and physical health services (Cluster 2) can also depend on their inclusion in national protection systems in the countries where they work (Cluster 1), their status as refugees or IDPs (Cluster 5) and the incidence of natural disasters (Cluster 6).

Cluster overlaps provide many opportunities for making progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in each domain. For example, gender-responsive school curricula and comprehensive sexuality education (Cluster 2) are important tools in modifying cultural patterns to eliminate gender-based violence and harmful practices (Cluster 3). The Beijing Platform for Action positions the media (Cluster 4) as a central tool that can support reducing the prevalence of violence against women, and illustrate healthy relationships to community members, especially children and youth.






## Section 3: Mapping the cluster areas with the BPfA critical areas of concern and the SDGs

Table A.3: SDG Indicators in the Asia-Pacific BPfA+25 regional assessment as they relate to the BPfA cluster areas

Cluster areas	SDG target	SDG indicators
<p><b>1. Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work</b></p> <p>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</p> <p>F. Women in the Economy</p> 	<p>5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work, by sex, age, and location</p> <p>8.3 Promote development-oriented policies</p> <p>8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value</p>	<p>5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location</p> <p>8.3.1 Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex</p> <p>8.5.2 Unemployment rate, by sex and age</p> <p><b>Non-SDG indicator:</b> Proportion of employed population living below poverty line, by sex</p> <p>2.1.2 Gender gap in food insecurity</p>
<p><b>2. Poverty eradication, social protection and social services</b></p> <p>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</p> <p>A. Women and Poverty B. Education and training of women C. Women and health</p> 	<p>4.1 By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes</p> <p>1.1 By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day</p> <p>3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births</p> <p>3.7 By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes</p>	<p>4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex</p> <p>1.1.1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex and age</p> <p>1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age</p> <p>1.3.1 Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable</p> <p>3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio</p> <p>3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel</p> <p>3.7.1 Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (percentage of women aged 15-49 years)</p>

Cluster areas	SDG target	SDG indicators
<p><b>3. Freedom from violence, stigma and stereotypes</b></p> <p>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</p> <p>D. Violence against women J. Women and the media</p>	<p>5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</p> <p>8.5 By 2030, achieve full and productive employment; decent work for all women and men, young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value</p>	<p>5.2.1 Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.</p> <p>5.3.1 Child marriage rates</p> <p>8.5.1 Unemployment rate, by sex and disability</p>
<p><b>4. Participation, accountability and gender responsive institutions</b></p> <p>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</p> <p>G. Women in power and decision-making H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women J. Women in the media</p>	<p>16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere</p> <p>16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children</p> <p>5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p> <p>5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels</p> <p>17.19 By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP, and support statistical capacity-building</p>	<p>16.1.3 Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence; (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months</p> <p>16.2.3 Proportion of population aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18, by sex (percentage of population aged 18-29)</p> <p>5.5.1 Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments</p> <p>5.5.2 Proportion of women in managerial positions</p> <p>5.c.1 Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment</p> <p>17.19.2 Proportion of countries that (a) have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years; and (b) have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration</p>



Cluster areas	SDG target	SDG indicators
<p><b>5. Peaceful and inclusive societies</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</b></p> <p>E. Women in armed conflict</p> 	<p>16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere</p> <p>16.9 By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration</p> <p>16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children</p>	<p>16.1.1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex (victims per 100,000 population)</p> <p>16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age</p> <p>16.2.2 Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation (forced labour, servitude and slavery; human trafficking in general)</p>
<p><b>6. Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</b></p> <p>K. Women and the environment</p>    	<p>7.1 By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services</p> <p>3.9 By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination</p> <p>11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums</p> <p>13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries</p>	<p>7.1.2 Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology</p> <p>3.9.2 Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services)</p> <p>11.1.1 Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing</p> <p>13.1.1 Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population</p>
<p><b>to Cross-cutting</b></p>	<p><b>Beijing Platform for Action critical area of concern</b></p> <p>II. Human rights of women</p> <p>L. The girl child</p>	



## ANNEX 3: Asia-Pacific Declaration

Throughout this report, the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment has been referenced alongside the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as forming a foundation for progress for women and girls in the region.

The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 review took place in Bangkok, Thailand from 27 to 29 November 2019. Together, ministers

and representatives of the member States and associate members of ESCAP affirmed their commitment to accelerating efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

The full text of the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment can be found here:

<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Beijing%2B25-Declaration-%28ENG%29-20200220.pdf>.

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