

UN WOMEN

GENDER ACTION LAB

Innovation and Impact for Gender Equality in Asia-Pacific

Powered by:

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES



In partnership with



OUR VISION

Together, the United Nations Entity for Gender equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the Government of Australia through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) are launching a new transformative initiative – the **UN Women Gender Action Lab: Innovation and Impact for Gender Equality in the Asia-Pacific region, powered by the Women’s Empowerment Principles.**

With an initial four-year commitment, both partners are laying the foundation to build a unique Gender Action Lab (GAL) for Asia and the Pacific aiming to foster private sector innovations and concrete actions that advance gender equality and women’s empowerment and build more inclusive economies across the region. In collaboration with the private sector, the GAL will identify, pilot and scale up multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives aligned with the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs), such as thematic innovation labs, hackathons, incubators and accelerators, policy labs, applied research initiatives and other partnership support initiatives. Finally, the GAL will generate new data and evidence and provide technical assistance to advance policy, investment and ecosystem development for gender-transformative innovations.

Established as a dynamic platform, the GAL is envisioned to be a long-term, multi-stakeholder and multi-donor platform across the whole region, seeking to galvanize efforts for gender-transformative action and impact **within and with the private sector** towards 2030 and beyond. Through GAL, a range of stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific region will have a unique opportunity to forge new partnerships, explore innovative modalities of working, and collectively build a powerful movement for impact that creates transformations in the world of work for women¹ and ultimately innovations that reshape economies and societies so that they are equitable for everyone, including people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse, intersex and queer

(LGBTIQ+) communities, youth, older people and ethnic minorities, among others.

CHANGE PATHWAYS



Leveraging innovation capabilities OF the private sector

to address persistent societal challenges disproportionately impacting women and other disadvantaged groups* and therefore holding back progress towards more inclusive, sustainable and equitable economies and societies.

Leveraging innovation WITHIN the private sector

to implement the Women’s Empowerment Principles and close the “action gap” to create more gender-responsive businesses in the Asia-Pacific region.



DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION APPROACH

The GAL will take an intersectional lens to gender and will also work on broader dimensions of gender diversity including disability, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) communities, age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status and others.

¹ UN Women (2024), Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy defining the Gender Accelerator ‘Women in the World of Work’ , p.25

Building on UN Women's experience working to reshape the world of business

The GAL will build on the different experiences, capabilities, networks, partnerships and tools and approaches of UN Women and DFAT, that have been built and contextualized for the Asia-Pacific region, notably leveraging WEPs and the innovation capabilities of the private sector.

Change Pathway 1: Leveraging WEPs to transform the private sector from within

GAL will leverage the globally recognized **Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)**, a set of seven principles that provide the private sector a road map to become more gender-responsive throughout their value chain. Launched in 2010 by UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact, the WEPs is the only framework that encompasses gender equality at all organizational levels, beginning with leadership and providing guidance for the **workplace, marketplace** and **community**, underpinned by a strong emphasis on **accountability and transparent reporting** of progress.

The Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

-  1. Gender-equal corporate leadership
-  2. Gender equality in the workplace
-  3. Employee health and safety
-  4. Education and training for women
-  5. Enterprise and supply chain development
-  6. Equality through community advocacy
-  7. Measurement and reporting

Globally, nearly 9,700 private sector organizations of all sizes and from all sectors have become WEPs Signatories. Between 2019 and 2024, the number of Asia-Pacific WEPs Signatories grew from less than 600 to now more than 2,500. Strong momentum and commitment for accelerated business action for gender-equality has been clearly established across the region, networks of stakeholders are in place, and a suite of evidence, data, tools and assets have been created, including a series of government-endorsed policy advocacy briefs, which provide a strategic entry-point for deeper action with business and with governments/business regulators.

Yet, implementation action is lagging behind. While commitments towards gender equality in the private sector are increasing, considerable evidence demonstrates that more must be done to translate commitments into actions.

Both governments and the private sector in the region have an “action gap” in their implementation of commitments towards gender equality, and this calls for a new approach. Based on a strong foundation established through previous UN Women programmes, the GAL aims to further advance private sector and government action to accelerate the adoption and implementation of gender-responsive business policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region by strengthening concrete actions and implementation efforts to contribute to closing the private sector and government action gap.

Change Pathway 2: Leveraging innovation capabilities of the private sector to drive larger change to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and other societal issues

The private sector is not a uniform group. It consists of different sectors and enterprises of all sizes inclusive of multinational corporations, large national companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and microenterprises. SMEs account for more than 96 per cent of all business in the region, accounting for two out of three jobs in Asia.² Women's entrepreneurship makes significant contributions to local, national and regional economic growth across Asia and the Pacific, as approximately 60 per cent of microenterprises and SMEs are owned and/or led by women.³ Microenterprises and SMEs also make up 56 per cent of the Asia-Pacific WEPs community.

Often, these enterprises are the motor for transformative innovation to drive sustainable development and advance women's empowerment. The GAL will design approaches to leverage this innovation capability, building on the UN Women **Care Accelerator Programmes**,⁴ for example, working together with care enterprises across the region to provide new solutions for accessible, affordable and quality care while developing gender-responsive business models that promote women's economic empowerment and a more inclusive care economy overall.⁵ Another example is the **Women-led Climate Tech Accelerator**, which works with a diverse cohort of women entrepreneurs from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) who are harnessing technological innovations to address climate change while offering more opportunities for women in the blue and green economies, and therefore creating a ripple effect of innovation and empowerment.⁶

The GAL will leverage the innovation capabilities **of the private sector** to address persistent societal challenges that are impacting women and other historically marginalized groups⁷ and holding back progress towards more inclusive, sustainable and equitable economies and societies.

² See <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/474576/adb-wp911.pdf>

³ See <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/GRP-Report-14-11-22.pdf>

⁴ See <https://www.seedstars.com/community/entrepreneurs/programs/care-accelerator/> and <https://www.care-accelerator.com/>

⁵ See [Think Piece: Innovations in Childcare to Advance Women's Economic Empowerment](#) and [Pathways Towards Decent Work in the Digitally Enabled Care Economy in Southeast Asia](#)

⁶ The UN Women Climate Tech Accelerator, powered by WEPs, is an initiative supported by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea and implemented by She Loves Tech.

⁷ This includes people with disabilities, people with diverse SOGIESC, youth, older people, people living in rural and remote areas and ethnic minorities, among others.

UN WOMEN'S GENDER ACTION LAB APPROACH

To fill the action gap, the **GAL** will take a **more systemic and sustainable capacity-building approach** paired with **practical approaches to enable accelerated implementation** and a mechanism for policymakers to learn from these solutions and enable them **to design practice-informed and feasible policies** to accelerate gender-responsive business conduct while leveraging the innovation capabilities of the private sector.

The GAL will use an inclusive and creative problem-solving methodology to enable multi-stakeholder and innovative thinking around specific thematic areas to ideate and prototype new multi-stakeholder solutions. While gender equality and women's economic empowerment remain the central priority, the GAL will also focus

on the intersections of gender equality and other areas critical to sustainable development, such as climate change, disability inclusion, digital inclusion and the broader Business and Human Rights agenda.

Geography

As the founding initiative, the 2024–2028 GAL programme will focus specifically on ASEAN countries with implementation in four priority countries, namely **Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia** and the **Philippines**. During the same period the programme aims to expand into additional Asia-Pacific countries.

INNOVATION LABS

A key approach for the first phase of GAL implementation will be a series of multi-stakeholder **Innovation Labs** for gender equality.

These Labs will be anchored in strong private sector leadership. The Innovation Labs will have themes aligned to WEPs thematic areas, for example:



Creating more inclusive workplaces for all, including people living with disabilities



Advancing family-friendly workplaces, notably through providing employer-supported care services



Implementing innovative practices for gender-responsive procurement



Strengthening accountability on gender-reporting within, for example, Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) frameworks

The Innovation Labs will work on other critical issues for sustainable development. Potential examples include women-led innovation in climate tech and gender-responsive practices in the financial sector. Concrete themes will be identified in a consultative process at the country and/or regional level. Equally, the implementation of an Innovation Lab can be country specific, work across multiple countries or at the ASEAN level, and the time frame of each Lab may vary from 6 to 24 months depending on the identified challenges.

The implementation of the Innovation Labs follows a phased approach, resulting in key outputs that provide practical guidance and multi-stakeholder recommendations to enable a feedback loop for future labs and accelerated ecosystem change.

PHASE 1

Awareness and engagement:

Increasing the awareness of and commitments towards specific thematic areas aligned with WEPs, aiming to create more gender-responsive businesses in the Asia-Pacific region. In this phase outreach will be done to select private sector organizations for participation in specific thematic Innovation Labs. In this phase the key thematic areas for the implementation of the Innovation Labs will be identified.

PHASE 2

Piloting solutions through Innovation Labs:

Fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships between business, innovators and government to accelerate innovation and implementation of gender-responsive business policies and practices. Innovation Labs will run on a thematic level determined by local demand and context.

PHASE 3

Showcasing best practices, building evidence for scaling:

Recognizing and documenting exemplary and innovative business practice for gender equality to inform public policymaking and inspire scaling through new and expanded private sector efforts. The [Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards](#) and [Asia-Pacific WEPs Forum](#) are flagship initiatives that provide a multi-stakeholder platform for recognition, exchange, capacity-building and inspiration. In addition to key knowledge products, such as policy briefs, best practice profiles and research, the GAL will showcase best practice and recognize innovative efforts across the region generated by Innovation Labs and beyond.

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JOIN US

Building a long-term platform for gender impact

Starting with the initial four-year phase supported by DFAT in four selected countries, the GAL represents an opportunity for like-minded organizations to come together to shape this dynamic action platform for gender equality.

UN Women and DFAT are calling different stakeholders and public and private investors and donors to expand the GAL to foster new collaborations and innovations that advance private sector impact for gender equality and women's empowerment across the Asia-Pacific region. Looking to 2030 and beyond, this may include thematic innovation labs, public-private policy labs, entrepreneurship accelerators and new methods of driving action through and with the private sector in all its forms.

Your engagement will allow us to deepen and expand our collective impact into different thematic areas and markets across Asia and the Pacific. Join us to bring the GAL vision to life and build a multi-stakeholder movement that transforms the world of work for women in the Asia-Pacific region.

**For more information and to enquire
about partnering with the GAL,
please contact us at:**

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