## WOMEN

## TRANSFORMING CARE SYSTEMS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT BUILDING CARING SOCIETIES, INCLUSIVE AND GREEN ECONOMIES

## CARE SYSTEMS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Care provision entails meeting the physical, social and emotional needs of care-dependent groups, such as children, elderly people and people with disabilities. This involves 'direct care' activities, which include oneon-one interactions between the caregiver and the caredependent individual (e.g. breastfeeding, assisting with schoolwork or providing emotional support), as well as indispensable indirect services that do not entail person-toperson engagement (e.g. cooking and cleaning, household repairs and maintenance, and fetching water and collecting firewood).<sup>1</sup>

Care provision lays the foundations for the well-being of present and future generations and nourishes human capital formation.

Women and girls are the primary providers of both unpaid and paid care services. **Caregiving is a crucial function that underpins the stability and well-being of economies and societies.** Women predominantly engage in this essential form of work without adequate compensation or recognition, effectively subsidizing economies and undertaking a significantly greater share of unpaid care work compared to men. This results in women and girls having less time available for pursuing opportunities in education, employment, entrepreneurship or other economic activities, or for thriving as leaders in economic and political spheres.<sup>2</sup>

## Among women in prime-working age,

**65%** 

are in the labour force when they do not have care responsibilities for preschool-aged children, **compared to 49% of women who do.** 

Often the result of discriminatory social and economic norms, the unequal distribution of care responsibilities influences women's and girls's agency and decision-making throughout their lives, starting early with young girls' caregiving responsibilities for their siblings and other household chores. In the Asia and the Pacific region, **more than 100 million young women aged 15-24 are not engaged in education, employment or training,**<sup>3</sup> and in 2024, the labour force participation rate for women in South Asia **was 46%, compared to 75% for men in the region**, slightly below the global average. Later in life, the unequal share of unpaid care work exacerbates gender pay gaps, often referred to as the 'motherhood penalty'.

As women age, they often encounter limited access to social protection schemes such as pensions and old-age care services. These challenges are even more pronounced for women who are income-poor, live in rural areas or are migrants, as they face compounded disadvantages, low financial security and inadequate safety nets throughout their lives. If social services do not expand to include care provision, women and girls may be compelled to take on even more unpaid care work, thereby hindering progress towards gender equality and preventing countries from realizing their full potential for inclusive economic growth and development.



## Transforming care systems requires taking a full life cycle approach and supporting women and girls at every stage to remove persistent gender inequalities.

UN Women's 2024 report, 'Caring Societies, Inclusive and Green Economies in Asia and the Pacific', indicates that the region is home to approximately two-thirds of the world's informal employment and that rate of female informal employment in the Asia and the Pacific region was 62% compared to 55% globally.<sup>4</sup> Informality is frequently observed in predominantly feminized sectors, such as the paid care economy. 63% of women care workers are in informal employment, compared to 52% of men who are engaged in care work.

Women are also significantly represented in the paid care economy; in the region, it is estimated that women care workers account for 14% of total female employment, compared to 5% for men.<sup>5</sup> Yet they often receive inadequate compensation and frequently face job insecurity. The rise of digital platform care work (e.g. match-making digital platforms) could further exacerbate precarious employment conditions or, if regulated and incentivized, offer pathways to decent work in the care economy.<sup>6</sup>

The care economy is highly labour-intensive. As such, **a shortage of care workers will likely introduce challenges in responding to demographic shifts in ageing societies.**<sup>7</sup> By 2050, **the number of people aged 60 and older in the Asia and the Pacific region is estimated to reach 1.3 billion**, with different implications at the subregional level.<sup>8</sup> In East Asia, population projections foresee higher demands for oldage care services amid a shrinking working-age population (15 to 64 years old), with implications for pension costs and strained social services.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, in South Asia, around 18 to 20 million people join the working-age population every year seeking jobs. To fill the care demand and supply gap, many countries rely on women migrant

**care workers to fill these roles**. The Asia region has historically been, and continues to be, the largest source of labour for the care and domestic work sectors, particularly in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> Women migrant care workers are typically employed in low-paying, insecure positions, where they encounter discrimination, violence and the risk of human trafficking. This labour mobility creates care gaps in their home countries.<sup>11</sup>

The increasing demands for both elder and childcare will put further pressure on women and girls to provide unpaid care services — likely to lead to detrimental effects on gender equality and women's full participation in the labour force.

This calls for critical gender-transformative actions and investments in the care economy, which can yield benefits for women and girls, economies and societies at large.

> Harmful gender stereotypes related to care work contribute to women caregivers' low status, inadequate pay and lack of representation.

## THE CARE INVESTMENT CASE - FOR ECONOMIES, PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

In light of increasing care demands, **the care economy has emerged as a dynamic area for job creation.** Studies indicate that investment in the care economy could generate nearly three times as many jobs as equivalent investments in construction while also producing **30% fewer greenhouse gas emissions.**<sup>12</sup> Care jobs are poised to become a significant source of employment that is less susceptible to automation, particularly outside the health sector.

Investing in transforming care systems **will yield a positive multiplier effect for people, businesses, the economy and the planet.** Increased care-enabling and gender-equalizing initiatives have the potential to contribute significantly to inclusive economic growth through job creation, increased incomes and consumption, and higher state revenues via tax collection. Creating synergies and complementarity between the care economy, women's employment and macroeconomic policies will help realize multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>13</sup>

Investment in the care economy could generate approximately

**300 million jobs** by 2035, of which

78% would be jobs for women84% would be jobs in formal employment.

#### TRANSFORMING CARE SYSTEMS YIELD BENEFITS FOR:

**PEOPLE** Benefits for Women, Girls and Society

- Higher levels of educational outcomes: Improved early childhood education outcomes and higher educational attainment for all, especially women and girls.
- Economic empowerment, improved livelihoods and better social protection: More decent jobs and higher tax revenues as a base for investments in social protection for all.
- Care for all and increased well-being: Accessible, affordable and quality care for children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and the families of migrant workers.

## BUSINESS

- Stronger business performance: Familyfriendly workplaces attract and retain talent; employee loyalty, especially among women, increases.<sup>14</sup>
- Enhanced reputation as an employer and among consumers: Diverse workforces with more women in leadership drive innovation, market growth and productivity, building more resilient businesses.<sup>15</sup>



#### ECONOMY

- Inclusive growth: Higher productivity, innovation and economic growth from women's increased participation in the labour market, newly created jobs in the care field, and burgeoning economies.
- Future-fit workforce: Achieved through higher educational attainment.
- Reduced inequality: Higher gender equality and lower long-term social expenditures.
- Increased tax revenues: Generated through newly created jobs in the formal economy.



#### PLANET Sustainable Development

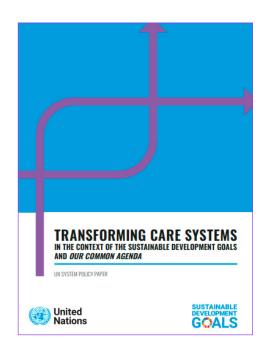
- Sustainable development: Creation of more care jobs, which are more likely to be green jobs.
- Advancing SDGs: Addressing care gaps rapidly emerging from demographic shifts and investing in education, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

## IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC A JOINT VISION FOR CARE

While there are compelling economic arguments and a demographic need to invest in resilient care systems in the Asia and the Pacific region, the foremost reasons are to uphold human rights and to ensure universal care for everyone. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) reflects a long-standing feminist commitment to recognizing and valuing care work, including in official statistics. Over the decades, economists have demonstrated the significant contributions of unpaid care services to the functioning of economies and societies. This evidence was further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored that unpaid care work, predominantly provided by women and girls, is an essential service for the survival and reproduction of present and future generations a pivotal moment accelerating coordinated actions and investments to transform care systems.

As part of this movement, at the global level, UN Women facilitated an inter-agency working group, which also includes the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), ILO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to coauthor a **UN system policy paper titled 'Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda'.** Highlighting the need to transform care systems to achieve sustainable development and gender equality, the paper provides a practical framework and policy options that promote a human rights-based, transformative approach to establishing comprehensive care systems as enablers for gender equality, social justice and resilient economies.<sup>16</sup>

In Asia and the Pacific, UN Women, together with numerous organizations—including civil society and women's organizations, as well as the private sector,



investors, governments, intergovernmental organizations and others—**has initiated a movement to transform care.** Numerous convenings, such as the Bali Care Dialogue 2022,<sup>17</sup> the inaugural UN Women Asia Pacific Care Forum 2023,<sup>18</sup> two regional G20 presidencies (hosted by Indonesia and India), the 2024 ASEAN Women's Leaders' Summit in Laos PDR and national consultations, have catalysed commitments, such as the ASEAN Declaration on Care,<sup>19</sup> the G20 Commitment towards Care and Gender Equality,<sup>20</sup> and multiple, national, regional and global roadmaps for transforming care systems.<sup>21</sup>

#### We know what needs to be done - it is time for action.

Informed by a multitude of consultative processes, **UN Women in Asia and the Pacific is calling for an aligned and bold vision for care** that serves as a catalyst for investments to build resilient care systems.



### ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CARING SOCIETIES AND INCLUSIVE AND GREEN ECONOMIES

#### **OUR VISION**

By 2050, we envision societies where care is recognized as a skilled profession, valued as essential work, and acknowledged as a right that is pivotal to the development of inclusive, green and prosperous economies where women and girls including care workers, including migrant workers have voice and agency to participate and flourish, and all members of society and institutions take co-responsibility for providing care. WHO WE SERVE

Women and girls in all their diversities, particularly those who are vulnerable and marginalized in the informal sector, including migrant workers, rural women, and single mothers.

#### **OUR MISSION**

Through a **whole-of-society and multi-partner approach**, we are working to transform care systems to make highquality care services and infrastructure accessible and affordable for all. We aim to shift gendered economic and social norms to create an enabling environment where women have the freedom and opportunity to join, remain and lead in the world of work, seize new economic opportunities and secure dignified employment within the care sector, as well as in other future-oriented economies such as the green and digital economy.

#### UN WOMEN'S GLOBAL CARE IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH:

Our efforts are aligned with the UN Women - convened Global Initiative *TransformCare*, which seeks to address the undervaluation and gendered division of care and to improve the lives of women and girls in at least 30 countries worldwide. It is anchored in UN Women's new global **Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Strategy**<sup>22</sup> and, more specifically, contributes to the **UN Women Gender Equality Accelerator** on Transforming Care Systems, a key pathway to advance women's economic empowerment and a unique contribution to the UN system's efforts to accelerate the SDGs.

**TransformCare** is a large scale, longterm global response aiming to catalyse multi-donor investments and multipartner collaborations to build resilient care systems, serving as a foundation for caring societies and inclusive and green economies where women can fully realize their economic rights and participation.

**UN Women** is committed to leveraging its UN mandate to lead, promote and coordinate efforts to advance the full realization of women's rights and opportunities. Through its convening power, UN women will implement TCII Asia-Pacific as a multi-partner, multi-year and multi-country programme, with the opportunity to contribute to create systemic impact for **1.29 billion women and girls**<sup>23</sup> in up to at least 10 countries in the Asia and the Pacific region.

Through a staged, ten-year implementation period, the programme will be managed by a secretariat hosted by UN Women, with a steering committee comprising of key implementation and funding partners. Managed as a multi-partner initiative, it will focus on national strategies supported by mutually reinforcing global, regional and subregional frameworks, with the aim of developing inclusive, equitable and comprehensive care systems in line with the <u>Care System Approach</u>.

## **TRANSFORMCARE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE - ASIA PACIFIC (TCII-AP)**



#### A UN Women convened initiative to make care systems prosperous for people and the planet

#### Advancing women's economic empowerment by building caring societies and inclusive and green economies aims to contribute by 2035 to:

**100 million** women and girls in all their diversity

BENEFIT

# **125 million** new employment opportunities in the care economy

CREATE

by 2035<sup>24</sup> and addition employment opportunities seized in future-oriented sectors, including the green and digital economies RELEASE

2 billion hours of women and girls' time spent on unpaid care work

The programme will be implemented across three interconnected investment areas, designed to build comprehensive and resilient care systems that increase access to affordable, quality care and foster increased women's economic participation.

#### RESULTS AND INVESTMENT DESIGN FOR TRANSFORMCARE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE – ASIA PACIFIC

expand access to social protection for all.

#### **INVESTMENT AREA 1:**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT (THROUGH MORE DATA, POLICIES AND FINANCING) Increased provision of quality and low-carbon care services, basic infrastructure

and energy-saving equipment, especially benefiting women and girls in low-income and rural households. This area also aims to include care in social protection floors and



INVESTMENT AREA 2: IMPLEMENTATION OF CARE DELIVERY FOR JOB CREATION

**Creation of decent jobs in the purple (care) economy and increased access to green and digital economies,** especially benefiting women informal workers and domestic workers, including women migrant workers.

#### INVESTMENT AREA 3: SUSTAIN IMPACTS THROUGH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE

Shift social and economic norms so that care work is recognized as valuable and skilled and seen as a shared responsibility within and between households, the state, and the private and not-for-profit sectors.

## **UN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AND MANDATE**

#### UN WOMEN'S GLOBAL MANDATE, REACH AND STRONG PARTNER NETWORK ARE WELL POSITIONED TO IMPLEMENT

#### THE TRANSFORMCARE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE ASIA-PACIFIC (TCII-AP)

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. As a global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. With a presence in 22 countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific has the potential to reach 60% of the global population. Under the current Strategic Plan 2022-2025, UN Women has benefited the following groups:



#### Over

# **9.5 million women** across 79 countries,

including many survivors of violence, internally displaced women, and refugees, with improved access to information, goods, resources and services.

# 12,300 civil society organizations

and mechanisms across 84 countries,

enhancing their leadership capacities and enabling meaningful and safe engagement in decision-making for women. The adoption, revision or repeal of

**248 laws** across 39 countries, which are home to

1.4 billion women and girls.<sup>27</sup>

#### With a strong track record of operating at every level—from government to grass-roots—UN Women possesses a unique triple mandate.

- NORMATIVE: To influence change, from shaping norms to influencing policy.
- OPERATIONAL: To work with local partners, including government, civil society and the private sector, to implement programming that empower communities.
- COORDINATION: To coordinate actions towards gender equality with all UN partners.

UN Women's capacity to operate at all levels positions it as a powerful agent capable of driving essential, systemic change that will transform care systems and empower women and girls.

#### **OUR PARTNERSHIPS SPAN:**

- Governments and intergovernmental institutions across 22 countries in the Asia and the Pacific region, including regional bodies, such as ASEAN, working with ministries of women, planning, economics and others. These institutions consider UN Women a trusted partner with strong expertise in gender data and research.
- A network ranging from small and medium enterprises to multinational corporations, business associations, and media entities are signatories to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). WEP signatories reach an estimated 5.2 million employees, 50% of whom are women.
- Grass-roots feminist movements, women's and civil society organizations, and academics from across the region, including women migrant and domestic worker organizations and care workers.

**THE TRANSFORMCARE INVESTMENT INITIATIVE ASIA-PACIFIC (TCII-AP)** will be able to leverage numerous existing networks, commitments, examples and tools created across the region in partnership with governments, UN agencies and other partners. The below examples provide an indication of the type of activities, tools and commitments that can be implemented across the three investment areas.

#### POLICY

- 'ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Resilience Towards the Post-2025 ASEAN Community' reaffirms ASEAN's commitment to strengthening the care economy and fostering resilience towards the post-2025 ASEAN Community.
- The policy support tool <u>'A Guide To Public Investments In The Care Economy'</u> for estimating care deficits, investment costs, and economic returns developed by ILO and UN Women.
- Implementation of the 'Whole of Government' and 'Whole of Society' approaches to care. Informed by the results of the ILO and UN Women developed Policy Simulator Tool, the Government of Nepal established the National <u>"Care Working Group"</u><sup>28</sup> (CWG) under the leadership of the National Planning Commission (NPC). CWG works towards increasing women's participation in decent employment, ensure equal wage access, expand inclusion in social protection schemes, and instigate transformative changes in gender relations to empower women holistically in Nepal. This model could be replicated in other countries.

#### DATA

Research and data for evidence-informed decision-making UN Women has proven expertise in care (e.g. time-use surveys) and gender data, official statistics, and innovative research. Examples include the recent flagship report, <u>'Caring Societies, Inclusive and Green Economies in Asia and the Pacific</u>', innovation research: <u>Pathways Towards</u> <u>Decent Work in the Digitally Enabled Care Economy in Southeast Asia</u> and forthcoming research exploring the effect of childcare provision on social norms pertaining to the gendered division of labour.

#### **IMPLEMENT:** INVESTMENT AREA 2

IMPLEMENTATION OF CARE DELIVERY FOR JOB CREATION

#### **CARING CITIES AND VILLAGES**

- Advancing caring cities in Bangladesh and China: UN Women is supporting the Government of Bangladesh in conducting a geo-spatial mapping of care demand and supply in Dhaka using big data to inform the government's expansion of childcare services. This is complemented by costing exercises for different care models to develop an implementation strategy for care delivery models. In China, UN Women, as a key member of the UN China Task Force on Family Friendly Policies and Care (established in February 2022, composed of UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP, UNFPA, ILO, and WHO), is leading the research on Policy Recommendations on Investing in the Care Economy and supporting the formulation of the Family-Friendly City Development Index with national partners.
- → Integrated upskilling for women and care delivery model in India: Co-designed by UN Women and social enterprise Dharma Life, the Better Skills Better Care Dharma Life Community Learning Centre aims to increase women's economic participation in India while providing their children with a space to learn, thrive and grow. This Center offers integrated vocational and livelihoods training for women along with providing accessible, affordable, and quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

#### CARE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

- Supporting care entrepreneurship to drive job creation and decent work for care workers in South and Southeast Asia: Care enterprises provide innovative pathways to meet the demand for care services and offer a variety of emerging models to cater to diverse needs29 in support of gender-responsive care delivery models. In 2023, UN Women launched the Gender Inclusive Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Programme (GICEEP), supported by the Visa Foundation and IDRC and implemented by UN Women, Bopinc, and SAFEEM. Under GICEEP, the Asia Pacific Care Accelerator supported care enterprises offering childcare, healthcare and eldercare services across the Asia and the Pacific region in order to develop gender-responsive business models. GICEEP also co-created the Gender-Responsive Decent Care Work: Training + Toolkit for Enterprises' to advance the provision of decent jobs for care workers.
- Strongly committed private sector network in Asia and the Pacific: More than 2,800 companies in the Asia and the Pacific region have committed to the WEPs, offering a strong entry point to advance family-friendly

workplace policies. For example, under the current Women in Motion project, launched in 2023, funded by and in partnership with the European Union, UN Women China is collaborating with national partners, including the China Enterprise Confederation and several industry associations, to promote family-friendly policies as part of WEPs implementation in 100 factories across the textile, automobile and ICT sectors. This initiative aims to integrate gender into corporate policies and practices, with the potential to benefit over 10,000 women, including migrant women workers.

#### **CARE AND DOMESTIC WORKERS AND MIGRATION**

Making labour migration governance more gender-responsive and enhancing the protection and promotion of the rights of women migrant domestic workers in South Asia through improved recruitment and standard terms of employment. UN Women has developed a toolkit to enhance the awareness and capacities of government and non-government actors that ensuring women migrant workers are protected by accessible, rights-based and gender-responsive employment contracts and recruitment procedures. This toolkit is and can be localized through TCII-AP, For example, a joint UN programme, <u>Governance of Labour Migration in South and South East Asia</u> (GOALS), has been adapted to the contexts of Bangladesh and Nepal.

#### CARE LENS TO EXISTING AND NEW PROGRAMMING

Implementing a care-lens to existing and new gender-equality programming. Care programming does not need to stand-alone; a care lens should be integrated into existing programming, including crisis response. For example, in Papua New Guinea, existing market vendor programming is enhanced by strengthening the social protection of vendors and investing in infrastructure to improve vendor safety and well-being. Similarly, in Timor-Leste, in collaboration with the Women Weavers Association, a national non-profit organization with over 1,400 members across all municipalities, UN Women Timor-Leste is developing community production centres with joint care facilities to promote women's economic empowerment and provide safe spaces.

#### SUSTAIN: INVESTMENT AREA 3

SUSTAIN IMPACT THROUGH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE

#### **MOVEMENT AND CONVENING FOR ACTION**

- → A global community of practice: <u>The Global Alliance for Care</u>, convened by UN Women and the Government of Mexico, is a global network of diverse stakeholders facilitating learning and exchange on solutions to transform the care economy. More than 200 organizations globally, including 38 from the Asia and the Pacific region, spanning from civil society, government, development and the private sector have committed to supporting care.
- Regional convening and coordinating the UN system on Care: UN Women annually convenes the Asia-Pacific Care Forum, a key dialogue that brings together governments, women's organizations, civil society and the private sector to build a shared understanding of care and its intersections with pressing issues in the Asia and the Pacific region. The results of the 2023 Asia-Pacific Care Forum informed and rallied partners for the 2024 Forum, which was co-organized by UN Women and the Global Alliance for Care, and supported by ADB, IFC, IDRC, the VISA Foundation, AYAT Care and ESCAP, with engagement from UN and development partners such as ILO, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank, UNDP and Oxfam.

#### **CAMPAIGNS AND SOCIAL NORMS CHANGE**

- Public campaign and knowledge sharing to promote the value of care work and advocate for shared responsibility: From 2021 to 2023, UN Women China implemented the *A Place Called Home WeCare* project in cooperation with IKEA China. A call-to-action video titled <u>Do more, for her and for the family</u> reached over 150,000 views, and 6,400 visitors attended the offline exhibition held at an IKEA store in Beijing.
- → Unstereotype Alliance in India As part of UN Women's global Unstereotype Alliance, this chapter in India aims to address gender stereotypes in advertising and media, with a primary focus on progressive portrayals of women and girls in non-traditional roles. Additionally, it broadens the representation of women, especially those re-entering the workforce, aligning well with TRANSFORMCARE. The recent #YouDontSeeMe campaign highlighted media portrayals of gender stereotypes, aiming to bridge the gap between on-screen and real-life experiences, especially stereotypes related to care responsibilities. The campaign, which was rolled out across India, reached approximately 10 million people.



## CALL FOR INVESTMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Achieving these ambitious results requires collaboration. Join us as partner of the TCII- Asia Pacific Consortium.



#### Establish TRANSFRORMCARE **INVESTMENT INITIATIVE ASIA PACIFIC**

as a regional system partnership convened by UN Women. TCII-AP is seeking an initial investment of

## US\$100 million

to catalyse further public and private investments to transform care systems in five to ten countries through 2035.

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women

supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



To learn more about how you can get involved with UN Women's initiatives on TransformCare Investment Initiative in the Asia and the Pacific region, contact:

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Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.