

ABOUT UN WOMEN

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.

SITUATION OF WOMEN – OVERVIEW

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste became an independent nation in 2002, after decades of political upheaval, and a devastating conflict in 1999 which displaced almost 75% of the population and destroyed 70% of the infrastructure.ⁱ

Since independence, the young nation has made serious efforts to improve gender equality and women's empowerment through policy reform, legislation, institutional mechanisms and public awareness campaigns. Equality for women is enshrined in the Constitution, and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) has been ratified. The status of the national women's machinery was elevated in 2008 to a State Secretariat reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office, which strengthens its authority to develop and implement policies and programmes that address women's needs and concerns. The government signed the *Dili Komprimisu*, a public declaration that acknowledges the importance of gender equality and investing in women and girls, to achieve sustainable development, address poverty and strengthen society.

Legal Frameworks for Gender Equality – New and amended laws reflect commitment to improving the situation of women. Provisions in the *Electoral Law* (2006) establishing quotas for women's participation have resulted in one of the highest rates of female representation in parliament in the world (29% in 2011)ⁱⁱ. In 2010, the *Law Against Domestic Violence* was passed, following historic changes to the penal code making domestic violence a punishable public crime with improvements in the areas of health and education. For example, 86% of mothers now receive some degree of antenatal care, and the incidence of malnourished women has decreased by 29% in the last decadeⁱⁱⁱ. While there are still more boys than girls in school overall, female enrolment (in higher education) has improved by 70 per cent since 2009^{iv}.

Despite a severe lack of capacity and resources, civil society is emerging as an important force in the country. Women's NGOs, for example, mobilized for affirmative action in the lead-up to the 2007 elections, working alongside the women's wings of 14 political parties to develop a joint action, using CEDAW as a basis and identifying issues of economy, health, education, politics, justice and security.

Poverty and instability — Years of political upheaval and conflict have intensified poverty and impeded Timor-Leste's ability to develop its public and private institutions, infrastructure and human resource capacity. It remains one of the poorer countries in the world, with 37% of the population living below the poverty line. Adult literacy rates are low, while mortality and malnourishment rates are high. The country has a large young population—about 20% are aged between 15 and 24 years, and many do not have a basic education, experience high rates of unemployment and, if they do work, are engaged in unskilled jobs or precarious employment. Poverty and unemployment are constant factors of instability, fueling unrest in 2006, and a flashpoint for the 2012 elections. A significant number of Timor-Leste's poor are women, widowed by the conflict and have become heads of households and sole providers for their families.

Patriarchal traditions and practices — An entrenched culture of patriarchy is a worrying cause of widespread discrimination against women, and their continued exclusion from political, economic and social life. Despite the high rate of female representation in parliament, and a

relatively high representation level in *suco* (village) councils (due to quotas), 2% of council chiefs are women. Women face challenges entering the labour market where non-agricultural employment is 36% of the total employed.

Violence against women — Gender-based violence, especially domestic violence, is widespread in Timor Leste. Nearly 40% of Timorese women over the age of 15 have experienced physical violence, while 34% of women who have been married report having been abused by their husbands. Domestic violence is broadly considered a private, family matter, or “a normal occurrence” to some women. Services for survivors are scant or non-existent. During the conflict, rape and sexual violence were used repeatedly as a weapon of war, and though some trauma-counseling projects were initiated in the post-conflict period, women still lack sufficient access to these services. The situation of women is precarious in isolated villages as in the western border districts where they are vulnerable due to geographical isolation, history of violence and sexual abuse, incest and lack of economic opportunities. Women in border districts are at high risk of sex-trafficking.

UN WOMEN IN TIMOR-LESTE

Since 2001 UN Women has been supporting the Government of Timor Leste and civil society partners address national priorities for gender equality and women’s empowerment, working together with the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste and as part of the UN Country Team. The current focus of support includes:

Placing gender equality on all agendas – UN Women supports government institutions and civil society to advocate for and place gender equality at the centre of development of programmes, laws, policies and budgets, and monitor their implementation. UN Women has helped build the awareness of government and NGOs on Women’s Human Rights standards and using CEDAW to promote and claim women’s rights, including supporting the national women’s machinery in presenting Timor-Leste’s first State Report in 2009, and working with NGO coalition Rede Feto to set up a ‘CEDAW Watch’ mechanism to track implementation of the Convention. Gender advocates have also been supported to campaign for gender-responsive budgeting in the national budget process, including lobbying for allocations from investments of the Timor-Leste Petroleum Fund to address the different needs of men and women, and evaluating and monitoring spending related to the implementation of the *Domestic Violence Law*.

Tackling violence against women – UN Women is working with local governance and community structures to develop community initiatives that respond to and prevent sexual and gender-based violence. UN Women conducted a study in two pilot districts on the western border to identify the types and causes of violence, and the services (or lack

hereof) available to survivors. The study is being used to inform future actions including working with men’s networks to prevent violence and strengthening women’s voice in local and national peace-building processes. UN Women also coordinates the *MDG-Fund Gender Equality Joint Programme* that focuses on reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to domestic violence and trafficking, and improving their social and economic situation. UN Women leads the gender-responsive budgeting aspect of the programme, which looks at whether resource allocation for related policies, plans and laws are adequately addressing women’s needs in these areas.

Promoting women’s leadership and participation in politics and decision-making – Enhancing women’s contribution to politics and the nation-building process, at the national and local level, is a cornerstone of UN Women’s programmes. Women leaders in the 2001 Constituent Assembly elections and the 2004-2005 *suco* elections were assisted to develop their electoral platforms and lobbying skills as candidates. Since 2004, UN Women has conducted pre-electoral trainings with 1,265 female potential candidates in 13 districts and a research to assess the impact of the feminization of poverty, especially among rural women. In 2007, another programme on politics and decision-making was set up to continue supporting women candidates in the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections and the 2009 *Suco* election. The results include affirmative action changes to the 2007 National Election Law mandating a quota for all political parties to include a women in every four candidate and 28% of the National Parliament being women. In the 2009 *suco* elections, UN Women organized transformative leadership trainings with 895 potential candidates (627 women and 232 men) in four districts, resulting in 20% women candidates standing for the position of *Chefe de Suco* (Village Chief) (3 out of 15) and 57% of the women *Chefe de Aldeia* (Hamlet Chief) candidates (17 out of 30 candidates) being elected in 10% of the *sucos* in the target districts. Building on the success and lessons learned from the past, UN Women will be supporting the participation of women in the 2012 national elections also.

ⁱ [Timor-Leste Country Overview](#), World Bank.

ⁱⁱ *Progress of the World’s Women 2011-2012: In pursuit of justice*, UN Women, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2010-2030](#).

^{iv} Timor-Leste Strategic Development Plan 2010-2030.