



# **Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific**

**Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030**

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**Summary**

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## Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for a new and transformative vision. It establishes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are integrated and indivisible, with gender equality as a central priority. While the region has made progress in reducing poverty overall, socio-economic gains have not been equally shared. The 2030 Agenda has been agreed as the Asia and the Pacific region is seeing both persistent and newly emerging development challenges. These include multi-dimensional inequality, climate change and natural disasters, rising urbanization, demographic shifts, disruptive technologies, and the emergence of extremist groups and ideologies.<sup>1</sup> Understanding how these trends can impede or enable progress towards gender equality and sustainable development is vital for effective SDG implementation. The 2030 Agenda is a commitment by all countries and stakeholders to take a new direction towards sustainable development through stronger universal action, new partnerships, adequate financing and an integrated approach to achieving all goals. Gender equality and women's empowerment are addressed as explicit priorities through the stand-alone Goal 5 and by mainstreaming gender equality across the SDGs. In recognizing multi-dimensional inequality within and between countries, the 2030 Agenda is a commitment to "leaving no one behind" (Chapter 1).

The report provides a baseline for monitoring progress on gender equality within the SDG framework (Chapter 2) and identifies priority actions towards achieving gender equality in the region (Chapter 7). It provides the first assessment for Asia and the Pacific of how the 2030 Agenda is to be achieved by addressing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. ADB and UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific jointly produced this report to assist governments, civil society, women's organizations and key stakeholders in the region to enhance gender equality and sustainable development outcomes by 2030. The report is informed by extensive regional consultations, involving key national stakeholders from planning ministries, national women's machineries, statistical offices, experts and UN agencies. It identifies a core list of 54 gender-specific indicators and an additional 34 gender-relevant indicators from the official SDG indicators list, through which the region can measure progress towards achieving gender equality and sustainable development. The report includes statistical tables presenting available data in 57 countries and economies in the region, excluding India. It emphasizes the challenges posed by limited data availability and comparability across all the Goals, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality. The report calls for better gender statistics and disaggregated data to enable the SDGs to be effectively monitored and implemented. It also puts the spotlight on four transformative policy areas and highlights key policy actions that can make a fundamental difference to the achievement of sustainable development (Chapters 3 to 6).

### Gender equality is central to sustainable development, but where do we stand in the region?

While Asia and the Pacific has made progress in some areas of gender equality, available data against the SDG indicators highlights significant inequality for women and girls. Moreover, major gaps remain in data availability and comparability in the region. Of the 85 unique gender-related SDG indicators used in this report, only 26 per cent are available for more than two thirds of the countries or territories in the region, as defined in this report, and 41 per cent have no relevant regional data.<sup>2</sup> Only 3 of the 14 Goal 5 indicators are classified as "Tier I", with data supposedly being regularly produced by countries and with agreed methodologies, however regional data is widely available for just one of these three indicators.<sup>3</sup> The other 11 Goal 5 indicators are classified as "Tier II" or "Tier III", because data are not being regularly produced by countries, or the indicators are under methodological or conceptual development. As such, significant investment is needed to monitor gender equality in the SDGs.

The following box provides insights into the situation of gender equality in the region, drawn from available data.

## Some highlights of the baseline for gender equality in Asia and the Pacific



- Goal 3 recognizes that gender differences in health outcomes are driven by biological differences and social determinants such as gender roles, access to resources, voice and agency.
- While the maternal mortality ratio dropped from 178 to 86 per 100,000 live births between 2000 and 2015, maternal deaths persist and progress has been largely uneven. In 2015, almost 92 per cent of all maternal deaths in the region – around 78,000 – occurred in just 12 countries, with South and South-West Asia registering the largest share and the highest total due to their large populations.
- More girls survive infancy than boys but the sex ratio is skewed for some countries in the region. This points to the discriminatory practice of son bias and daughter devaluation, which leads to sex-selective abortion, neglect and deliberate infanticide. The region has some of the countries with the highest incidence of missing women in the world.
- HIV incidence increased across the region between 2000 and 2015, from 23 to 29 per 100,000 men, and from 10 to 13 per 100,000 women aged 15–49. Women are biologically more susceptible to HIV transmission, which, combined with gendered power dynamics in relationships and violence against women, puts them at particular risk.

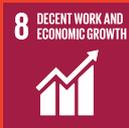
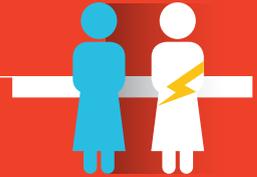


- Goal 4 includes a comprehensive set of targets that moves beyond gender parity in education to focus on quality education, which has important gender-related implications for economic opportunity, but large gaps remain in country coverage and data points over time. Insufficient disaggregation of data remains a challenge to understanding other important dimensions of inequality and discrimination beyond sex (including religion, ethnicity and race).
- More girls achieve proficiency in maths and reading than boys in most countries. On the other hand, girls are less likely than boys to be in organized learning before primary school in the region.
- In the Asia and the Pacific region, 22 of 28 countries reported integrating sexuality education at secondary level, but there is a lack of information about its quality and content.





- As many as one in two women has experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in the last 12 months in countries across the region for which data is available.
- In terms of access to economic and productive resources, women have less access than men to financial services and productive assets, including land, capital, agricultural extension and training, and information technologies.
- South and South-West Asia have the highest rates of child marriage in the region and in the world, where 1 in 3 women are married or in a union by the age of 18.
- Women and girls spend as much as 11 times more of their day than men and boys on unpaid care and domestic work, including cooking, cleaning and collecting water and fuel.
- Women's representation in decision making and leadership roles remains limited: fewer than 1 in 5 parliamentarians in the region are women.



- Economic gains made in the region have not equally benefitted women and men. Asia and the Pacific is the only global region in which women's labour force participation is falling – from 56 per cent in 1990 to 49 per cent in 2013. Women are more represented than men in informal non-agricultural jobs in half of Asia and the Pacific. Even in formal jobs, they still earn much less than men.



- Girls aged under 15 are over-represented among those living in slums. A lack of housing and security of tenure increases their vulnerability to eviction and exploitation.



- Women are more likely to be the victims of trafficking than men. In five of eight countries in the region with data on human trafficking for both men and women aged 18 years or older, the victimization rate per 100,000 population was much higher for women than men. For children, in all five countries for which data are available, girls are more vulnerable than boys.



# Gender equality and women's empowerment as a stand-alone Goal 5 and cross-cutting priority across all the SDGs



## Goal 5: Targets to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.



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.



5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.



5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.



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.



5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

### Means of implementation targets:



5.a Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.



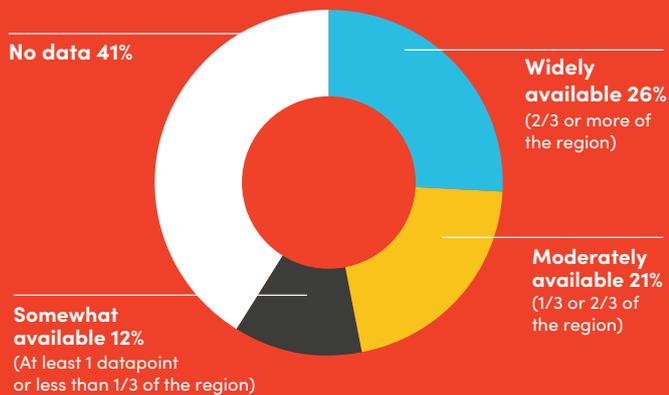
5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.



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.

## Availability of data for gender-related SDG indicators

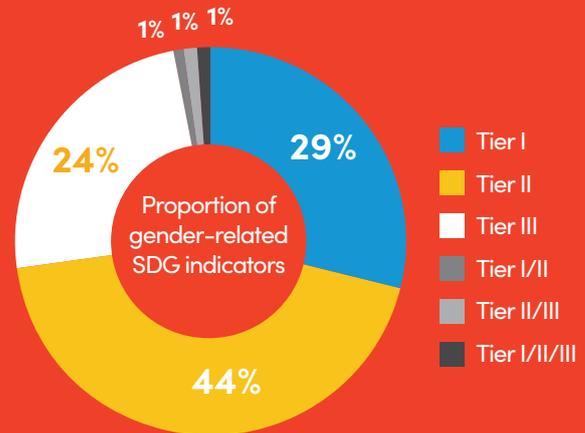
1. Of the 85 unique gender-related SDG indicators for Asia-Pacific, the status of the availability of the data is as follows:



**Tier I:** Indicator is conceptually clear, has an established methodology and standards are available. Data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicator is relevant.

**Tier II:** Indicator is conceptually clear, has an established methodology and standards are available.

2. The classification of 85 unique gender-related SDG indicators



**Tier III:** No established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but the methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed and tested.

## Accelerating progress towards sustainable development – putting a spotlight on four transformative policy areas for the advancement of gender equality

The report focuses on four transformative policy areas. These areas were selected because they are acutely relevant to achieving sustainable development in the region, underscore the strongly integrated nature of the SDGs, and highlight the potential to catalyse change across the SDGs and in the lives of women and girls. They are: (i) Realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights (Chapter 3); (ii) Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work (Chapter 4); (iii) Eliminating violence against women and girls (Chapter 5); and (iv) Empowering women to build climate resilience and reduce disaster risks (Chapter 6). A failure to address these four critical areas risks undermining the achievement of multiple SDGs, and indeed, the entire Agenda.

## Interlinkages between universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and the achievement of other Goals



### Realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights as a catalyst for achieving sustainable development

The ability of women and girls to make their own decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health is critical for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. The report emphasizes the synergies and interlinkages between realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights (Goal 5) and the achievement of other SDGs in the region. Expanding sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls will enable them to enjoy other social and economic opportunities. Fewer unintended pregnancies, greater family savings and productivity would improve maternal and child health (Goal 3), nutrition (Goal 2), household living standards (Goal 1) and school attendance (Goal 4). This could also catalyse greater benefits for communities and the economy at large.

Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights in the region includes meeting the unmet need for modern contraception, improving access to safe abortion, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights for adolescents and marginalized communities, and tackling HIV/AIDS. The ability to make informed reproductive choices and use modern contraception for family planning can empower women. Even though the use of modern contraceptive methods has increased in Asia and the Pacific, gaps remain between the total fertility rate and wanted fertility rate (in countries for which data is available such as Pakistan, Samoa, and Vanuatu), indicating that women's need for family planning in the region remains unfulfilled. Furthermore, evidence proves that when abortion is made legal, services for women tend to be safer and more widely accessible, resulting in improved health outcomes. Nevertheless, in 2014 an estimated 6 per cent of maternal deaths in Asia were attributed to unsafe abortion. Only 18 countries allow abortion on request, but even when legally permitted, safe abortion and services are not accessible for many women in the region.<sup>4</sup> Factors contributing to unintended pregnancy among adolescents include the lack of comprehensive sexuality education, discriminatory gender norms and unequal power relations that constrain the capacity of adolescent girls to negotiate safe sex. One of the drivers of high rates of teenage pregnancy, particularly in South Asia, is early marriage. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage, with 52 per cent of girls married before the age of 18. Conservative interpretations of culture and religious text, which are misused to entrench traditional gender roles (particularly the role of women and girls in the family, their rights over their bodies and sexuality), continue to be a challenge in the region.

## Interlinkages between addressing unpaid care and domestic work and the achievement of other Goals



### Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work for inclusive growth and sustainable development

One of the significant constraints on women's economic empowerment is the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work they undertake. Across four Asian countries (Bangladesh, the People's Republic of China, Mongolia and Pakistan) for which a breakdown of data is available, around 90 per cent of women perform unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 31 to 75 per cent of men. Redistributing women's disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work (Goal 5) will help unleash their economic potential and enhance other development outcomes, including increased time for women to engage in decent work and economic opportunities (Goal 8), participate in education (Goal 4), politics and leadership (Goal 5), and undertake self-care and leisure activities. Over 20 per cent of women in the region cite work/family balance as a major challenge to labour participation. Approximately 83 per cent of Bangladeshi women and 73 per cent of Pakistani women report that responsibility for domestic work is the main reason they are not engaging in paid work. Apart from limiting participation in the labour market, unpaid care and domestic work has an impact on the type and quality of work that women engage in, and on their wages. Cross-country analysis in the region shows that countries in which women perform a higher share of unpaid care work have a higher share of women in part-time and vulnerable jobs. Investing in infrastructure and services (Goal 9) helps to ease the unpaid care and domestic responsibilities of women and girls, and expand their choices to lift themselves and their families out of poverty (Goal 1).

It is important to make care work more visible through statistics. Time-use data can reveal the details of how and for how long individuals spend their time on paid and unpaid activities. However, less than half of the countries in the region have collected time-use data at least once, and only six have mainstreamed time-use surveys in their national statistical systems and collected the data regularly.

Demographic changes in the region are adding new dimensions to the issue of care as people live longer and increase the demand for care and pressure on health services. Demographic transition is also unfolding in a context where patterns of urbanization and migration are rapidly changing the safety net of the family as a traditional source of care. As such, investment in affordable, accessible and quality services for child, disability and elderly care is an urgent priority to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work which is predominantly carried out by women.

## Interlinkages between ending violence against women and girls and the achievement of other Goals



### Eliminating violence against women and girls as a cross-cutting priority for sustainable development

Ending violence against women and girls means addressing the most serious manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination that deprives women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities. Addressing this violence would widen the opportunities for women to complete their education (Goal 4), participate in paid employment (Goal 8), and increase their income (Goal 1), which can also reduce their social and economic vulnerability. Furthermore, it would reduce women's risks of physical harm, which can lead to poor health and well-being (Goal 3). Violence against women and girls in public spaces, particularly sexual violence and harassment, is an everyday occurrence (Goal 11). Based on data for 39 countries, intimate partner violence is a widespread form of violence and the most common in the region. The lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence ranges from 6.1 per cent in Singapore to 67.6 per cent in Kiribati. Some of highest rates of this violence are in Pacific countries. Intimate partner/family-related violence is a major cause of female homicide, with almost half of all female victims (47 per cent) killed by a family member or intimate partner, compared to 6 per cent of male victims (Goal 16). Violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) adolescents and adults goes largely undocumented in the region.

Entrenched attitudes and social norms around gender roles underlie the persistence of violence against women and girls. Empowering them, and engaging men and boys, are key to addressing this issue. Social constructions of masculinity and manhood play a central role in the violence, and men and boys have a positive role to play in ending it. Research reveals that in many societies, both men and women, young and old, subscribe to attitudes and social norms that justify wife beating on various grounds. Key areas of intervention that are proving promising in preventing violence in the region include: community mobilization to empower women and engage with men to change gender stereotypes and norms at community level; prioritizing education and youth engagement to prevent violence in schools; and utilizing policy and legal reform to address structural inequality.

## Interlinkages between empowering women to build climate resilience and reduce disaster risks and the achievement of other Goals



### Empowering women to build climate resilience and reduce disaster risks for sustainable development

Asia and the Pacific is the region most vulnerable to climate change and disaster impacts. Climate-related disasters now account for more than 80 per cent of all disaster events in the region. Women and girls are disproportionately affected due to underlying gender inequality and socio-economic disadvantage. Where sex-disaggregated data is available, it shows that women's mortality rates in major disasters in the region are much higher than men's, for example, in Indonesia due to the 2004 tsunami (77 per cent) and in Solomon Islands due to the 2014 flood (96 per cent). Women and girls are particularly dependent on climate-sensitive natural resources for their livelihoods (Goal 1) and are overrepresented among people who are food insecure (Goal 2). Women smallholder farmers and fishers tend to have less adaptive capacity to cope with the impacts of climate change and disasters, including the adverse impact on the quality and availability of water (Goal 6) and coastal and marine resources (Goal 14), due to their lack of knowledge and access and control over land and other productive resources (Goal 5). Women's unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities (Goal 5) tend to increase due to negative climate impacts. During and in the aftermath of disasters, many women and girls face heightened risk of violence, which is exacerbated where disasters cause significant population displacement, for instance in the 2010 floods in Pakistan.

Women are important agents of change. Their role in mitigating and adapting to climate change risks must be further supported. Critical to this end is investing in more robust data and evidence for better planning, monitoring and implementation of gender-responsive climate action. Sex-disaggregated data on the population affected by climate shocks, including mortality rates, is essential. Women need to be empowered as key actors in tackling climate change with improved capacity to prevent, prepare for and recover from climate change and its related disaster impacts, for instance through active involvement in early warning systems, sustainable land and ecosystem management, and access to recovery services and products such as micro-insurance. Other critical actions include stronger engagement of women in renewable energy and energy efficiency, and ensuring that women benefit from the expansion of green jobs (for example, women-led biogas mason enterprises in Viet Nam), as well as the integration of the gender perspective into climate finance.

## Key pathways and policy actions for transformative change

The report brings together key recommendations centred around how gender equality issues can be tackled across the SDGs to support the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. It proposes key policy actions across sectors to advance a gender-responsive approach to SDG monitoring and implementation at national and sub-national level. These actions require a fundamental shift towards development approaches that recognize the synergies and interlinkages between achieving the SDGs and gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Removing discrimination from legal frameworks and promoting change in social norms

- Ensure comprehensive constitutional and legal frameworks that guarantee gender equality and remove discriminatory provisions. For instance, national laws should prohibit practices that violate the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls such as the requirements of spousal or parental consent to receive health services, and early and forced marriage (Chapter 3); and laws and national action plans must be adopted that criminalize all forms of violence against women and girls, including marital rape (Chapter 5). Similarly, laws that guarantee women's equal rights to productive resources and assets, including inheritance rights, is critical for their economic empowerment (Chapter 4).
- Transform discriminatory social norms and practices in favour of gender equality. This has been emphasized in all four transformative policy areas. For example, changing social norms around the traditional role of families can lead to greater acceptance of redistributing responsibility for elderly care from, especially, unpaid women family members to paid non-family care providers. This can be driven by government policies, such as in Japan and the Republic of Korea (Chapter 4). Similarly, engaging men and boys is an effective strategy for changing social norms to prevent violence against women and girls (Chapter 5).

### Strengthening the production, analysis and use of gender data and statistics

- Promote enabling policies and legal environments to prioritize gender statistics, including disaggregation of data to better understand inter-sectional issues related to gender inequality (such as age, ethnicity, sexual identity and geographic location) to ensure "no one is left behind", especially marginalised groups of women and girls.
- Strengthen the capacity of national statistical systems and collaboration between national statistical offices, women's organizations and policymakers, to ensure the quality and integrity of data, including through methodological development, data dissemination and the use of data to influence policy making, and hold decision-makers accountable.
- Identify new data sources, including "big data", which offer promising potential to reduce data gaps and garner new insights into otherwise unmeasurable areas.

### Gender-responsive institutions and localisation to mainstream and prioritise gender equality across all policy sectors

- Localize the 2030 Agenda through inclusive planning processes at national and local level, including the adoption of nationally specific gender-based targets and indicators with robust monitoring and review structures.
- Institutionalize national coordination mechanisms that include various stakeholders (including key government, public and private institutions, civil society and women's groups), new partnerships and approaches to support progress towards gender equality across sectors. For instance, Thailand has established a National Committee for Sustainable Development. Similarly, Azerbaijan has established a National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development, which has organized consultations with a range of stakeholders, including women's civil society organizations.

### Ensuring women's active and equal participation, representation and leadership at all levels

- Enhance women's voice and representation in decision-making to set national SDG priorities, and in SDG implementation and monitoring. This should especially involve women from the most marginalized groups, to ensure, for example, gender analysis in the voluntary national reviews, and gender-responsive management of resources to combat climate change and disaster risks (Chapter 6).

### Increasing financing and investment

- Strengthen participatory and gender-responsive budgeting, social audits and public hearings to promote the transparency and accountability of spending decisions and assessment of their gender impacts.
- Make gender a priority in domestic resource mobilization. Macroeconomic policies, including tax policy, government expenditure and debt management, directly affect the level of resources available to achieve gender equality. For instance, the Government of Sri Lanka has reduced defence and security expenditure in order to increase social spending.
- Engage the private sector in the financing and delivery of the 2030 Agenda, in compliance with human rights and environmental and labour standards in business practices.

# Sustainable Development Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



## **No Poverty**

End poverty in all its forms everywhere



## **Zero Hunger**

End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture



## **Good Health and Well-being**

Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages



## **Quality Education**

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all



## **Gender Equality**

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



## **Clean Water and Sanitation**

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



## **Affordable and Clean Energy**

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all



## **Decent Work and Economic Growth**

Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



## **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation



## **Reduced Inequalities**

Reduce inequality within and among countries



## **Sustainable Cities and Communities**

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



## **Responsible Consumption and Production**

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



## **Climate Action**

Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts



## **Life Below Water**

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development



## **Life on Land**

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



## **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



## **Partnerships for the Goals**

Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.





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