

# Caring Societies, Inclusive, and Green Economies in Asia and the Pacific

UNVEILING DATA TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S  
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT BEYOND GDP



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.

This publication contributes to the UN Women Gender Action Lab: Innovation and Impact for Gender Equality in Asia-Pacific, powered by the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs). The Gender Action Lab (GAL) is a dynamic action platform launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia and UN Women in Asia and the Pacific. GAL is envisioned to grow in a long-term, multi-stakeholder and multi-donor platform across Asia and the Pacific. It seeks to galvanize efforts for gender-transformative action and impact in the private sector. By leveraging and expanding the innovation capabilities of the private sector, it aims to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and sustainable development to build more inclusive economies in the region.

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**About the cover:** It features three women, symbolically referred to as the Gender Equality Accelerators. Each woman embodies the key themes of the chapters: transforming care systems, women and the world of work, and gender-responsive climate action. Set against a nature-inspired backdrop, the fluid lines and vibrant colors convey a sense of connection. The movement of the women represents collaboration and solidarity, emphasizing how unity can drive change toward inclusive and sustainable economies. These figures reflect a commitment to transforming economic and care systems, illustrating that progress toward equality is a collective endeavor.

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## Foreword

Women's economic empowerment presents a significant opportunity to rebuild societies that prioritize care and inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific. It is crucial to recognize the importance of creating a society that values the well-being of its people and promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth within our planet's finite resources. The Asia-Pacific region faces multiple complex challenges, including natural hazards, widespread informal economies and limited participation of women in the labour market. These factors not only hinder economic growth but divert the development process towards suboptimal social and environmental outcomes.

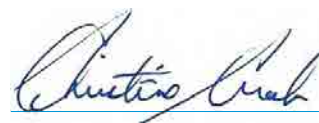
To achieve women's economic empowerment, we must reorient economic models and objectives to prioritize the care needs of individuals and communities with a gender-responsive lens. Sustainable economic growth must build on a foundation of universal access to quality and affordable care services, recognizing and rewarding care workers, giving them a voice through representation and redistributing unpaid care work to be shared equally between women and men. By investing in the well-being of our people, we can create a society where everyone has an equal opportunity to thrive and contribute to the betterment of our region.

Moreover, we must transition to sustainable economic activities and practices to address the adverse effects of climate change as well as build resilience, particularly for the most vulnerable women and girls. Preserving

our natural resources is crucial for the well-being of future generations. Through investment in renewable energy, promotion of low-carbon technologies and adoption of environmentally friendly practices, we can ensure sustainable economic growth while safeguarding our planet.

'Caring Societies, Inclusive, and Green Economies in Asia-Pacific' aims to measure the value of care within the economy and women's contributions towards development, prioritizing the central role of women's economic empowerment in fostering a caring and green region. The report shares data and evidence to further the discourse on inclusive metrics of progress in the 'Beyond GDP' initiative, which aims to develop a more comprehensive approach to measuring overall well-being and agency of people, prosperity and the health of the planet. It goes beyond the numbers to understand the tangible steps governments, companies and communities as a whole need to take to ensure that gender-responsive and inclusive care measures foster social and economic growth of societies and drive green economic growth in Asia and the Pacific.

The report establishes the foundation for future action, and forthcoming guidance for regional initiatives aimed at promoting caring, inclusive and low-carbon economies in the Asia-Pacific region. Let us work together to create a future where all women, men, girls and boys can thrive, where no one is left behind and where our economies flourish in harmony with our environment.



**Christine Arab**

UN Women Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific and Representative in Thailand

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## Acronyms and abbreviation

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>GEA</b>	Gender equality accelerator	<b>LDC</b>	Least developed country
<b>CEB</b>	Chief Executives Board for Coordination	<b>MSG</b>	Minimum Set of Gender Indicators
<b>ESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>GDP</b>	Gross domestic product	<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>GII</b>	Gender Inequality Index	<b>WEE</b>	Women's economic empowerment
<b>CSW</b>	Commission on the Status of Women	<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index	<b>WEF</b>	World Economic Forum
<b>HLCP</b>	High-Level Committee on Programmes	<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technologies	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization	<b>UNPD</b>	United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

## Glossary

<b>Care economy</b>	The care economy entails the production and consumption of goods and services necessary for the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of care-dependent groups, such as children, the elderly, the ill and people with disabilities, as well as healthy, prime working-age adults. Care-related economic production activities are wide-ranging, including both direct and indirect services and production of goods. Direct care provisioning entails one-to-one relational tasks between the caregiver and the care receiver, such as breastfeeding a baby, helping a child with homework, tending to a bed-bound elderly person or giving emotional support to someone diagnosed with a terminal illness. Such direct provisioning is supported by indirect care activities, which do not entail person-to-person engagement but are nevertheless indispensable components of care provisioning. These include common domestic tasks—for example, cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and household repairs and maintenance—as well as additional activities in rural areas of less developed regions, such as collecting water and firewood or food processing (UN Women, 2018, <a href="#">Promoting women's economic empowerment: Recognizing and investing in the care economy</a> ).
<b>Care systems</b>	The United Nations policy paper on <a href="#">Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda</a> defines systems as “a set of things working together as parts of a mechanism or an interconnecting network; a complex whole”, and “a set of principles or procedures according to which something is done; an organized scheme or method.” In that sense, it considers care systems to encompass the following components: normative frameworks, policy, legislation, infrastructure, services, trainings and governance.
<b>Gender-transformative</b>	The term refers to development projects, programmes and policies in which gender mainstreaming is utilized to design and implement activities that attempt to redefine gender roles and relations and promote positive gender equality results. Commonly used terms such as gender-transformative approaches, practices and interventions indicate that these are planned and implemented in a manner intended to lead to positive transformation and the intended gender equality results (UN Women, <a href="#">Gender Equality Glossary</a> )
<b>Informality</b>	All remunerative work (i.e. self-employment and wage employment) that is not registered, regulated, or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks and non-remunerative work undertaken in an income-producing enterprise (ILO, 2013, <a href="#">Measuring Informality: A Statistical Manual on the Informal Sector and Informal Employment</a> . Geneva).
<b>Vulnerable employment</b>	Individuals of working age who are own-account workers or contributing family workers (ILOSTAT, 2018, <a href="#">Spotlight on Work Statistics. Paid employment vs. vulnerable employment</a> ).
<b>Women's economic empowerment</b>	Women's economic empowerment is a transformative, collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable, and prosperous, and all women enjoy their economic and social rights, exercise agency and power in ways that challenge inequalities and level the playing field, and gain equal rights and access to, ownership of and control over resources, assets, income and their own lives (UN Women, 2024, <a href="#">Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy</a> ).

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# Economic empowerment of women and sustainable development



## KEY MESSAGES

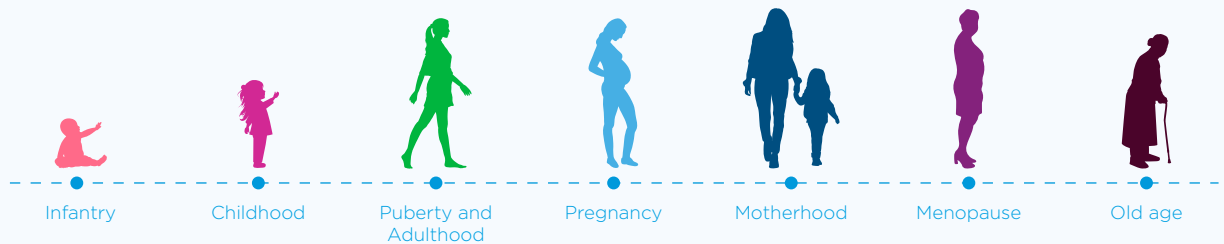
1. Although Asian economies have experienced significant growth since 2000, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly negative economic and social impact, especially on women and girls. The economic recovery offers the opportunity to strengthen a gender-transformative agenda and foster inclusive economies.
2. The latest decades witnessed an improvement in women's engagement in the labour market.<sup>1</sup> However, the goal of gender equality in the workforce is still out of reach, curbing potential for growth.
3. The disadvantaged position of women and girls in the economy makes them more vulnerable to shocks despite their key role in societal and economic resilience.
4. The past decades recorded progress in economic performance and improved social conditions for both women and men. However, more women than men live in poverty.
5. Income poverty alone does not encompass all the different ways in which women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region experience deprivation.
6. Failing to build on previous investments in improving the status of women and girls, as well as harnessing their untapped potential, not only impacts the prospects of enhancing economic prosperity but also hinders the region's ability to achieve sustainable development.

8.

Women's economic empowerment contributes to inclusive economic growth and further the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

9.

It is crucial to support women and girls at every stage of their lifecycle to achieve gender equality and realize all of the SDGs.



10.

Of the 26 Asia-Pacific countries with available data, only 9 have established systems to monitor and allocate resources for gender equality and women's empowerment.

11.

The Beyond GDP initiative aims to develop a more comprehensive approach to measuring prosperity, well-being and agency.

## 1.1 Progress of the socioeconomic status of women in Asia and the Pacific

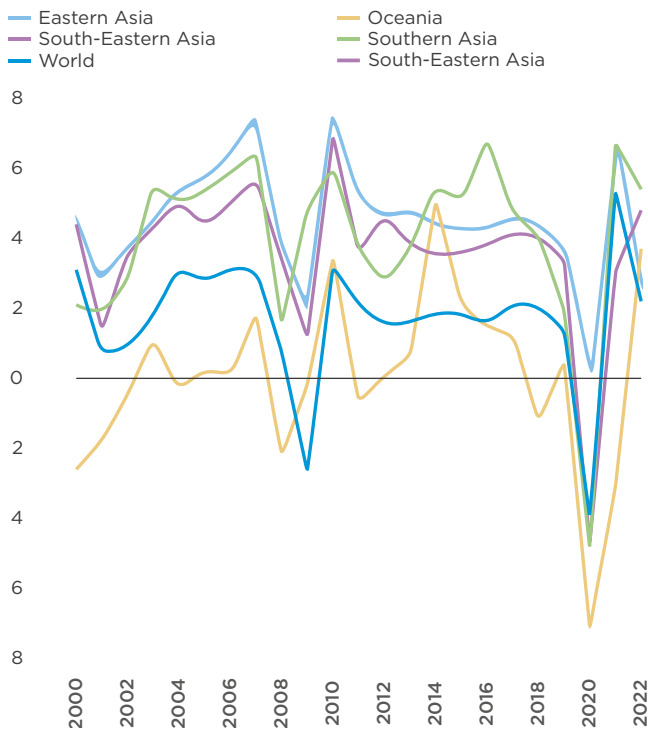
Since 2000, the Asia-Pacific region has witnessed remarkable expansion of its market share, driven by sustained industrialization, technological advancements, increased exports and foreign investments. The economies in the region have grown at different rates and paces, ultimately integrating into the global market.<sup>2</sup> As home to more than 60 per cent of the global population, the Asia-Pacific region has had a positive impact on the global economy through its economic growth, with China and India exhibiting substantial growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, surpassing the global average.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, countries in South-East Asia that have benefitted from intraregional trade agreements have also made a significant contribution. Over the past two decades, economies in Asia scored well above the global average in GDP-metrics of successful economic performance. Nevertheless, the Asia-Pacific region consists of diverse economies, including a high concentration of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Countries in Oceania face unique challenges related to geographical isolation, natural hazards, and climate change. Economic downturn triggered by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic coupled with climate-change and natural hazards have hampered the economic growth of all Asia-Pacific subregions (figure 1).

The strong economic performance of the Asia-Pacific region would not have been possible without the significant contributions of its women and girls. Over the past 30 years, the gender gap in the labour force participation rate declined by 2 percentage points in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole and across all subregions.<sup>4</sup> Yet, gender disparities persist in labour markets, with a lower percentage of women participating compared to men. This is particularly evident in South Asia where the labour force participation rate of women remains one of the lowest globally (figure 2). To date, there remains a significant untapped potential in the economies of the Asia-Pacific region, as women's participation in the labour force consistently lags behind that of men in all subregions. The lower participation rate of women persists even though women's contribution would lead to favourable outcomes in terms of productivity and innovation.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the vulnerable position of women and girls in the economy.<sup>5</sup> The economic downturn associated with the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted more women and girls than men and boys.<sup>6</sup> In 15 countries with available data, more women and girls reported having experienced or continuing to experience severe financial hardship compared to men and boys (figure 3). Gendered labour markets reinforce challenges in eliminating gender disparities in

**FIGURE 1.**

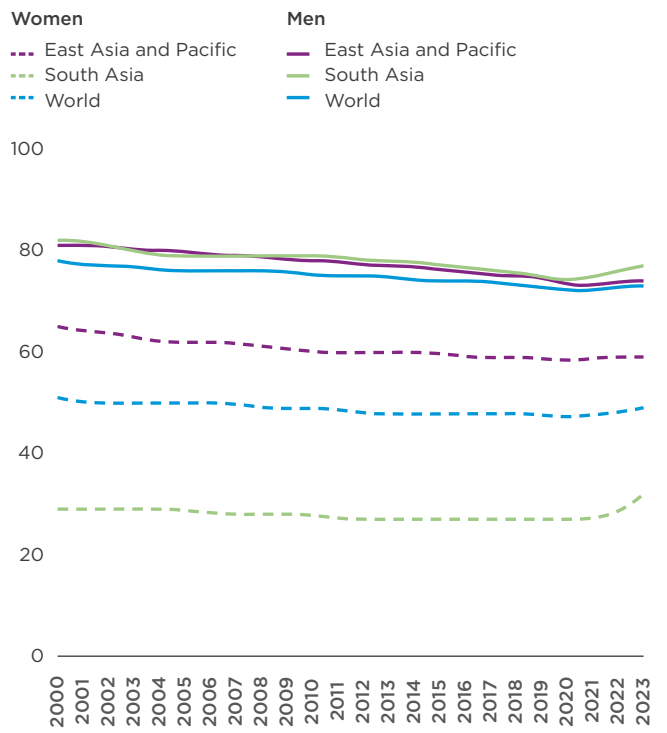
**Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, by subregion (percentage)**



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 2.**

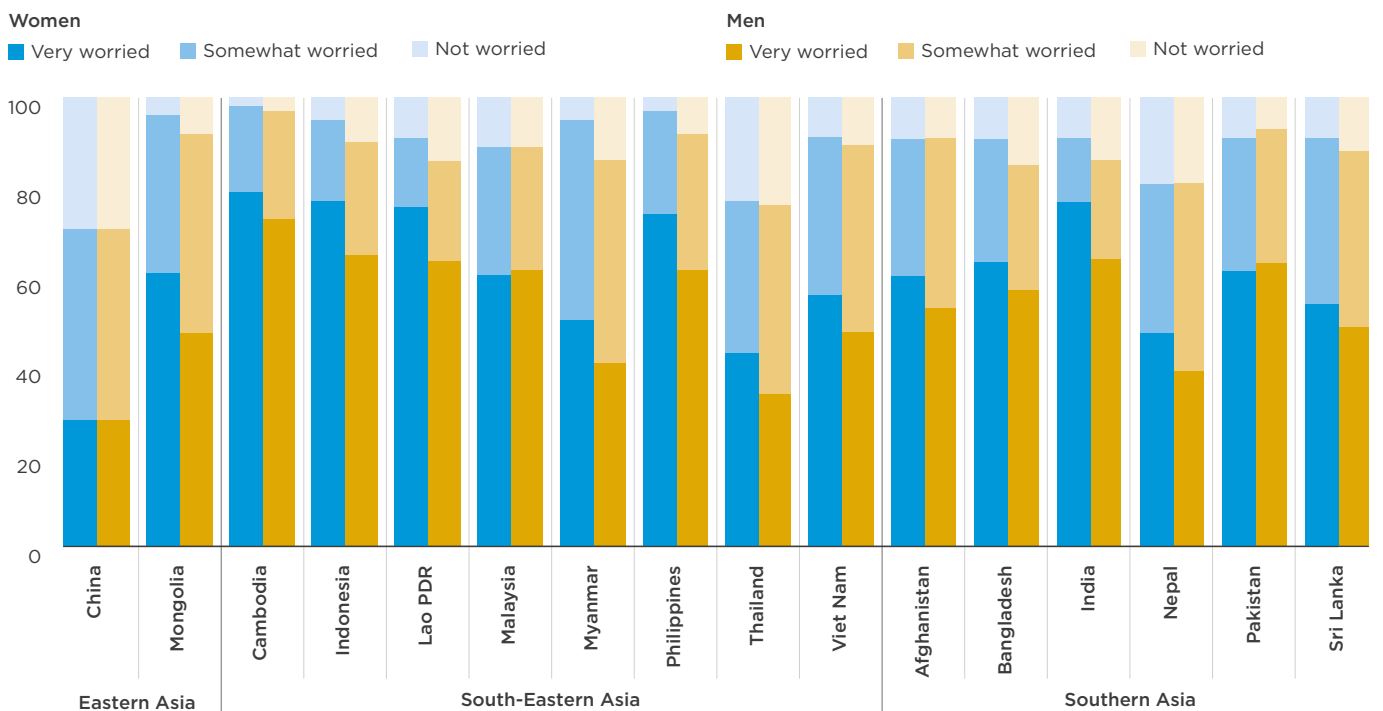
**Labour force participation rate, by sex and subregion (percentage)**



Note: The graph illustrates modelled estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO). Given the exceptional situation experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the scarcity of relevant data, the ILO modelled estimates and projections from 2020 onwards are subject to substantial uncertainty.  
Source: World Bank Data Portal.

**FIGURE 3.**

**Proportion of population (aged 15+) who experienced and continue to face severe financial hardship due to COVID-19, by sex, latest year (percentage)**

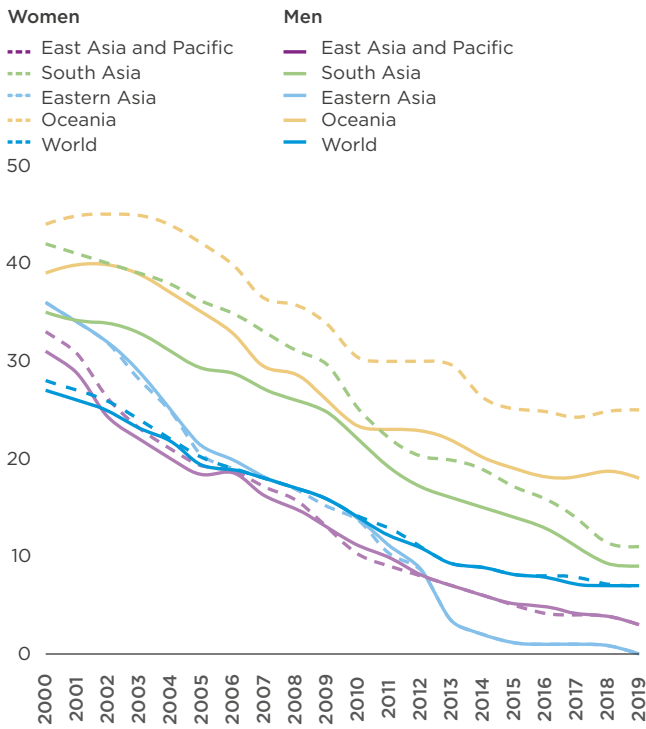


Source: World Bank Data Portal.



**FIGURE 4.**

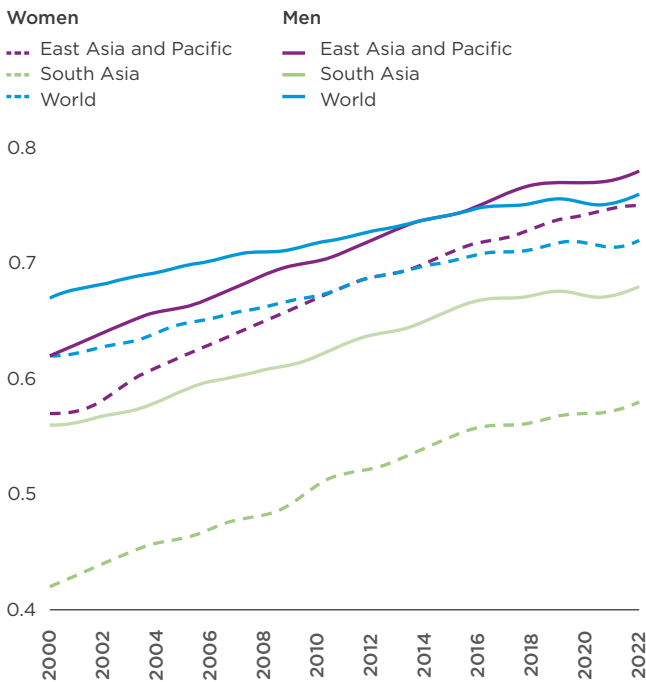
**Proportion of employed population (aged 15+) living below the international poverty line, by sex and subregion (percentage)**



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 5.**

**Human Development Index, by sex and subregion**

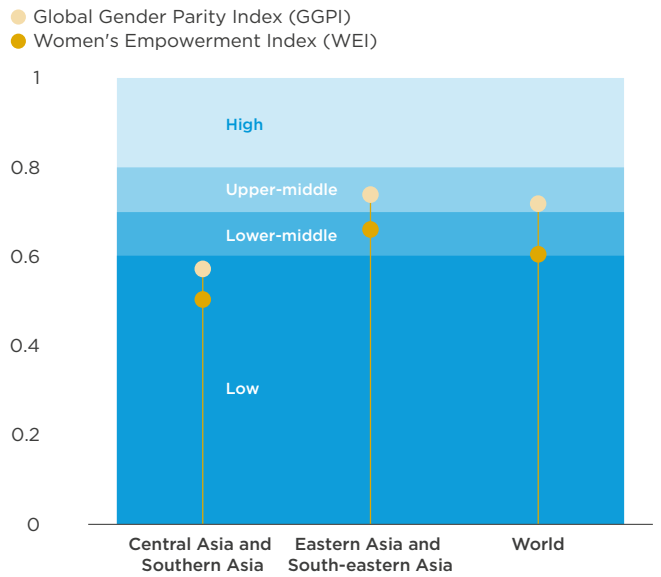


**Note:** The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The HDI is the geometric mean of normalized indices for each of the three dimensions.

Source: United Nations Development Programme – Data Center.

**FIGURE 6.**

**Twin indices on women’s empowerment and gender equality, 2022**



**Note:** Regional groupings presented in the graph are SDG’s grouping. Data for Oceania are not available. For both indices, the cutoff points are less than 0.600 for low women’s empowerment/ performance in achieving gender equality, 0.600–0.699 for lower-middle women’s empowerment/ performance in achieving gender equality, 0.700–0.799 for upper-middle women’s empowerment/ performance in achieving gender equality and 0.800 or greater for high women’s empowerment/ performance in achieving gender equality.

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women.

income-poverty (figure 4). In Oceania, among participants in the labour force, a significantly higher share of women are living below the international poverty line (less than \$2.25 per day) compared to men. While Southern Asia has made strides in narrowing gender poverty gaps in recent decades, poverty rates for women in these economies remain higher than the global average. Nevertheless, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia have witnessed significant progress in reducing gender gaps in income poverty over the past 10 years, narrowing the overall proportion of employed population living below the international poverty line.

Economic growth and improved social conditions have not enabled the achievement of gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>7</sup> Supplementing economic metrics with indicators from the Human Development Index (HDI) reveals persistent gender disparities. Over the past three decades, the HDI has surged by 19 percentage points – the greatest leap in the world.<sup>8</sup> Higher HDI values indicate higher levels of human development. Countries in East Asia and the Pacific have witnessed substantial advancements in life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, and income per capita, surpassing the global average. Yet,

most notably in South Asia, women and girls rank well below men and boys and the global average (figure 5). In 2022, the HDI score for women in South Asia was 0.58 compared to 0.67 for men, whereas scores in East Asia and the Pacific were 0.74 for women compared to 0.77 for men. Significant gender gaps in HDI call for improving access to education, health care and economic opportunities for women and girls in the region.

The latest developments in composite indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment show that Central and Southern Asia exhibit scores well below the global average (figure 6).<sup>9</sup> While scores slightly higher than global average are recorded in Eastern and South-eastern Asia, opportunities for good health (including bodily integrity), education, skill-building and knowledge, labour and financial inclusion, participation in decision-making, and freedom from violence are still limited for women and girls.

The Global Gender Gap Index for 2024, published by the World Economic Forum (WEF), reveals significant regional disparities in gender equality and women's economic empowerment.<sup>10</sup> Southern Asia ranks seventh out of eight WEF regions, reflecting significant gender gaps despite a modest improvement since 2006.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly true in terms of economic participation and opportunity, where the score is only 39 per cent, indicating a need for improvement in female labour force participation and opportunities for leadership roles. Eastern Asia and the Pacific ranks fourth, with an overall gender parity score of 69 per cent, slightly above the global score (68.5 per cent). Nevertheless, this subregion still faces challenges in economic participation and opportunity (71 per cent) and political empowerment (15 per cent), underscoring the need for focused efforts to achieve comprehensive gender equality in the world of work. After decades of economic growth and progress in human development, compounded crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, have resulted in a slowdown of progress towards development outcomes in the Asia-Pacific region with women and girls at a disadvantage.

## 1.2 Women's economic empowerment and the Sustainable Development Goals

Beyond the dedicated goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) contributes to achieving gender equality and empowering women.

In turn, women's agency, decision-making power and control over productive resources are essential for realizing all SDGs and are a fundamental aspect of pursuing sustainable development.<sup>12</sup> This interconnectedness is rooted in the vital and diverse role that women and girls play across the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development.

Empowering women is a catalyst for societal and economic change. Women's participation in the labour market boosts productivity, promotes economic diversification, and results in inclusive economic growth. When women have equitable access to education, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, they contribute significantly to economic growth and the reduction of poverty.<sup>13</sup> This aligns directly with SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), benefitting not only women but also entire communities. The benefits of women's economic empowerment (WEE) have wide-reaching effects for both current and future generations. When women are financially empowered, they are more likely to invest in their children's education, thereby promoting improved health, reduced mortality rates, and higher levels of education.<sup>14</sup> This empowering cycle of investment serves as the foundation for progress towards SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 3 (good health and well-being).

Women are important contributors to economic growth and development. Empowering women promotes more inclusive, sustainable and equitable societies. Economic autonomy can provide women with a platform to voice their opinions within their communities and the political sphere, driving progress towards SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). WEE actively challenges deep-rooted gender stereotypes and disparities, ultimately laying the foundation for a more democratic and accountable governance structure. The economic empowerment of women is among those protective factors that can reduce the risk of violence against women, which results from the low status of women in society and the household.<sup>15</sup>

Migration, including the substantial contributions of women migrant workers, can be a powerful driver of sustainable development and reduced inequalities (SDG 10). The contributions of women migrant workers through remittances and the transfer of skills play a vital role in improving economic outcomes and narrowing the gap between the wealthy and the poor in their countries of origin. When migration policies are effectively managed, they can result in increased participation in the labour force, investment and cultural diversity, all of which are crucial for reducing inequalities, including gender disparities.<sup>16</sup>

WEE can play a crucial role in driving innovation across different spheres. By ensuring equal opportunities for women to participate in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, they can contribute to finding innovative solutions for sustainable development. This, in turn, supports the achievement of SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).<sup>17</sup> Women are guardians of nature and often play a key role in managing natural resources, peacebuilding and sustaining agricultural productivity.<sup>18</sup> Their economic empowerment can lead to more sustainable farming practices and food security, addressing SDG 2 (zero hunger) and SDG 15 (life on land).<sup>19</sup> Additionally, when women participate equally in economic decision-making processes, they can advocate for environmental sustainability, influencing policies and practices that support SDG 13 (climate action) and SDG 14 (life below water).<sup>20</sup>

Structural discrimination against women and girls creates harmful cycles that hinder the positive impacts of WEE, thus slowing down progress towards all SDGs. These inequalities begin even before birth and persist throughout women's lives. For example, societal norms that favour boys over girls often lead to girls being expected to contribute more to household welfare, leaving them with less time for education. This, in turn, results in gender gaps in employment later in life. Additionally, motherhood frequently limits opportunities for entering, staying in and advancing in the workplace, particularly in societies where gender norms dictate women should stay home to raise children and in employment settings without

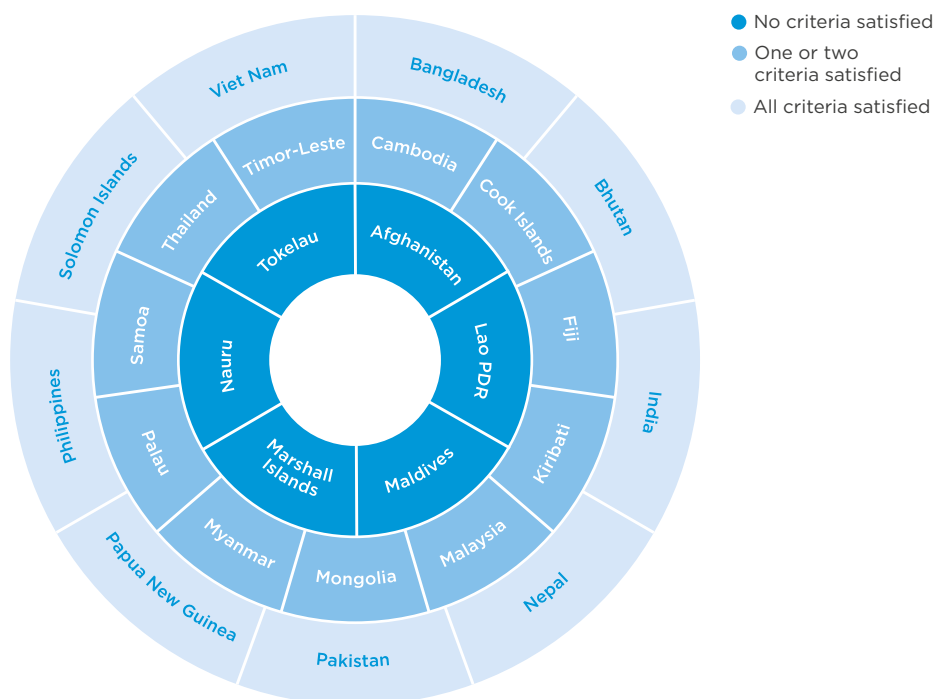
adequate parental leave policies or care services. Consequently, many women drop out of the labour force or resort to informal employment to fulfil their family responsibilities, which leaves them without pensions in their later years and weakens their social standing.

In addition to discriminatory social norms, the lack of public allocation systems for gender equality and women's empowerment along with a shrinking fiscal space hinders the potential benefits of WEE on all SDGs.<sup>21,22</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, only 9 out of 26 countries with available data have established systems to monitor and allocate resources for gender equality and women's empowerment (figure 7). Moreover, recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters have exacerbated pre-existing gender disparities in the workforce, placing women and girls at a significant disadvantage.<sup>23</sup> These structural barriers to gender equality during times of crisis have affected women's labour force participation and perpetuated the feminization of poverty.<sup>24</sup> These systemic constraints in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment have adverse implications for the attainment of all SDGs, underscoring the imperative for immediate action in catalytic areas related to WEE.

### 1.3 Rethinking how progress is measured: the Beyond GDP agenda

Rollbacks in gender equality and women's empowerment coupled with multiple and interrelated challenges such

**FIGURE 7.**  
Countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment, latest year (percentage)



**Note:** The indicator builds upon countries' responses on: (1) the existence of programmes/policies on gender equality and women's empowerment and associated resource allocations for implementation; (2) mechanisms to track resource allocations towards gender equality and women's empowerment in the public financial management cycle; and (3) provisions to make information about allocations publicly available.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

as the triple planetary crisis (i.e. climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution),<sup>25</sup> extreme inequalities, changing dynamics of globalization, financial volatility and vulnerability, rapid digital transformation and the digital and data divides have prompted a widespread re-evaluation of conventional practices in assessing the well-being of both people and planet.

While GDP has been the dominant metric for measuring economic performance, it has significant limitations, particularly in capturing women's contribution to the economy and society. For instance, while the provision of unpaid care services is considered a productive activity from an economic perspective, GDP does not account for it due to limitations in the identification of market values. To highlight and address inequalities and ensure that economic models generate benefits for all segments of society, including the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls, adequate gender indicators are needed to address emerging regional challenges, such as climate change, poverty, resource depletion and demographic shifts.

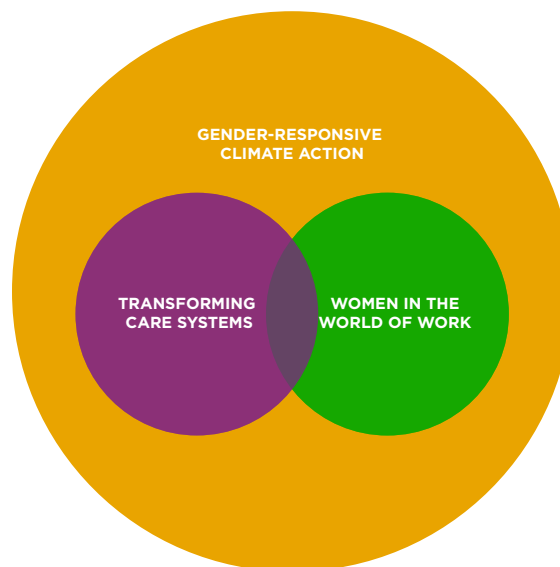
The [United Nations Beyond GDP](#) initiative represents a significant shift towards more inclusive metrics to measuring progress, aiming to create a world where development is assessed not just by economic output, but by the overall well-being and agency of people and the health of the planet. Building on the SDG indicators framework, the Beyond GDP agenda focuses on developing alternative measures of progress that better reflect the well-being of all people and the sustainability of economies.

Putting forward these solutions requires rethinking the economic paradigm that shapes both economies and societies to shed light on what counts. Ensuring inclusive economies calls for recognizing the essential yet overlooked role of non-market labour, including unpaid care work, which is often provided by women and girls and is critical to ensuring economic living standards, social well-being and the development of human capabilities.<sup>26</sup> It also requires recognizing the interlinkages of non-market labour with climate change and environmental conservation. Measuring societal progress beyond conventional GDP metrics opens the space for accounting for the role that WEE plays in fostering care societies and inclusive and green economies.

A unique opportunity is at hand to leverage a key framework to advance evidence informed decision-making for women's and girls' rights and empowerment. While the SDG indicators framework – a cornerstone of the Beyond GDP initiative – was designed to capture progress in areas not typically measured by GDP, additional gender

indicators can provide policymakers and other stakeholders more comprehensive and actionable data to guide sustainable and inclusive policy decisions to advance WEE.

## 1.4 Objectives of the report



This report aims to help Governments, policymakers, multi-lateral organizations, the private sector and civil society in the Asia-Pacific region build consensus around a transformative agenda for WEE that catalyses the production and use of gender data as pathways to action now and for the future. Its objective is to enhance evidence-informed WEE-related policymaking, action, agenda setting and programming guidance in response to new and emerging trends and crises in Asia and the Pacific. As articulated in [Our Common Agenda](#), the mid-point of the SDGs represents an opportunity to identify new and improved approaches to expedite progress on the SDGs. Accelerated actions on WEE are imperative not only to achieve SDG 5, but also to serve as a multiplier mechanism to foster progress towards all SDGs. However, this requires examining the fundamental causes of disempowerment and identifying influential factors that can generate multi-faceted impacts for gender equality and beyond.<sup>27</sup>

This report targets data ecosystems, including National Statistical Systems and data users (such as line ministries of gender equality) at the national, regional and international levels. It aims to identify key information spaces to inform the development of gender-transformative WEE policies and strategies. The report aims to assist data ecosystems in understanding the WEE data to be collected, its relevance, how it can be utilized and where it can be found, while advancing a proposal for essential WEE indicators for the future.

## BOX 1.

### The Beyond GDP Initiative

In November 2021, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) deliberated on measuring progress beyond GDP. CEB highlighted that the significance of numbers, or the absence of them, has a profound impact on national and global policies. Therefore, moving beyond GDP is intricately linked to all aspects and fundamental factors of sustainable development, and it holds great significance for individuals, the environment, economic well-being, peace and partnerships.

CEB identified an opportunity for the United Nations system to go beyond GDP and measure progress considering various dimensions. To accomplish this, High-Level Committee on Programmes (HLCP) was assigned the task of developing a comprehensive United Nations system-wide contribution on Beyond GDP. This contribution includes an analysis and proposed recommendations related to data, policy coherence, and capacity development. The aim is to support Member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG target 17.19. This target seeks to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP and enhance statistical capacity-building in developing countries by 2030. Additionally, these efforts will contribute to the follow-up of [Our Common Agenda](#) and support the multi-year update of the System of National Accounts led by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

An HLCP Core Group on Beyond GDP was established in December 2021, co-led by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNDP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. The Core Group developed a concept note approved by HLCP at an [intersessional meeting](#) held on 18 February 2022. In-depth discussions on the substantive aspects of Beyond GDP were held on 31 March and 1 April 2022 at the [43rd session of HLCP](#) in London. The Committee agreed to a set of conclusions that guided the production of the United Nations system-wide contribution.

The HLCP Core Group on Beyond GDP drafted the paper [Valuing What Counts: United Nations System-wide Contribution on Beyond Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#), containing a narrative on why the international community need to go beyond GDP, followed by a section containing a proposed framework for Beyond GDP, and a set of recommendations for the United Nations system, Member States and other stakeholders. Valuing What Counts was approved by HLCP at an [intersessional meeting](#) held on 28 July 2022 and taken note of by CEB in August 2022.

The policy paper focuses on three critical priority areas, namely: i) well-being and agency; ii) equality; and iii) sustainability for present and future generations. Achieving progress for societal well-being calls for putting in motion processes that foster participatory governance, innovative and ethical economies and building resilience. This call is accompanied by a sharper understanding of the relevance of a cross-sectoral approach to the achievement of the SDGs, the role of data and evidence for informing decision-making and the multiplier effect of cross-fertilization among thematic areas.

Guided by the [UN Women Strategy on Women's Economic Empowerment](#), the report examines available gender data in the Asia-Pacific region across three domains of change, namely: i) power, agency and autonomy; ii) equal rights and access to, ownership of and control over resources; and iii) policies, norms and institutions. Accompanying these three critical elements of economic empowerment as root causes of systemic inequalities, the data mapping comprehensively depicts facets of inequality that need to be addressed to enable WEE, including inequality of opportunities and outcomes. This analysis is conducted in two interrelated areas where catalytic change can accelerate progress towards caring societies and inclusive and green economies—referred to as gender equality accelerators (GEAs).<sup>28,29</sup> The two GAEs are: transforming care systems (section 2); and women in the world of work (section 3). Section 4 illustrates how key impacts articulated in previous sections are aggravated through climate change. The report also presents case studies that illustrate programmatic solutions to address structural barriers to WEE and promote investments in critical areas where economic, social and environmental outcomes can be just for all and inclusive of all.

Ultimately, this report presents a comprehensive and holistic set of WEE indicators derived from existing data sources to enable evidence-informed decision-making through a data ecosystem approach that addresses systemic issues in WEE areas with transformative potential to foster overall progress towards SDGs. While available WEE data already provides valuable insights into various dimensions of well-being, including economic factors, sustainability, risks and vulnerabilities, inequalities and governance, it may not encompass all relevant factors. To inform the discussion happening across the United Nations system on beyond GDP from a WEE lens, section 5 puts forward a proposal for complementing GDP metrics with indicators that are deemed relevant to accelerate actions towards WEE.

### 1.5 WEE indicators framework and methodological note

The indicators showcased in this report have been selected based on their relevance to the WEE GEAs. The criteria guiding the selection were the extent to which indicators relate to the following: i) realizing the economic rights

and autonomy of women and girls; and ii) using a gender lens to dismantle structural inequalities in economic systems. In this report, WEE indicators refer to indicators that explicitly or implicitly have these underlying objectives. Overall, 206 indicators were selected. The select list of WEE indicators includes the 54 gender-specific SDG indicators identified by UN Women (2018),<sup>30</sup> relevant SDGs indicators identified in the UN Women WEE Strategy (2024) and the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators (MSG) aligned with the strategic objectives in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A refinement of this list for Asia-Pacific was conducted in view of data availability and sex disaggregation, and it resulted in the 77 WEE indicators presented in this report. Data for 49 countries within the Asia-Pacific region have been selected, and graphs visualize WEE indicators when at least 20 countries in the region reported data points. Few exceptions are applied for select WEE indicators, such as SDG 5.4.1. These indicators were then mapped across domains of change for transforming care systems (table 2), and women and the world of work (table 3). Contextual indicators, including composite indicators, for WEE situational analysis were also considered in the selection (table 4).

Given the scope of this report, it relies on official statistics with data sourced primarily from four key databases: the SDG Global Database, UN DESA Gender Data Hub, the World Bank Gender Data Portal and the International Labour Organization (ILO) Department of Statistics. Data from these sources were retrieved as of July 2024 and all estimates refer to the latest available year. In some instances, the report presents subregional aggregates. The four data sources each use distinct subregional classifications for the Asia-Pacific region. Data from the World Bank and ILO are aggregated according to separate subregional classifications defined and followed by each organization, neither of which correspond with the subregional classifications used in the SDG Global Database. Throughout this report, subregional aggregates have been presented according to their original classifications. The authors acknowledge that differing subregional groupings can lead to challenges in data comparability and subregional analysis. Understanding these differences is crucial to ensure methodological consistency and accurate interpretation in subregional assessments.

**TABLE 1.**  
**Subregional groupings by data source**

Database	Subregional groupings	Number of countries/territories
<a href="#">ILO</a>	Eastern Asia <sup>a</sup>	8
	Pacific Islands <sup>b</sup>	24
	South-eastern Asia	11
	Southern Asia <sup>c</sup>	9
<a href="#">World Bank</a>	East-Asia and Pacific <sup>b</sup>	38
	South Asia	8
<a href="#">SDG Global Database and UN DESA Gender Data Hub</a>	Eastern Asia	7
	Oceania <sup>b</sup>	25
	South-eastern Asia	11
	Southern Asia <sup>c</sup>	9

**Note:** All graphs in this report depicting Oceania exclude Australia and New Zealand unless otherwise stated. Bibliographical and other references have been verified as far as possible. The United Nations bears no responsibility for the availability or functioning of URLs. References to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars, unless otherwise stated. Graphs represent only countries for which data is available for all categories.

<sup>a</sup> Includes Taiwan Province of China.

<sup>b</sup> Includes Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>c</sup> Includes Iran (Islamic Republic of).

**TABLE 2.**

**WEE Indicators framework for transforming care systems**

Transforming Care Systems		
<b>POWER</b> Agency, power and autonomy	<b>RESOURCES</b> Equal rights and access to, control over and ownership of resources	<b>SYSTEMS</b> Policies, institutions and norms
<p>Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and 18 years (SDG 5.3.1)</p> <p>Proportion of women (aged 15–49) who make their own informed decisions regarding contraceptive use, reproductive health care and sexual relations (SDG 5.6.1)</p>	<p>Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex and type (SDG 5.4.1)</p> <p>Proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores, by sex (SDG 8.7.1)</p> <p>Average number of hours spent on total work (paid and unpaid), by sex (MSG 1.2)</p>	<p>Proportion of mothers with newborns receiving maternity cash benefit (SDG 1.3.1)</p> <p>Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality (SDG 5.1.1)</p> <p>Extent to which countries have laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men to maternity care and contraceptive and family planning (SDG 5.6.2)</p> <p>Length of maternity leave (MSG Q1.3)</p> <p>Percentage of wages paid during maternity leave (MSG Q1.4)</p> <p>Share of employees with access to parental leave, by sex (ILO)</p> <p>Length of paid parental leave, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Dismissal of pregnant workers is prohibited (WB)</p> <p>There are periods of absence due to childcare accounted for in pension benefits (WB)</p>
<b>Inequality of opportunities</b>		
<p>Proportion of youth (aged 15 to 24) not in education, employment, or training, by sex (SDG 8.6.1)</p> <p>Proportion of people in employment working part-time, by sex (MSG 1.12)</p> <p>Prime-age (25 to 54 years) employment-to-population ratio, by sex, household type and presence of children (MSG 1.13)</p> <p>Composite rate of labour underutilization, by sex (ILO)</p>		
<b>Inequality of outcomes</b>		
<p>Proportion of health workers, by sex and type of occupation (SDG 3.c.1)</p> <p>Average hourly earnings of care employees (PPP \$), by sex (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of care workers in informal employment, by sex (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and care worker type (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and education (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and institutional sector (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and location (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and marital status (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and status in employment (ILO)</p> <p>Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and working time arrangement (ILO)</p>		

**TABLE 3.**

**WEE Indicators framework for women and the world of work**

Women and the world of work		
POWER Agency, power and autonomy	RESOURCES Equal rights and access to, control over and ownership of resources	SYSTEMS Policies, institutions and norms
<p>Proportion of people (aged 15 to 49) who own a house, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of people (aged 15 to 49) who own land, by sex (WB)</p>	<p>Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex (SDG 5.b.1)</p> <p>Proportion of people (aged 15+) who own an account at a financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of people (aged 15+) who borrowed any money from a formal financial institution or using a mobile money account, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of people (aged 15+) who borrowed to start, operate, or expand a farm or business, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of people (aged 15+) who saved to start, operate, or expand a farm or business, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of population (aged 15+) who made or received a digital payment in the past year, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of population (aged 15+) who own a credit card, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of population (aged 15+) who own a debit card, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Proportion of population (aged 15+) who used a mobile money account in the past year, by sex (WB)</p>	<p>Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality in employment (SDG 5.1.1)</p> <p>Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and deliberative bodies of local government (SDG 5.5.1)</p> <p>Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy (SDG 8.b.1)</p> <p>Number of chairs of permanent committees (people aged 46+), by sex and focus of the committee, Lower Chamber or Unicameral (SDG 16.7.1)</p> <p>Ratification of ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) (MSG QI.1)</p> <p>Ratification of ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) (MSG QI.1)</p> <p>Women's share of government ministerial positions (MSG IV.1)</p> <p>Presence of a gender quota for parliament (reserved seats and legislated candidate quotas) (MSG QIV.1)</p> <p>Whether or not the law guarantees the same inheritance rights to women and girls (MSG QV.3)</p> <p>Law mandates equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value (WB)</p> <p>Law prohibits discrimination in employment based on gender (WB)</p> <p>The law grants spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage (WB)</p> <p>The law prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender (WB)</p> <p>Women, Business and the Law Indicator Scores, by indicator (WB)</p>
<b>Inequality of opportunities</b>		
<p>Proportion of women (aged 15+) in managerial positions and senior and middle management positions (SDG 5.5.2)</p> <p>Proportion of countries with migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, by policy domain (SDG 10.7.2)</p> <p>Labour force participation rate (people aged 15+), by sex (MSG I.3)</p> <p>Proportion of employed, by sex and status in self-employment (MSG I.4)</p> <p>Proportion of firms with female participation in ownership (WB)</p> <p>Share of business owners, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Share of directors, by sex (WB)</p> <p>Share of sole proprietors, by sex (WB)</p>		
<b>Inequality of outcomes</b>		
<p>Proportion of informal employment (people aged 15+), by sex and sector (SDG 8.3.1)</p> <p>Average hourly earnings (people aged 15+), by sex and selected occupations (SDG 8.5.1, ILOSTAT for PPP values)</p> <p>Proportion of population in employment, by sex, sector and subregion (WB)</p>		

**TABLE 4.**

**Contextual WEE indicators**

**Contextual indicators for WEE**

Proportion of employed population (aged 15+) living below the international poverty line, by sex and subregion (SDG 1.1.1)	Dependency ratio, by World Bank regional grouping (WB)
Proportion of population covered by at least one social protection benefit (SDG 1.3.1)	Labour force participation rate, by sex and subregion (WB)
Proportion of total government spending on health, education, and social protection (SDG 1.a.2)	Proportion of people (aged 15+) worried about not having enough money for old age (WB)
Gender parity index for ICT skills, by skill (SDG 4.5.1)	Proportion of population (aged 15+) who experienced and continue to face severe financial hardship due to COVID-19, by sex (WB)
Countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5.c.1)	Human Development Index, by sex and subregion (UNDP)
Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita, by subregion (SDG 8.1.1)	Population, by sex and age groups (UN Population Division)
Fixed broadband subscriptions, by subregion (SDG 17.6.1)	Projections for the dependency ratio, by type, subregion, and scenarios (UN Population Division)
Proportion of individuals using the Internet, by sex (SDG 17.8.1)	Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality (UN Women and UNDP)



# 2

## Transforming care systems



### KEY MESSAGES

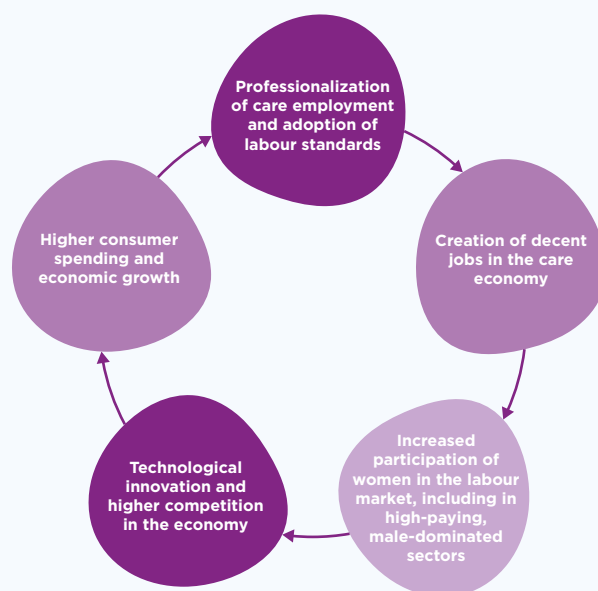
1. Care provision lays the foundations for the well-being of present and future generations and nourishes human capital formation. Women and girls are the primary providers of both unpaid and paid care services.

2. While in East Asia and the Pacific, demographic shifts may imply rising health-care and pension costs and increasing strain social services, challenges in South Asia may lie in creating enough jobs to support a growing workforce.

3. The demographic transition in the Asia-Pacific region poses both challenges and opportunities for the economy. It will have social and economic returns on investments in the care economy.

4. In 2021 in East Asia and Pacific, 28 per cent of women and 27 per cent of men reported being very worried about not having enough money for old age compared to 64 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men in South Asia.<sup>31</sup>

5. Economies that prioritize decent care work are catalysts for women's economic empowerment. They can stimulate job growth within the sector and beyond.



6. Recognizing the value of care work and the rights of care recipients and providers calls for adopting and ratifying existing relevant normative frameworks, including labour standards.

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7. There is a need to adopt a comprehensive, life-course and whole-of society approach in the design and implementation of evidence-informed care policies to dismantle the root causes of persistent gender gaps in the economy.

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8. Adverse social norms predominantly relegate women and girls to restrictive reproductive and care giving roles, negatively affecting their participation to employment and opportunities for income-generating activities. There is need to enable women's ability to make decisions about their own lives.

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9. Women's and girls' unpaid care work, including supervising care dependents, is a severe constraint on time they can allocate to other important life spheres, such as participation in employment. The unequal distribution of care work significantly contributes to women's time poverty.

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10. Empowering all individuals, especially women and girls, to make informed reproductive health decisions can enhance social norm change in the care economy.

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11. Without adequate paternity leave, traditional gender roles are reinforced, maintaining disparities in career advancements and earnings between women and men.

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12. In 2022, in South Asia 43 per cent of young women were not in education, employment or training compared to 11 per cent of young men. This is likely due to discriminatory social norms on unpaid care work.

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13. In the Asia and Pacific region, 37 per cent of women in employment work part-time compared to 17 percent of men.<sup>32</sup>

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14. Single women may be more dependent on care employment for economic survival compared to men, who may have broader employment opportunities outside the care economy.

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15. Caregiving, though skill-intensive, is often undervalued and not recognized as professional experience. Women gain significant skills in caregiving roles (e.g. medical care, crisis management, logistical coordination), but these are rarely acknowledged or compensated in ways that reflect their economic value.

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16. Occupational segregation is at play in the highly feminized care economy, with more women nurses than men nurses.

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17. In Asia and the Pacific, 63 per cent of women care workers are in informal employment compared to 52 per cent of men care workers.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.1 Why it matters

Care provision entails meeting the physical, social and emotional needs of care-dependent groups, such as children, frail older people and people with disabilities. This involves dedicating time to one-on-one relational activities between the caregiver and the care-dependent individual, such as breastfeeding an infant, assisting a child with schoolwork, or offering emotional support to an adult facing illness. These are activities commonly known as direct care. Care-related economically productive activities are, however, wide-ranging and include indirect services that do not entail person-to-person engagement but are nevertheless indispensable components of care provisioning. Indirect care includes common domestic tasks—for example, cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping and household repairs and maintenance. In addition, in low-income countries, a significant component of care work may also include the unpaid production of goods, such as fetching water and collecting firewood for the final consumption of the household and family members, with important implications for environmental conservation.<sup>34</sup>

All people at different stages of life need and provide care services in varying degrees and the age structure of economies significantly influences the demand for the type of such services, with individuals in younger (children aged 18 years and below) and older age groups (elderly aged 65 years and above) more likely to be care-dependents. In 2023, women and girls comprised 49 per cent of the total population in the Asia-Pacific region, with 29 per cent aged 19 years and below, and 12 per cent 65 years and above. In contrast, for the slightly more predominant male population, the care dependent cohorts consisted of 31 per cent of men and boys aged 19 years old and below, and 9 per cent aged 65 years and above (figure 8).

Trends in the dependency ratio—a demographic indicator of care dependents (children and older people) to the total working-age population (individuals aged 15–64 years)—illustrate different population dynamics at the subregional level with implications for economic planning and social policy (figure 9). From 2000 to 2010, East-Asia and the Pacific experienced a gradual decrease in the dependency ratio reaching a low of 42. This suggests that, at that time, the working-age population supported 42 dependents per 100 workers, indicating a favourable balance between those who were economically active and those who were dependent. Indeed, demographic dividends played a key role in enabling higher economic performance in East Asia.<sup>35</sup> Thus, economic growth was sustained by a demographic structure where the working-age population was larger relative to the care dependent population. In China,

Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, rapid economic growth was specifically associated with a favourable demographic structure. Since 2010, demographic trends in East Asia and the Pacific have reversed, and the dependency ratio has gradually increased to 47 per 100 by 2022, as the proportion of care dependents grew relative to the working-age population. South Asia has seen a decrease in the dependency ratio, with a growing proportion of the working-age populations compared to care dependents. This could potentially lead to a demographic dividend, creating an opportunity for significant economic growth if the labour market is able to absorb and effectively utilize the growing workforce.

Population projections for the Asia-Pacific region anticipate an important demographic shift with significant implications for societies and economies in the region (figure 10). The low fertility rates observed in several countries coupled with low mortality rates have raised questions—especially in fast-ageing societies, such as in Eastern Asia—about who will provide long-term care for older people, a traditional role of women and girls within families. In other contexts, such as Southern Asia, unlocking women's time constrains through increased availability of care services is needed to reap the potential benefits of changing demographic structures. Migration, including migrant care workers, will have a key role in potentially meeting increasing care demands associated with higher dependency ratios.

Demographic changes are likely to have an impact on various economic sectors in the future.<sup>36</sup> Ageing populations are likely to put pressure on fiscal systems with rising demands for costly care services, such as long-term care. This, along with decreasing working-age population and tax revenues, may jeopardize progress in social services provision and increase unpaid care work demands on women and girls. Implications for SDG 5 are unclear as care models that rely exclusively or primarily on families will be affected by the decline of intergenerational co-residence in both developed and developing countries.<sup>37</sup> The combination of declining fertility rates and longer life expectancy for women is expected to further intensify the demand for care for older people, especially older women. The absence of spousal support in meeting the caregiving needs of older women, as well as potential financial constraints faced by women due to the exclusion of informal workers from pension benefits, could further heighten the demand for care for older people in the region (figure 11). At the subregional level, in South Asia, 7 per cent of women saved for old age compared to 10 per cent of men, while in East Asia and the Pacific, 34 per cent of women saved for old age compared to 31 per cent of men.<sup>38</sup>

## BOX 2:

### Care matters for GDP and beyond

Meeting care needs involves both paid and unpaid forms of care work. The economic significance of unpaid care work lies in the productive nature of the services it provides. Although indicators of economic progress, such as GDP, do not account for it due to constraints in the identification of market wages, unpaid forms of care work could be provided in the public sector, not-for-profit sector (including voluntary and community provision), through market-based care arrangements, or a combination of these.<sup>a</sup> The reliance of economies and societies on the household sector, and more specifically on women's unpaid care work to maintain a productive work force, advance human capabilities and keep populations healthy is not met with equivalent recognition, investment and redistribution of responsibility between states, markets and households. This is particularly manifest during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and in contexts lacking quality and affordable care services.

A dependence on women's unpaid care work rooted in discriminatory social norms combined with limited access to affordable and quality care contributes to women's economic exclusion and persistent gender gaps in employment.<sup>b</sup> It acts as a structural barrier to participation in other economic activities, such as entrepreneurship, and in other life spheres, such as health and education, thus limiting women's human potential in society and the economy. Discriminatory social norms governing gendered allocation of time and tasks are evident in economic structures with women and girls constituting the predominant workforce in the care economy. When remunerated, care work often takes place in the informal economy and under poor working conditions with low wages and without social protection across women's lifetime.<sup>c</sup>

The [United Nations policy paper on Transforming Care Systems](#) highlights that the current social structure of caring displays significant disparities in status and power. It frequently exploits women and girls from ethnic and racial minority groups, migrant women and women in informal employment. This situation is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and structural inequality, impacting the rights and well-being of those involved in providing and receiving care. The issue lies not in the act of caregiving itself, but in how paid and unpaid care is valued and structured within households, communities, institutions and society as a whole.

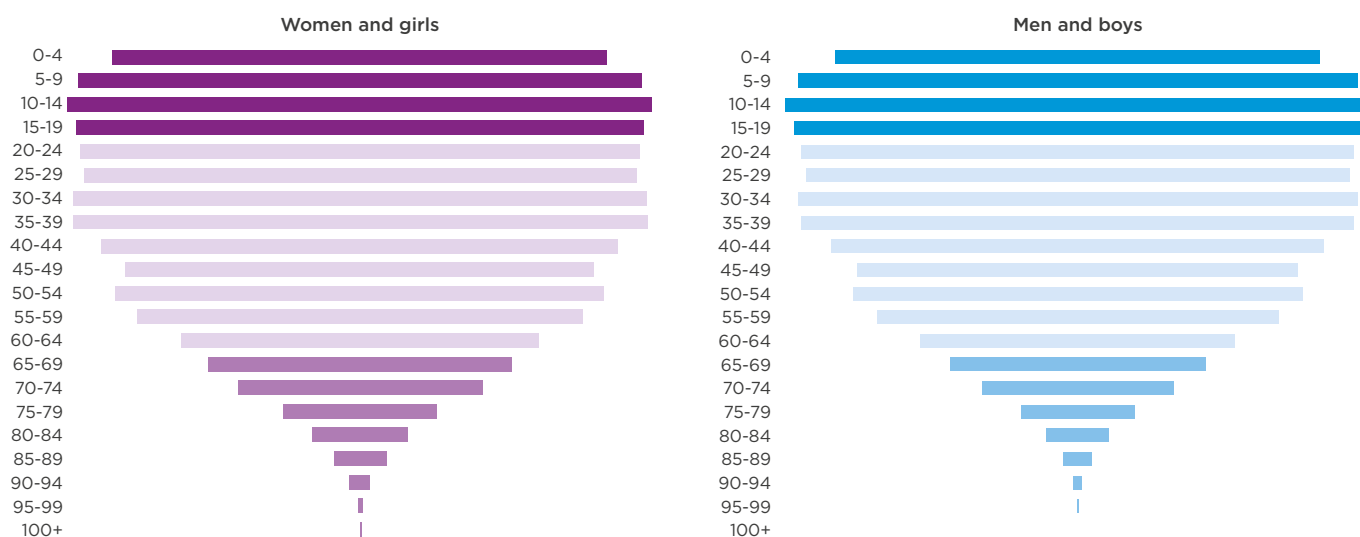
In the future, the provision of care services is expected to remain a significant source of employment, particularly for women. Care work is vital for a functional economy, the well-being of humanity and the planet. It plays a crucial role in developing the future workforce, while ensuring the overall health, education and well-being of the current workforce and vulnerable groups. Select care occupations outside the health sector are less likely to be automated and key in supporting a green transition. Evidence shows that investment in the care sector could create almost three times as many jobs as the same investment in construction, and it would produce 30 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>d</sup>

#### Notes:

- a. S. Razavi (2007). The political and social economy of care in a development context. Conceptual issues, research questions and policy options. UNRISD.
- a. ILO (2023). The benefits of investing in transformative childcare policy packages towards gender equality and social justice.
- a. ILO (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work.
- a. J. De Henau (2022). Costs and benefits of investing in transformative care policy packages: A macrosimulation study in 82 countries. ILO Working Paper 55.

**FIGURE 8.**

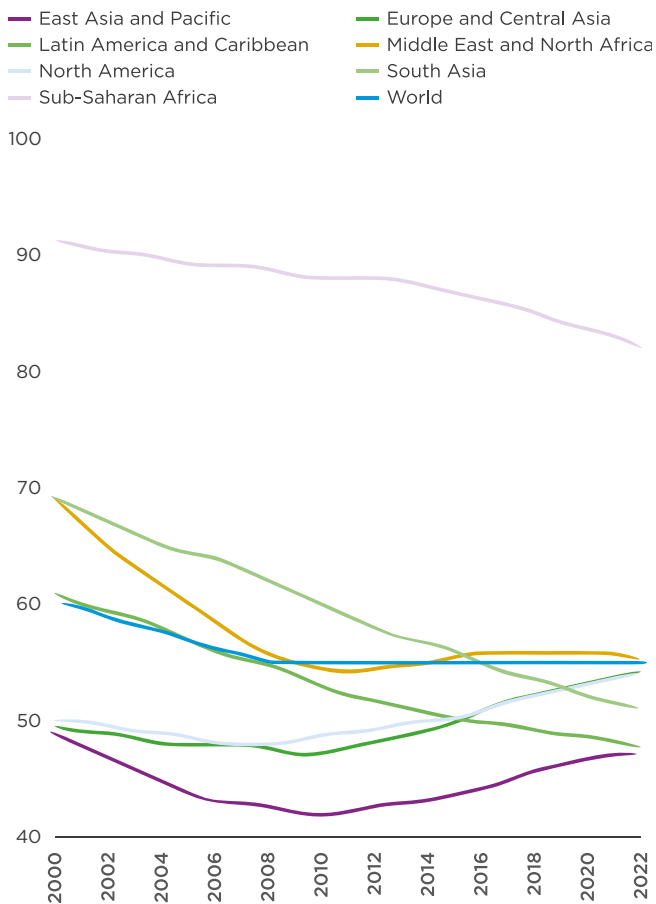
### Population of the Asia-Pacific region, by sex and age groups (2023)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division Data Portal.

**FIGURE 9.**

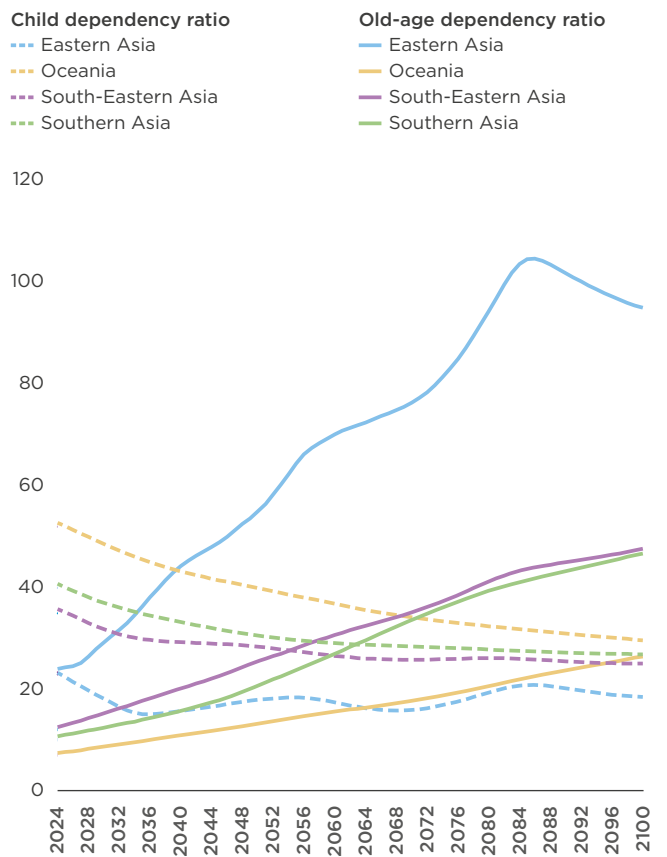
**Dependency ratio, by World Bank regional grouping**



Source: World Bank Data Portal.

**FIGURE 10.**

**Projections for the dependency ratio, by type and subregion**

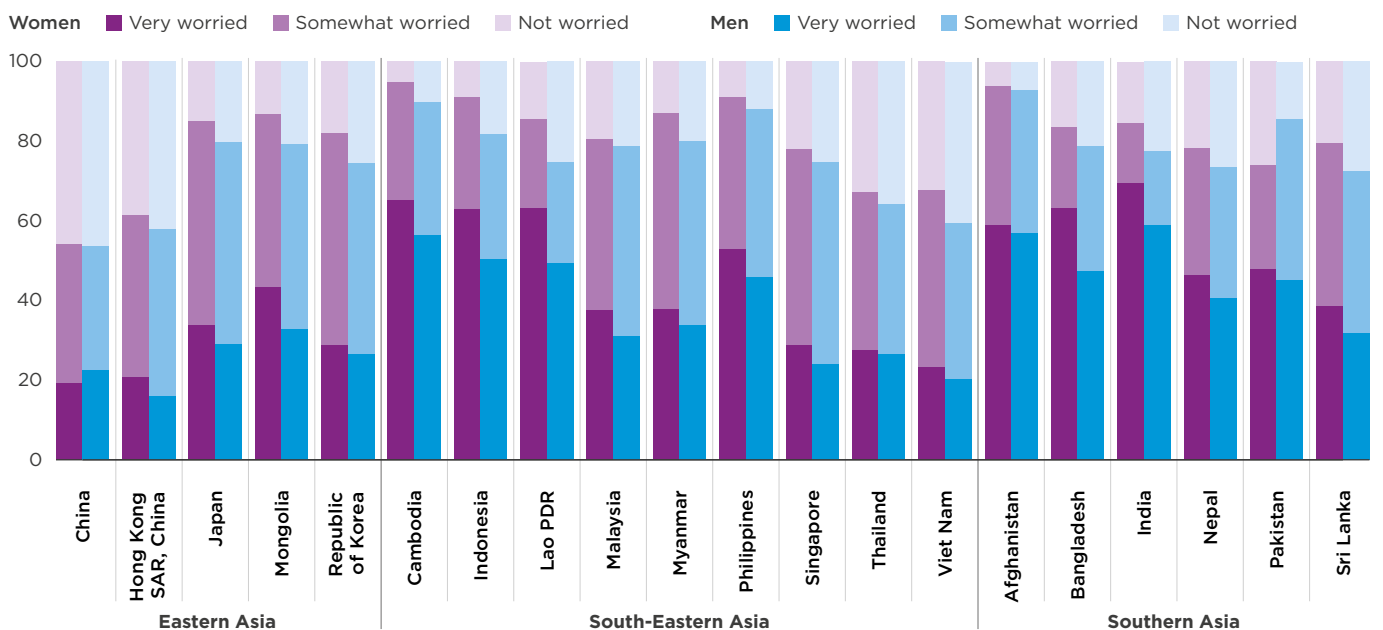


Note: The graph depicts the medium scenario projection. For further information, see [Definition of Projection Scenarios](#).

Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects 2024.

**FIGURE 11.**

**Proportion of people (aged 15+) worried about not having enough money for old age, latest year (percentage)**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

## 2.2 Transforming care systems to accelerate gender equality

Population shifts offer numerous opportunities for making economies equitable and inclusive. As highlighted in the UN Women Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy, transforming care systems is a key GEA. In ageing societies, addressing the increasing demand for care through employment creation can have positive effects on economic growth and societal well-being. This is especially important in contexts with high unemployment rates. Expanding care services through job creation, including for migrant care workers, has the potential to drive technological innovations in care delivery and create new business opportunities, including for digitally enabled care enterprises.<sup>39</sup> Including migrant care workers in these job creation opportunities can enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives and promote inclusive economic growth as part of progress towards the SDG targets on decent work and reduced inequalities. Investing in the care economy, which is a labour-intensive sector with a diverse occupational landscape, can unlock constraints on women’s participation in the labour market beyond the care economy itself. Evidence shows that at the country level, 70–90 per cent of jobs created by investing in care infrastructure will benefit women.<sup>40</sup> This, in turn, can lead to higher demand for goods and services in the overall economy through increased consumer spending, which is a key driver of economic growth.

Employment creation for women and men in the care sector can help to address gender disparities in care responsibilities by alleviating time constraints faced mostly by women and girls.<sup>41</sup> Easing those time constraints can expand the opportunities of women and girls not just for employment, but also for training, skill development, upskilling and career advancement in all sectors. When more women participate in the labour market, it introduces higher competition, fosters innovation, improves efficiency and leads to optimal allocation of resources in the economy, resulting in increased

productivity.<sup>42</sup> In 2022, WEF projected that investing in social jobs, including those in the paid care sector, could yield triple rewards in terms of GDP returns, well-paid jobs created and social mobility.<sup>43</sup> To reap these benefits, however, interventions need to be designed through comprehensive gender-transformative approaches that stimulate women’s employment in growth-oriented sectors, such as the digital and green economy (see section 3 and 4, respectively). Transforming care systems to catalyse socioeconomic development requires recognizing and valuing care work, expanding social protection coverage for care workers and investing in professionalizing care employment through skills development, upskilling and certification programmes.

Transforming care systems and improving working conditions can not only enhance the quality of care services but also raise the status and attractiveness of care jobs for both women and men, thus promoting social norms change towards the redistribution of care work within the household as well as between the state, the market and the not-for-profit sector. By expanding access to affordable, high-quality care services and realizing decent care work, the care economy can support societies and economies to navigate changes in the demographic structure and accelerate progress towards all SDGs. For example, closing existing care policy gaps and expanding care services with decent care work could create almost 300 million jobs by 2035, thereby contributing to reducing gender inequalities in employment and yielding significant economic and social returns.<sup>44</sup> Within this process, the professionalization of care jobs must be gender-responsive, taking into consideration the different needs of women and girls as well as men and boys. For example, professionalizing care jobs of women migrant workers will only result in gender-transformative outcomes if affordable and quality care services are available for their dependents. Similarly, investments in early childhood education will not automatically translate in women’s labour market participation if preschool hours are limited.

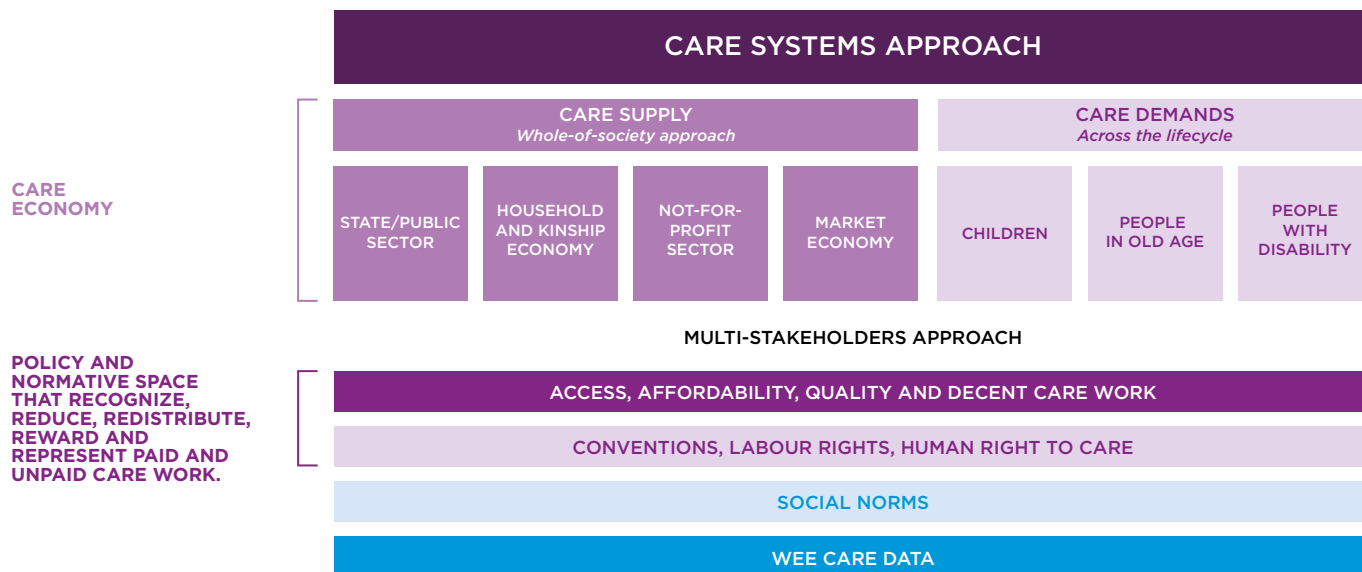
### INFOGRAPHIC 1

#### Developments for the recognition of care work in the international framework for cooperation



**FIGURE 12.**

Visual representation of a comprehensive care systems approach



Source: Authors' elaboration based on United Nations (2024). [Transforming Care Systems in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda](#).

The normative framework for international cooperation and development increasingly recognizes care as a public good and calls for the realization of the human right to care and increased investment in the care economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased attention to the need to create robust, resilient, gender-responsive, disability-inclusive and age-sensitive care support systems with full respect for human rights and with a view to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work as well as reward paid care work and ensure representation and meaningful participation of care workers. It is vital to prioritize decent care work to create an enabling environment that promotes gender equality and social justice, ultimately benefiting everyone.

Supporting the development of policies and programmes to recognize, reduce, redistribute unpaid care work and represent and reward paid caregivers requires a comprehensive care systems approach. This approach must consider not only the supply of and demand for care services in the economy, but also those discriminatory social norms that translate assigned reproductive roles into a gendered labour market as well as normative frameworks and labour standards that affect women's lifecycle.<sup>45</sup> Addressing increasing care demands and decent care work deficits requires innovative policies, such as time-saving care infrastructure, and investment in care-responsive workplaces and social protection systems that recognize and reward care work adequately.

Ultimately, the right to care that every individual possesses must be prioritized in the development process and

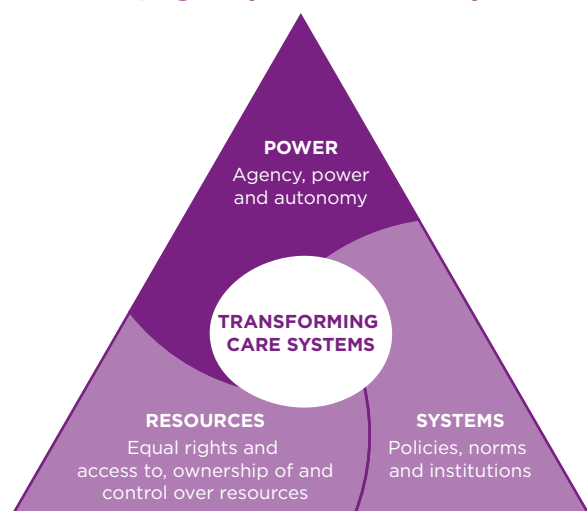
commitments toward economic justice and rights for all must be increased to promote and effectively protect the human rights of women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons. The integration of comprehensive and equitable care-related policies can greatly enhance economic outcomes. It is essential for policymakers to take these aspects into account in legislative frameworks to fully leverage the potential of the care economy. This approach not only advances economic development but also fosters a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across all segments of society by dismantling critical challenges for WEE, such as the lack of power, unequal economic rights and gender-blind systems and institutions. A gender-responsive approach to transform care systems recognizes the need for evidence-informed decision-making in the care economy (figure 12). Recognizing and valuing care work in official statistics can trigger decisive policy actions. This should, however, be complemented by considerations on how structural drivers of gender inequality translate into limited opportunities and suboptimal outcomes in the economy and society.

### 2.3 Systemic inequalities in the care economy

The extent to which policies and programmes in the care economy are gender-transformative hinges on their capacity to address critical elements of economic empowerment simultaneously.<sup>46</sup> Empowering women in the care economy calls for: (i) strengthening their capacity to make autonomous decisions about their reproductive lives; (ii)

ensuring equal rights and granting women control over resources, such as time; and (iii) altering the social, economic and institutional contexts in which they operate.

### 2.3.1 Power, agency and autonomy



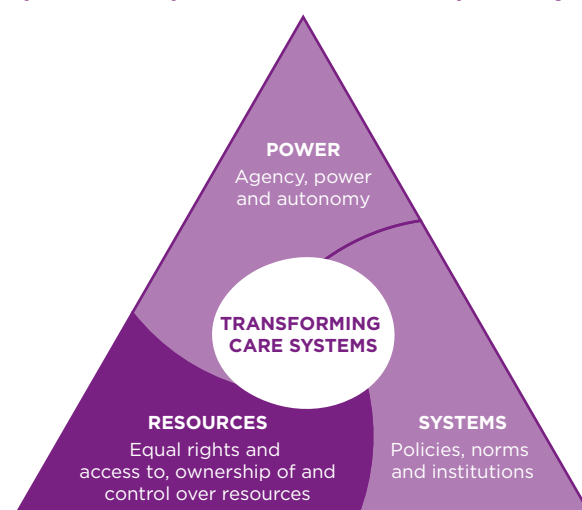
Discriminatory social norms drive persistent gender inequalities in the world of work and beyond. These norms create a vicious cycle of disparity, keeping women economically dependent and marginalized. Societal expectations around family formation reinforce restrictive roles for women and girls and have a negative effect on their health, education and economic opportunities. As a result, gender biases on reproductive responsibilities continue to persist over time.

In the Asia-Pacific region, significant strides have been made in regulatory initiatives to establish a legally mandated minimum age for marriage. In countries with gender data, progress is noted in enacting laws stipulating that both women and men must be at least 18 years of age to marry without parental consent.<sup>47</sup> Despite this progress, customary laws and other factors, such as marriage with parental consent, allow child marriage to persist in the Asia-Pacific region (figure 13). Early marriage not only hampers opportunities for education, but often force girls into early domestic roles.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development have consistently emphasized the importance of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Lacking access to essential services, such as family planning, deprives women of the ability to decide if, when and how many children to have. This can intensify women’s caregiving responsibilities and worsen the gender imbalance in the

distribution of care work. In the Asia-Pacific region, women’s autonomy in decision-making over reproductive rights shows a lack of empowerment in reproductive health in most countries in the region (figure 14). Out of 28 countries with available data, only one has an estimate above 91 per cent for use of modern contraceptive methods among women who wish to prevent pregnancy, while in nine countries, more than 75 per cent of women use modern contraceptive methods. On the contrary, in 10 countries, the prevalence is significantly lower, with estimates below 50 per cent, signalling the inability to exert reproductive rights (not shown). Recent trends indicate that demographic changes paired with lower fertility rates might increase pressures on women and girls in the exercise of their reproductive health rights.<sup>48</sup>

### 2.3.2 Unequal resources: Unpaid care provision and time poverty



Discriminatory social norms governing family formation coupled with women’s lack of control over decisions concerning fertility shape the allocation of reproductive and domestic tasks as women’s duties. In the Asia-Pacific region, women and girls deliver the greater portion of care services in an unremunerated form of household work. Available time-use data for the region, while scarce, illustrates that gender gaps are acute with women at a disadvantage in all selected countries and with indirect care provision accounting for the greatest time spent providing unpaid care services (figure 15).

Data for SDG indicator 5.4.1 on the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic work reveal gender gaps that range from 20 per cent of time spent in a day by women and 2 per cent by men in Pakistan, to 14 per cent by women and 10 per cent by men in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (figure 15). When this time is added to time spent



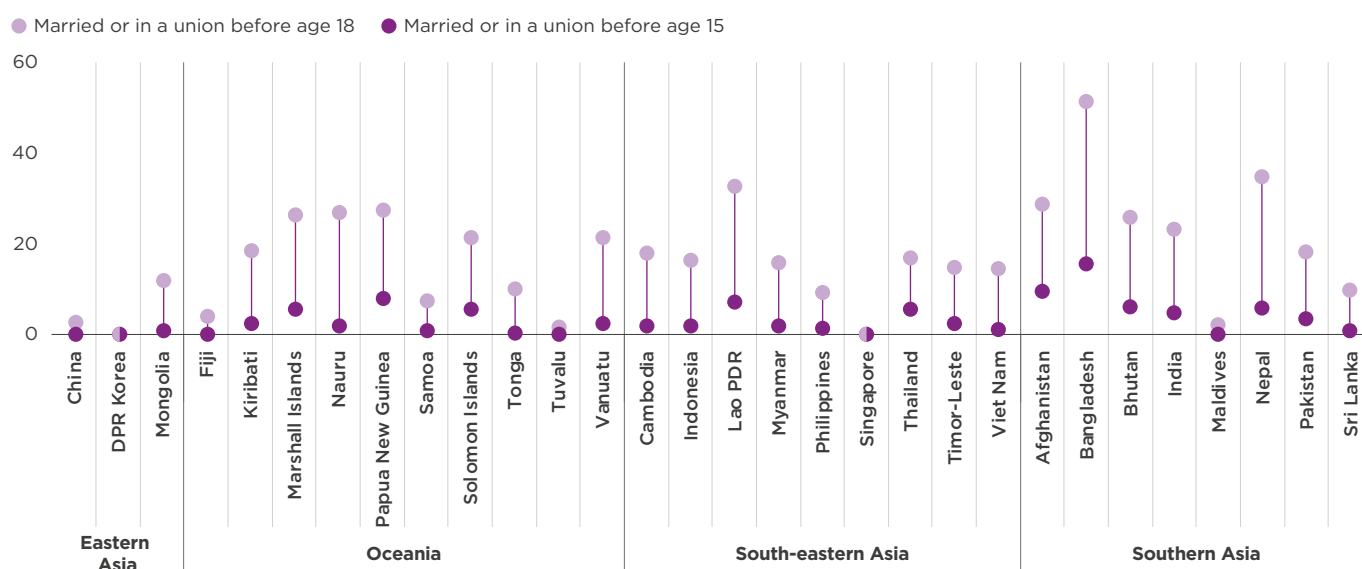
in employment and unpaid production of goods (e.g. fetching water for household final consumption) the total workload of women and girls is higher than men and boys (figure 16).

The demand for care, however, extends beyond mere involvement in activities. In certain contexts, being a guardian – whether mandated by law or voluntarily assumed – underscore the guardian’s duty towards a dependent, such as a minor child. This duty entails the inability to leave a dependent unsupervised without arranging for another individual to assume responsibility for the dependent’s welfare and safety. To date, most available indicators to monitor progress toward shared family responsibilities do not account for on-call time associated with unpaid care provision, thus

underestimating the constraints on women’s and girls’ opportunities. Providing supervisory care imposes constraints on the use of time that are particularly pronounced where care services are lacking and social norms regarding parental roles shape the unequal allocation of time among caregivers.

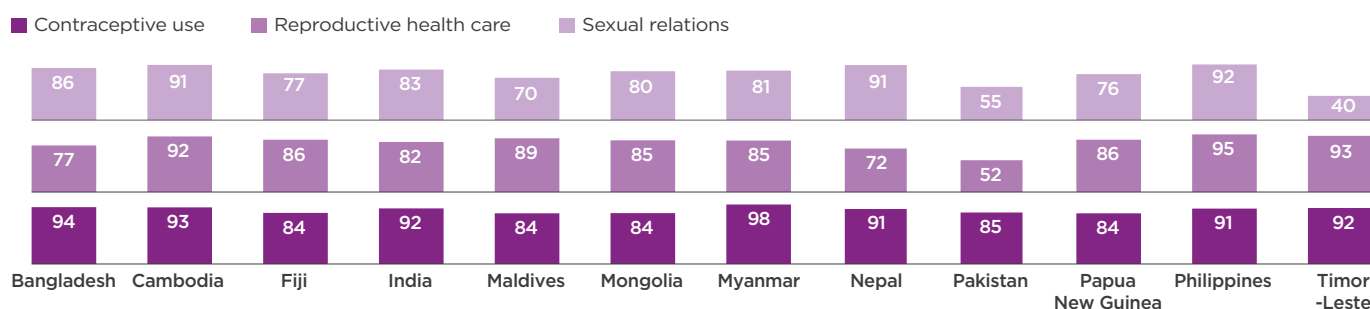
Systematic barriers to WEE start in early life. Accounting for the provision of unpaid domestic services to the economic activities of children amplifies gender disparities, even in countries with a higher prevalence of boys engaged in economic activities, such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Kiribati, Mongolia, Pakistan, Samoa and Tonga. In other countries, girls’ unpaid contribution to the household welfare results in a higher prevalence of engagement in economic activities compared to boys (figure 17).

**FIGURE 13.** Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and 18 years, latest year (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 14.** Proportion of women (aged 15–49) who make their own informed decisions regarding contraceptive use, reproductive health care and sexual relations, latest year (percentage)

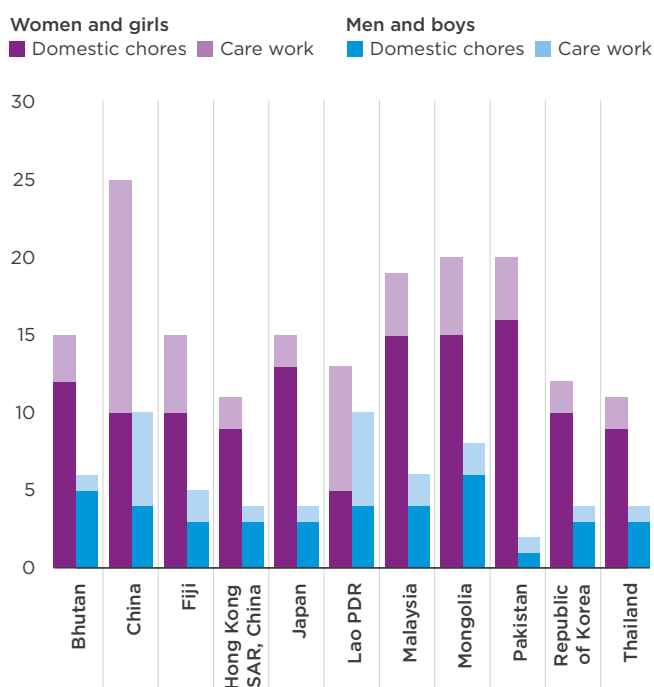


Note: Only women who provide a “yes” answer to all three components are considered to make their own decisions regarding sexual and reproductive health. A union involves a man and a woman regularly cohabiting in a marriage-like relationship.

Source: SDG Global database.

**FIGURE 15.**

**Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex and type, latest year (percentage)**

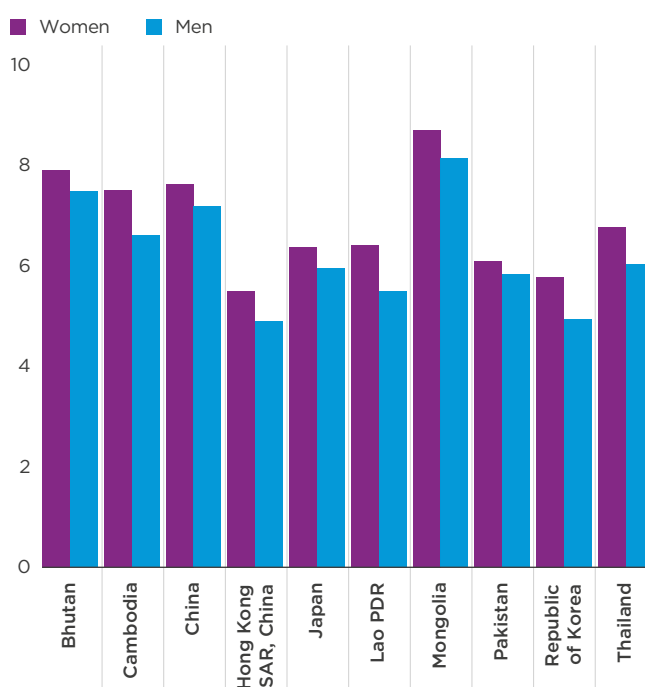


**Note:** Data refer to people aged 15+ for Bhutan; China; Fiji; Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), China; Japan; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Mongolia; and Republic of Korea. Data for Malaysia refer to people aged 15–64 years. Data for Pakistan refer to people aged 10+. Data for Thailand refer to people aged 6+.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 16.**

**Average number of hours spent on total work (paid and unpaid), by sex, latest year (hours per day)**

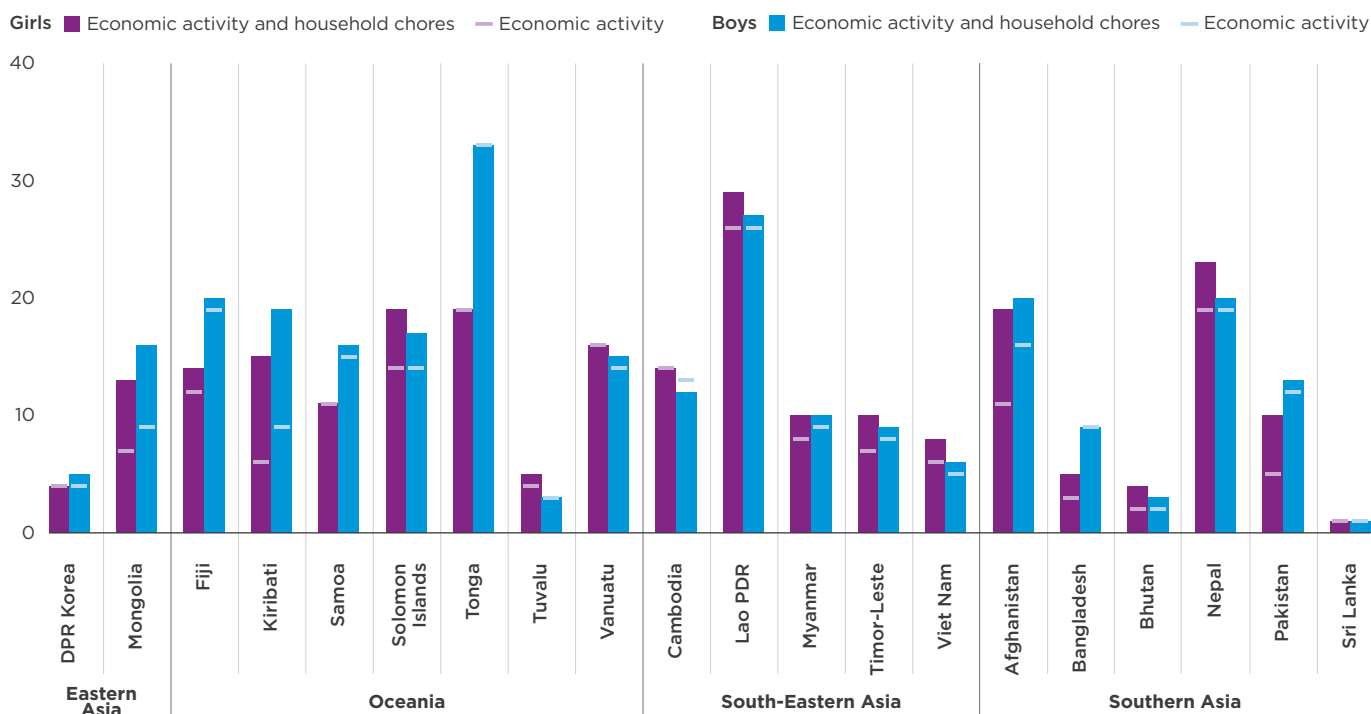


**Note:** Data refer to people aged 10+ for Japan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Pakistan and Republic of Korea. Data refer to people aged 15+ for Bhutan; China; Hong Kong SAR, China. Data for Mongolia refer to people aged 12+. Data for Thailand refer to people aged 6+. Data for Cambodia refer to people aged 45–64 years.

**Source:** UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 17.**

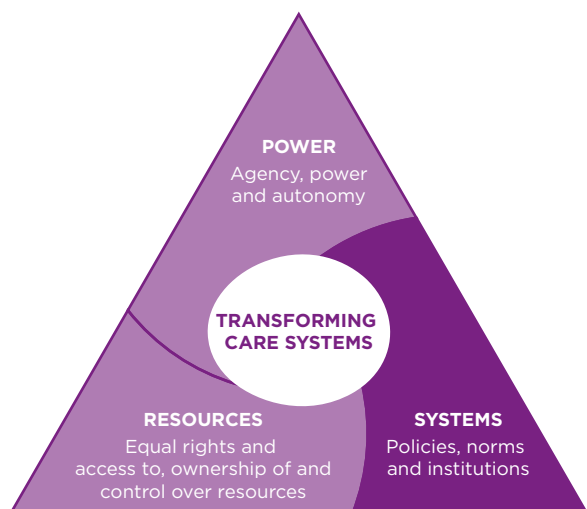
**Proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores, by sex, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** Children refer to age 5–17 years. For Bhutan, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, children refer to age 5–14 years. For Pakistan, children refer to age 10–17 years. For Cambodia, the proportion of children engaged in economic activity refers to 2017, while the proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores refers to 2012.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

### 2.3.3 Unequal systems: Policies and institutions

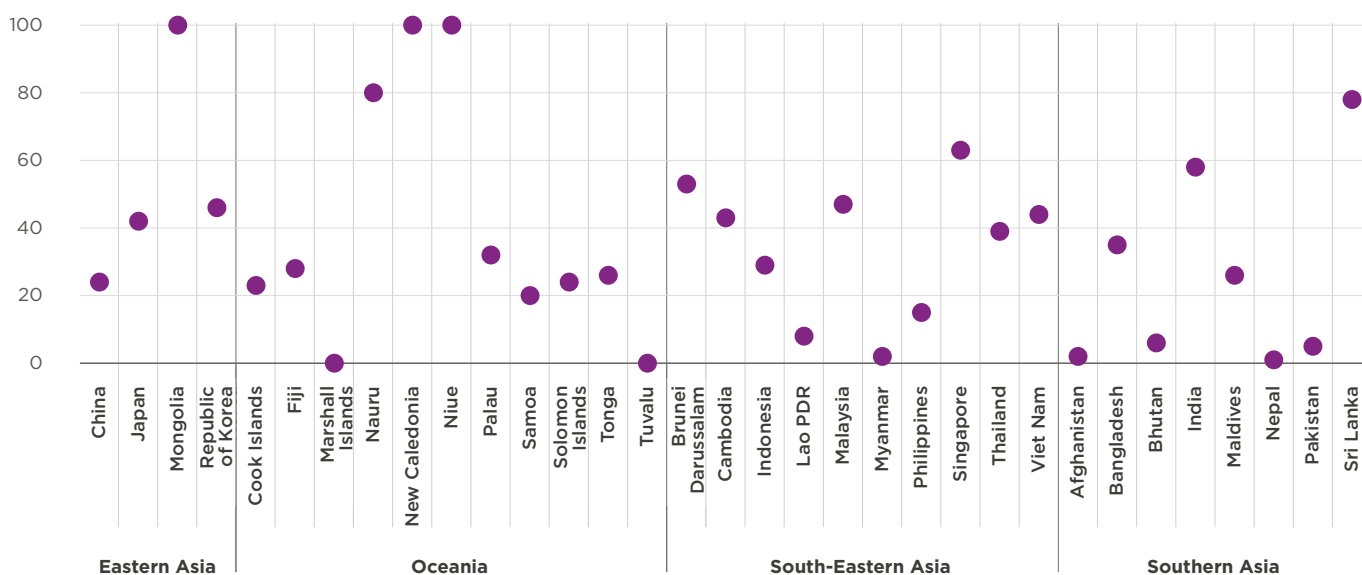


Addressing gender discrimination in the economy calls for multifaceted interventions that reflect a comprehensive and intergenerational approach in the design and implementation of care policies. Recalibrating the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work to enhance women’s agency, their ability to participate in the labour market and enjoy economic opportunities as well as entrepreneurial activities, may, for instance, demand mixed policy interventions. In certain contexts, comprehensive care system interventions may simultaneously aim at expanding access to quality and affordable care services, enhancing care-supporting workplaces and physical infrastructure, as well as expanding social protection benefits, to include, for instance, those who are the main unpaid caregiver of a

person with disabilities. This may include extending social protection benefits to mothers of newborns. With some exceptions, in most countries with available data the share of mothers covered by social protection schemes does not exceed 40 per cent (figure 18).

The care economy, encompassing the provision of services such as health care, childcare and education, is a fundamental factor in maintaining economic stability, fostering growth and building resilience. By closing legislative loopholes and transforming social norms that impede access and equality in care services, significant economic potential can be unlocked within and beyond the care economy. The Asia-Pacific region has recorded substantial advancements in the legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality in marriage and family and the overarching legal framework and public life.<sup>49</sup> An assessment of countries in the region found several countries with high scores. For instance, Fiji and India have both attained a score of 100 for comprehensive legal safeguards and policies that promote gender equality in marriage and family life. Nevertheless, disparities persist, as evidenced by lower scores in the Philippines and Solomon Islands. Progress in overarching legal frameworks for gender equality exhibits a wider variability with Mongolia and the Republic of Korea exemplifying solid frameworks that support gender equality in public life and across legal domains. These signal the presence of effective legal instruments that facilitate women’s participation in public and political spheres, as well as protect against gender-based discrimination (figure 19).

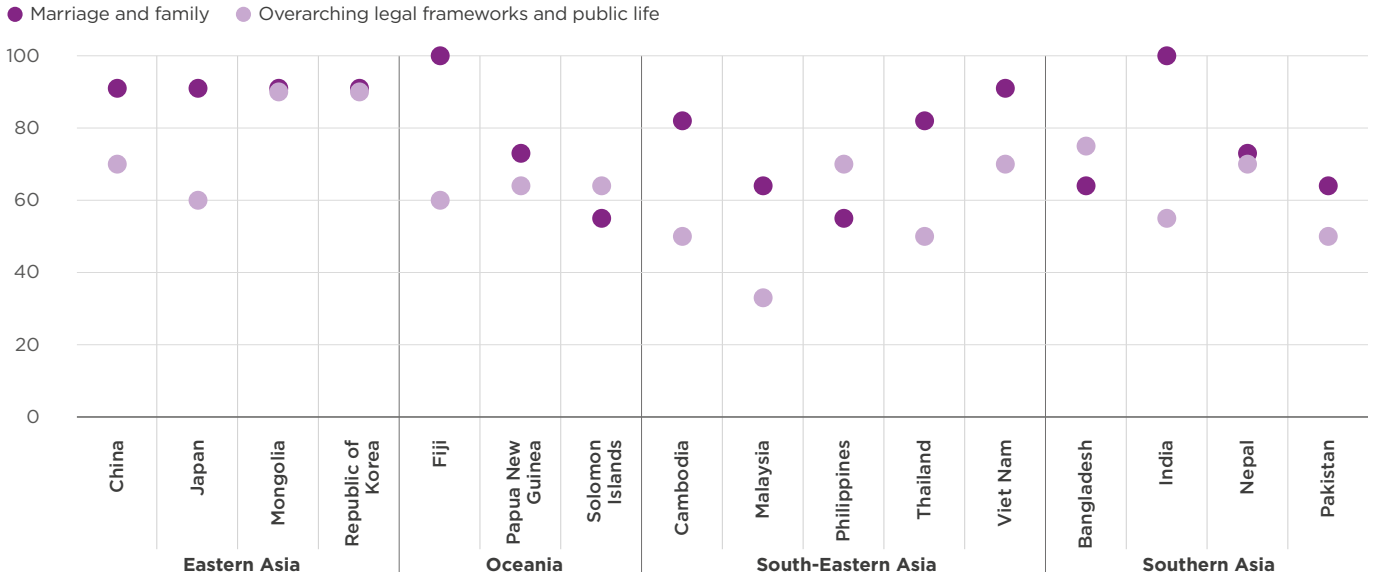
**FIGURE 18.** Proportion of mothers with newborns receiving maternity cash benefit, latest year (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 19.**

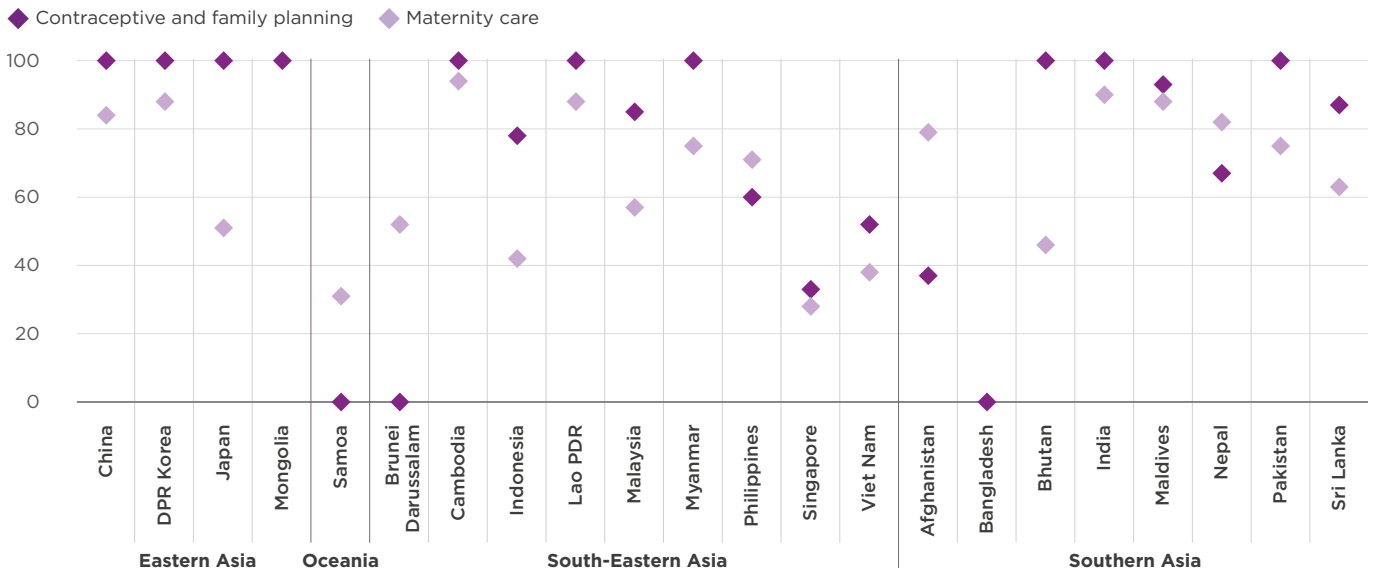
**Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality, latest year**



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 100 indicating adherence to best practices across all questions.  
Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 20.**

**Extent to which countries have laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men to contraceptive and family planning and maternity care, latest year (percentage)**



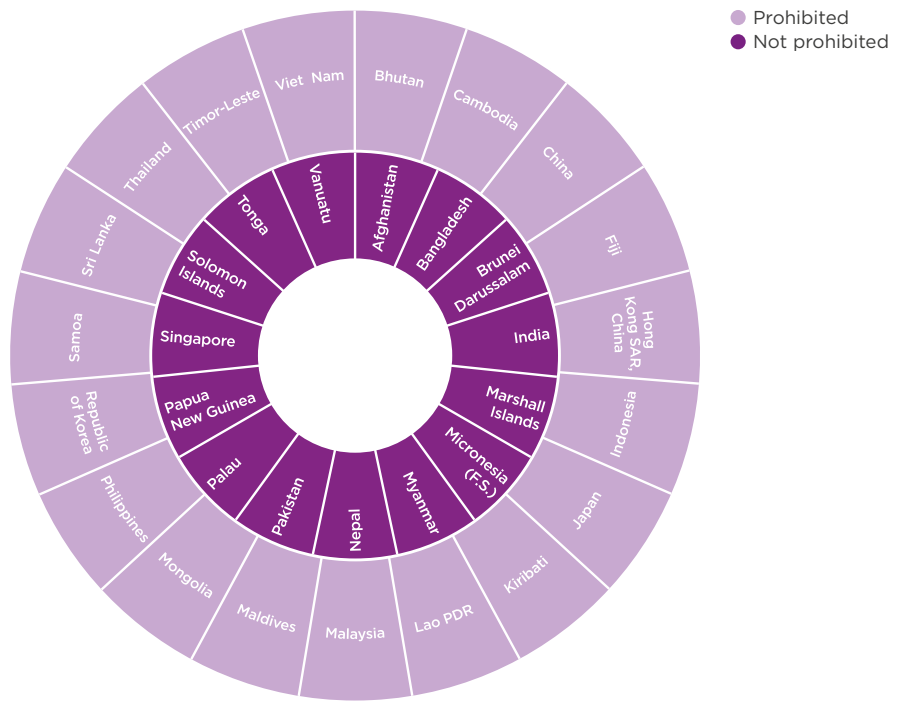
Source: SDG Global Database.

Improving access to health-care services through legislation that guarantees equal access to sexual and reproductive health care is essential to protect women’s rights and central in all efforts to transform the care economy. In the Asia-Pacific region, there are significant disparities in the existence of laws that provide access to contraceptive and family planning services. For example, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, India, Japan, Mongolia and Pakistan have robust legal frameworks ensuring reproductive

rights. In stark contrast, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam and Samoa completely lack such regulations, highlighting gaps in legal frameworks that could impede progress towards health and gender equality goals (figure 20). Inadequate legal coverage for maternity care remains evident in Bhutan, Singapore, Samoa, Viet Nam and Indonesia. Such gaps can lead to poorer health outcomes for mothers and children and wider gender disparities in health care access with repercussion on overall demand for care services.

**FIGURE 21.**

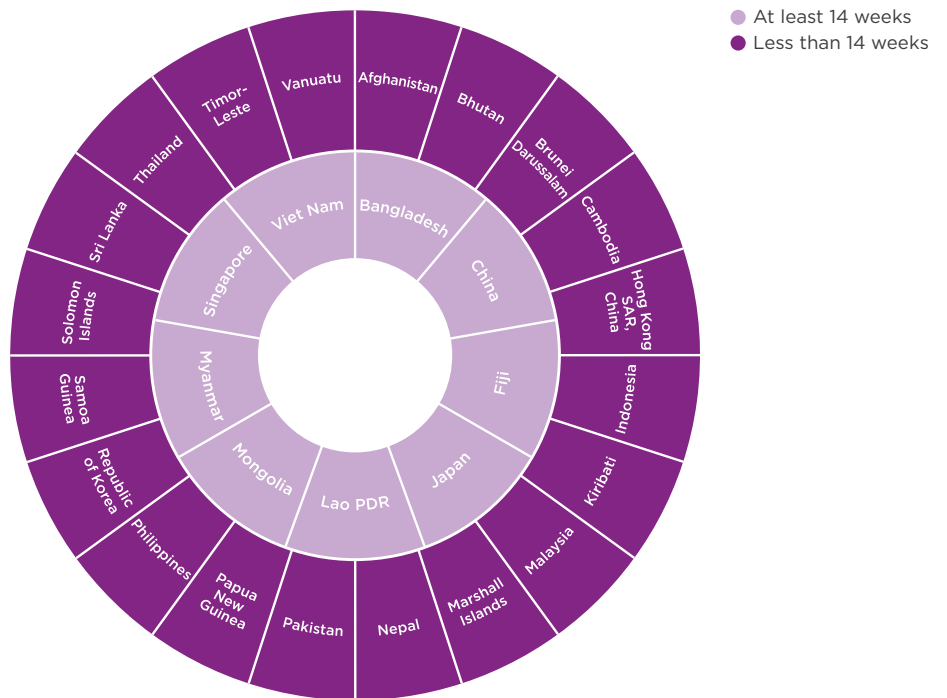
Dismissal of pregnant workers is prohibited, latest year



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 22.**

Length of maternity leave, latest year



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

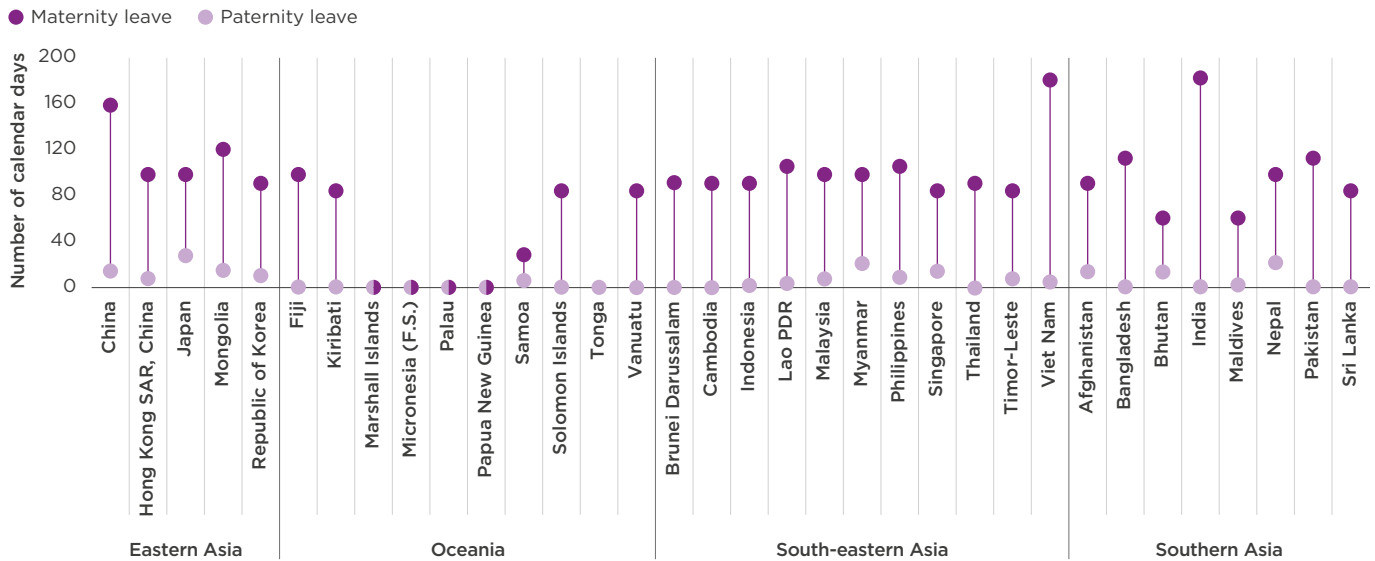
Enhanced legal frameworks that promote and enforce gender equality in the workplace, encompassing policies on both maternity and paternity leave, are foundational for comprehensive care systems. This not only upholds the economic empowerment of women and girls but also bolsters economic productivity by expanding the workforce. Notably, **economies that offer extended paid parental leave have higher rates of women’s labour force participation, which aligns with higher GDP growth rates.**<sup>50</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, a considerable number of countries (19) have established legal frameworks that prohibit the termination of employment for pregnant workers.

This legal protection guarantees job security for pregnant workers during a crucial period in their lives, safeguarding their economic stability and mitigating workplace discrimination. Nevertheless, 15 countries lack such legal protections, which is likely to lead to a lower labour force participation rate among women and reduced financial stability in accessing sufficient prenatal and postnatal care, thereby impacting overall economic progress and stability (figure 21).

In the Asia-Pacific region, the length of paid parental leave provides an insightful overview of the disparities and

**FIGURE 23.**

**Length of paid parental leave, by sex, latest year (calendar days)**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

allocations in paid parental leave for mothers and fathers (figure 22 and figure 23). The duration of paid maternity leave differs greatly among countries in the region. India and Viet Nam offer the longest durations at 182 and 180 days, respectively. Paid paternity leave is significantly shorter in comparison to maternity leave in all select countries with Japan showing the longest paternity leave at 28 days. Differences in maternity and paternity leave reflect and perpetuate discriminatory norms that give responsibility for child-rearing responsibilities primarily to mothers and increase the challenge of fostering strong bonds between a child and both parents. **The gender gap emphasizes the need for policy advocacy to promote a more equitable distribution of parental responsibilities and sustained participation of women in the workforce.** Moreover, there is a disconnect between legislation on the one hand and norms on the other hand, with a significant proportion of employees not having access to parental leave (figure 24).

Promoting the implementation of policies that facilitate investments in childcare facilities and parental leave legislation can yield significant social and economic benefits.<sup>51</sup> These encompass improved child health and education outcomes, enhanced participation of women in the labour force and improved readiness of the future workforce—all of which are crucial elements for fostering sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Macrosimulations show that funding high-quality universal care provision is an investment in wider systems, including social infrastructure, with long-term and broader benefits beyond the

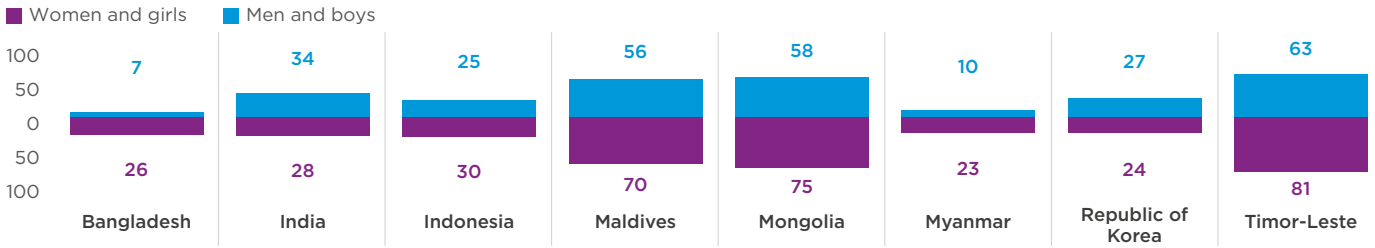
direct users of care services. Together with increased provision of paid care leave, such investment has gender-equalizing effects on employment and caring roles.

Higher wage compensation during maternity leave can enhance workforce retention rates among women following childbirth, thereby promoting gender equality in the workplace. Moreover, factoring in periods of childcare when calculating pension benefits can significantly impact long-term financial security, ensuring that taking time off for family obligations does not lead to disadvantages later in life. In the region, most countries secure the payment of at least 66.6 per cent of wages during maternal leave (figure 25). In contrast, fewer countries consider childcare periods in pension benefits, with improved pension entitlements for parents, primarily impacting women, who are more likely to take time off for childcare (figure 26).

The ratification of International Labour Conventions, such as the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and the implementation of equitable laws across genders demonstrate a commitment to inclusive policymaking. This commitment to inclusivity cultivates a stronger, more diverse and resilient economy that is better equipped to absorb economic shocks. Recognizing and improving the working conditions and compensation in sectors dominated by women, such as the care economy, can help address economic inequalities and empower women in the workforce. While enhancing regulatory frameworks to improve working conditions in the care

**FIGURE 24.**

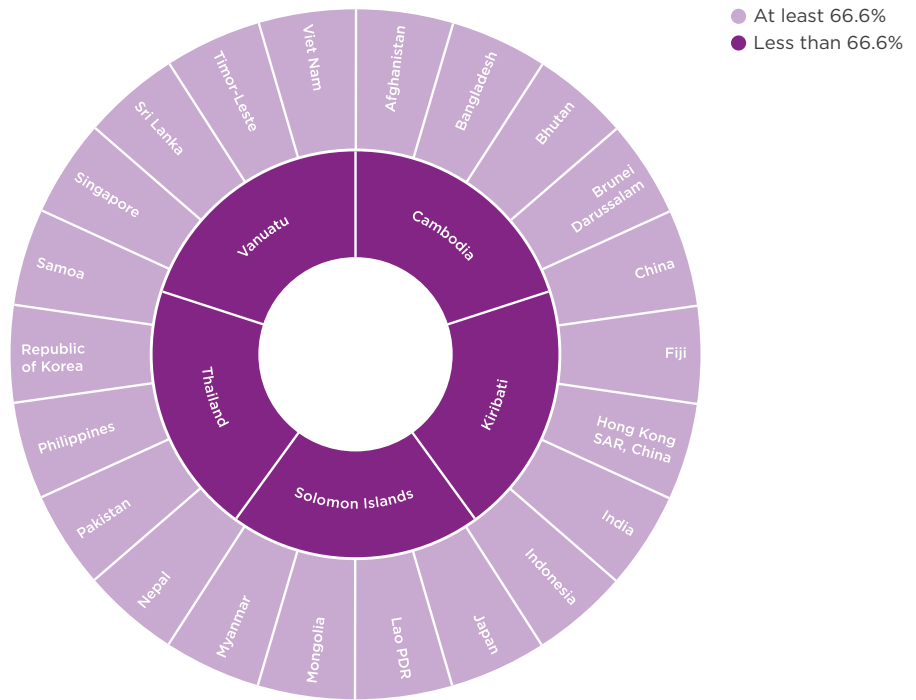
Share of employees with access to parental leave, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: ILOSTAT.

**FIGURE 25.**

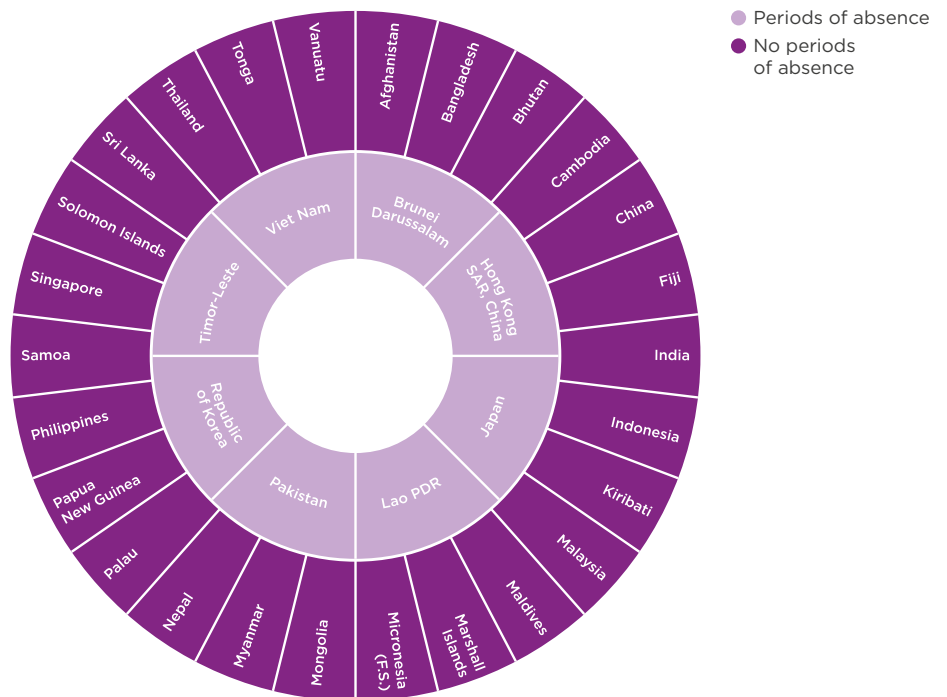
Percentage of wages paid during maternity leave, latest year



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 26.**

Periods of absence due to childcare are accounted for in pension benefits, latest year



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

economy is crucial for achieving broader economic stability and gender equality, the only country in the Asia-Pacific Region that has ratified the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) is the Philippines. Furthermore, only Japan and Republic of Korea have ratified Convention No. 156.

To respond adequately to the demographic shifts in the Asia-Pacific region, transforming care systems also calls for tackling decent work deficits in the care economy through a closer alignment with labour standards, including the right to organize, as well as enforcing workplace environment regulations. While available estimates presented in this report do not adequately reflect the major contribution of migrant workers in the care economy, previous evidence has already shown the vulnerability of these workers. Extending social protection services, such as fair wages, legal status and access to health care, to migrant care workers is an integral component of a comprehensive care economy action plan that aims to build resilient care systems.

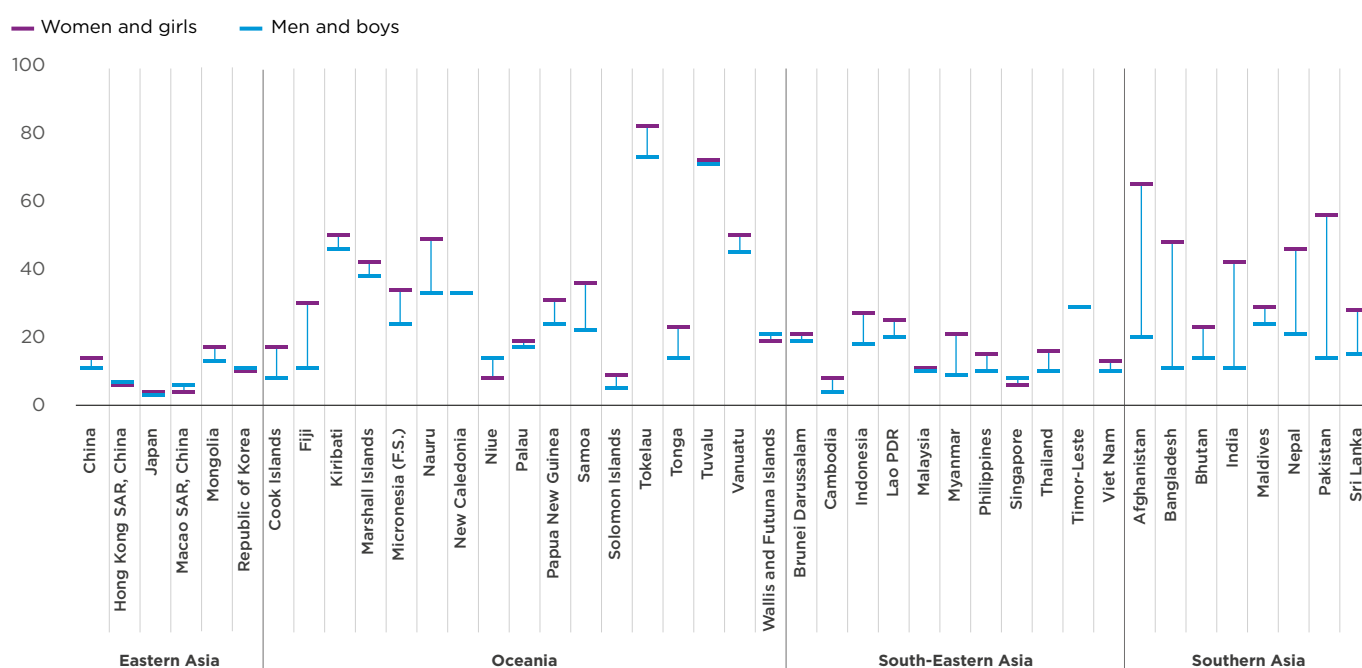
## 2.4 Inequality of opportunities in the labour market

Discriminatory social norms that assign reproductive roles to women and girls along with the unequal distribution of resources such as time and gender-blind systems and institutions result in limited opportunities

for women and girls to fully realize their potential in the labour market. This particularly impacts women from a young age, as family responsibilities and unpaid care duties often result in more girls than boys being unable to participate in education, employment, or training. Data from 42 countries in the region reveal that, with very few exceptions, it is girls who do not avail themselves of educational and training opportunities and income-generating activities (figure 27). In the Asia-Pacific region, more than 100 million young women aged 15–24 are not in education, employment, or training, and this is above the global average.<sup>52</sup>

Gender inequality in unpaid care work is a key factor in explaining why women face economic exclusion and heightened gender inequalities in the workplace. In the Asia-Pacific region, women aged 25–54 who have child-care responsibilities consistently experience lower rates of employment compared to men (figure 28). These gender gaps become even more pronounced when women are responsible for caring for children under the age of 6, especially if they are married or in an informal union.<sup>53</sup> Leaving no one behind and addressing the issue of inclusivity in the care economy requires specific attention to single women who are the sole parent of young children. These women are particularly vulnerable as their care responsibilities limit their participation in employment, and this is compounded by their reliance on a single source of income.

**FIGURE 27.** Proportion of youth (aged 15–24) not in education, employment, or training, by sex, latest year (percentage)



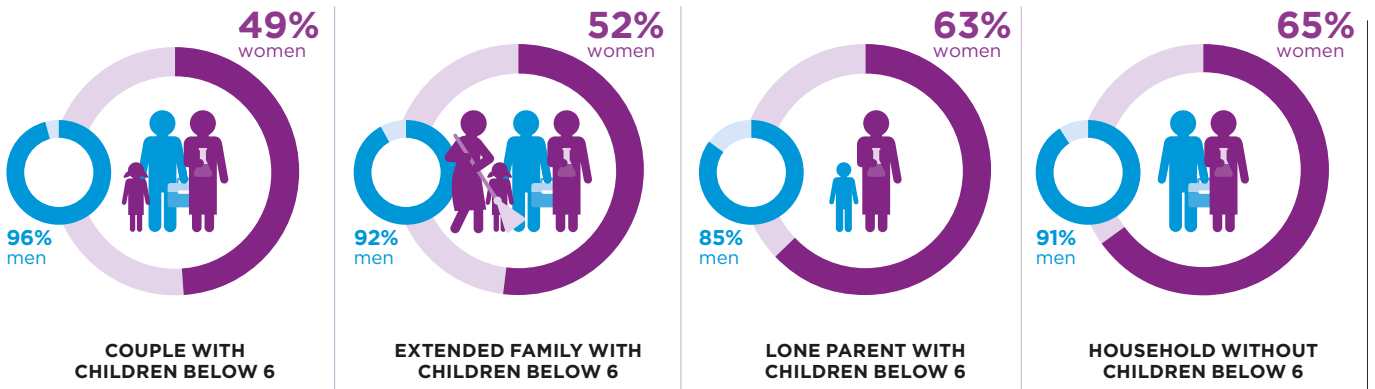
Source: SDG Global Database.



## INFOGRAPHIC 2

Most unpaid care work in the region is predominantly carried out by women and girls, which significantly impacts their ability to access, retain, and advance in employment.

AMONG THOSE WORKERS AGED 25-54 YEARS, IN THE LABOUR FORCE THERE ARE:



Source: Estimates refer to the prime-age labour force rate, by sex and household type as available on ILOSTAT. Estimates refer to 2023.

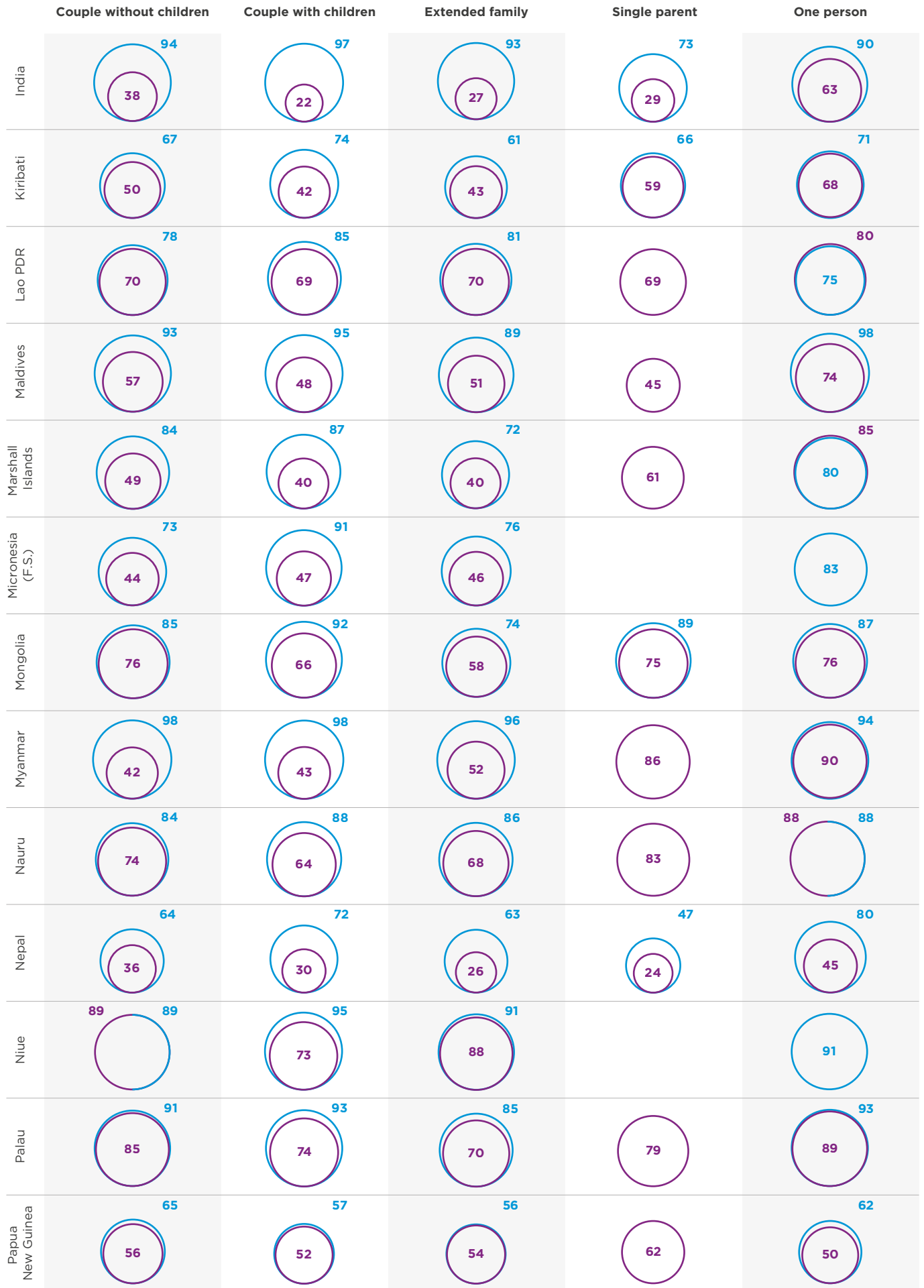
FIGURE 28.

Prime-age (25-54 years) employment-to-population ratio, by sex, household type and presence of children below 6 years, latest year (percentage)

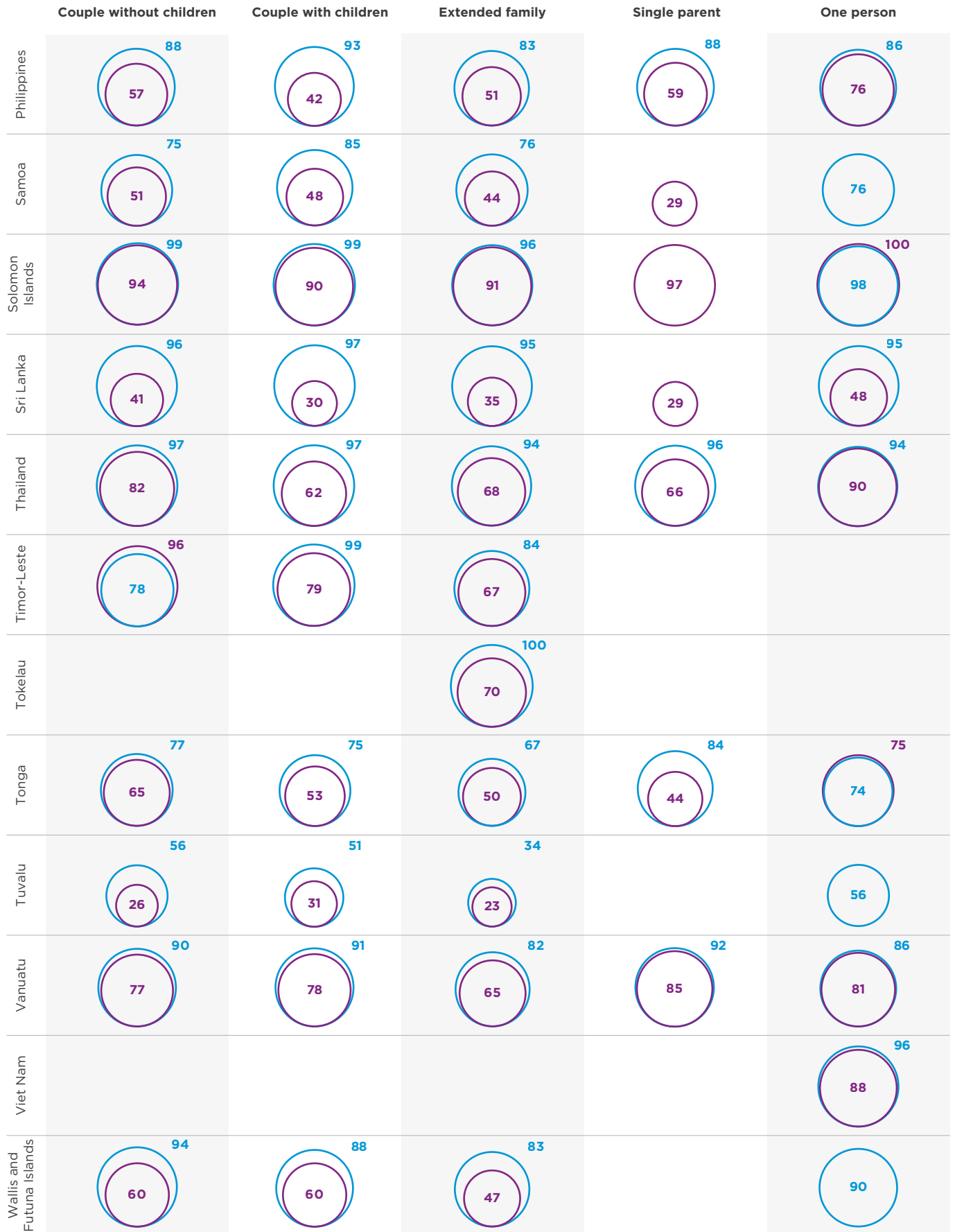
○ Women ○ Men



○ Women ○ Men



○ Women ○ Men



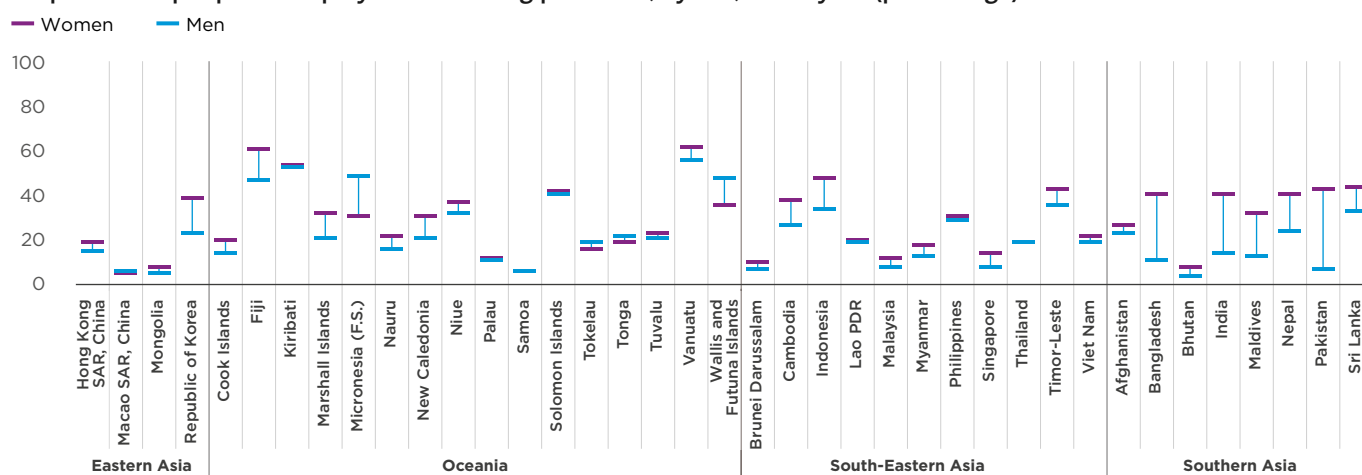
Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

Family obligations may limit women's participation in formal employment, leading women to choose part-time work, lower-paid jobs, or leave the workforce altogether to fulfil caregiving duties. As a result, their income, career advancement and retirement benefits are affected. In the region, the gender disparity in working arrangements

can be seen in the higher proportion of women engaged in part-time work compared to men, except for Macao SAR, China; Micronesia (Federated States of); Samoa; Thailand; Tokelau; Tonga; and Wallis and Futuna Islands (figure 29).

**FIGURE 29.**

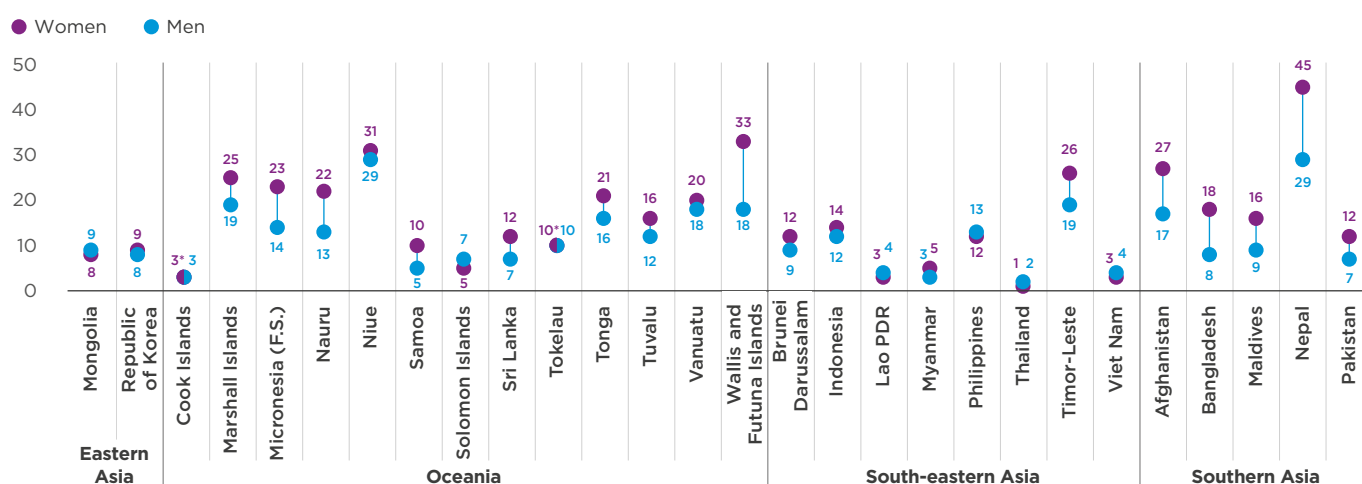
**Proportion of people in employment working part-time, by sex, latest year (percentage)**



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 30.**

**Composite rate of labour underutilization, by sex, latest year (percentage)**



Note: The indicator reflects the proportion of persons in time-related underemployment, unemployment, and potential labour force over the extended labour force.

\*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: ILOSTAT.

The rate of women working part-time consistently exceeds that of men, except in those countries. Moreover, in Fiji, Kiribati and Vanuatu part-time work is the predominant arrangement for 61, 54 and 62 per cent of employed women, respectively. Ultimately, a higher share of women than men find themselves in positions that do not offer the desired or necessary number of working hours to meet their financial or career goals (figure 29 and figure 30). For instance, in Nepal 45 per cent of women of working age would like to access the labour market but are

unsuccessful compared to 29 per cent of men. While flexible working arrangements, including working part-time, are strategies that can support women's increased labour force participation, efforts to promote shared care responsibilities could close the gender gap in full-time employment. This is important as greater flexibility can translate into reduced and more volatile earnings and higher levels of income insecurity, unregulated working conditions and non-existent or limited social protection for workers.

### INFOGRAPHIC 3



**WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM THE LABOUR MARKET** OCCURS EVEN IF MORE WOMEN THAN MEN ARE AVAILABLE TO WORK AND EVEN IF **WOMEN WOULD LIKE TO WORK MORE HOURS AND ARE SEEKING WORK.**

THIS REPRESENTS A SUBSTANTIAL LOSS TO **ECONOMIC GROWTH**, UNDERMINES THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AN EFFICIENT MARKET EQUILIBRIUM AND PREVENTS WOMEN FROM REALIZING THEIR **FULL POTENTIAL** IN THE ECONOMY AND BEYOND.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data for 30 countries.

## 2.5 Inequality of outcomes in the care economy

In the Asia-Pacific region, the dearth of opportunities for women and girls in the labour market is highly significant and leads to detrimental outcomes such as vulnerability, poverty, injustices and a lack of agency. These constraints manifest as limited choices for women in the economy. More so than men's engagement in the labour market, women's engagement perpetuates gender stereotypes, as women predominantly assume caregiving roles that are plagued by deficient employment conditions.<sup>54</sup>

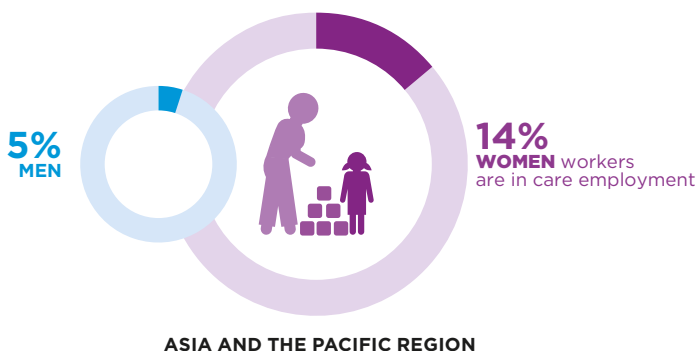
### 2.5.1 Women in care employment

When women in the Asia-Pacific region participate in the paid workforce, a significant proportion works in the care economy. Given the lack of an international agreed definition for care employment, the ILO experimental series offers valuable insights into the nature of care employment and its characteristics.<sup>55</sup> It refers to care work performed for payment within various settings, including private households (e.g. domestic workers), communities and both public and private hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, schools and other care or support establishments (figure 31). Care workers

may have an employment relationship with a private household, a public agency, a for-profit business, a nonprofit organization, or they may be self-employed. However, it is important to note that the current ILO definition of care employment only includes domestic workers who are in an employment relationship with a household. As a result, this definition undercounts this group of care workers.

Available care employment data in the Asia-Pacific region indicates a considerable gender disparity in the economy, with a significantly higher proportion of women occupying care jobs compared to men in all subregions. For instance, in Tuvalu, women constitute 23 per cent of the workforce in care sectors, while men account for only 4 per cent. In the Philippines, 9 per cent of women are employed as domestic workers, whereas only 1 per cent of men are engaged in such occupations (figure 32). Overall, women's lower level of employment, predominantly concentrated in the care economy, highlights a significant division in the labour market along gender lines. Women predominantly occupy care-related roles, while men tend to work in other sectors. This division underscores prevailing gender norms that associate women with care-related occupations, reflecting traditional gender roles within economic structures.

### INFOGRAPHIC 4

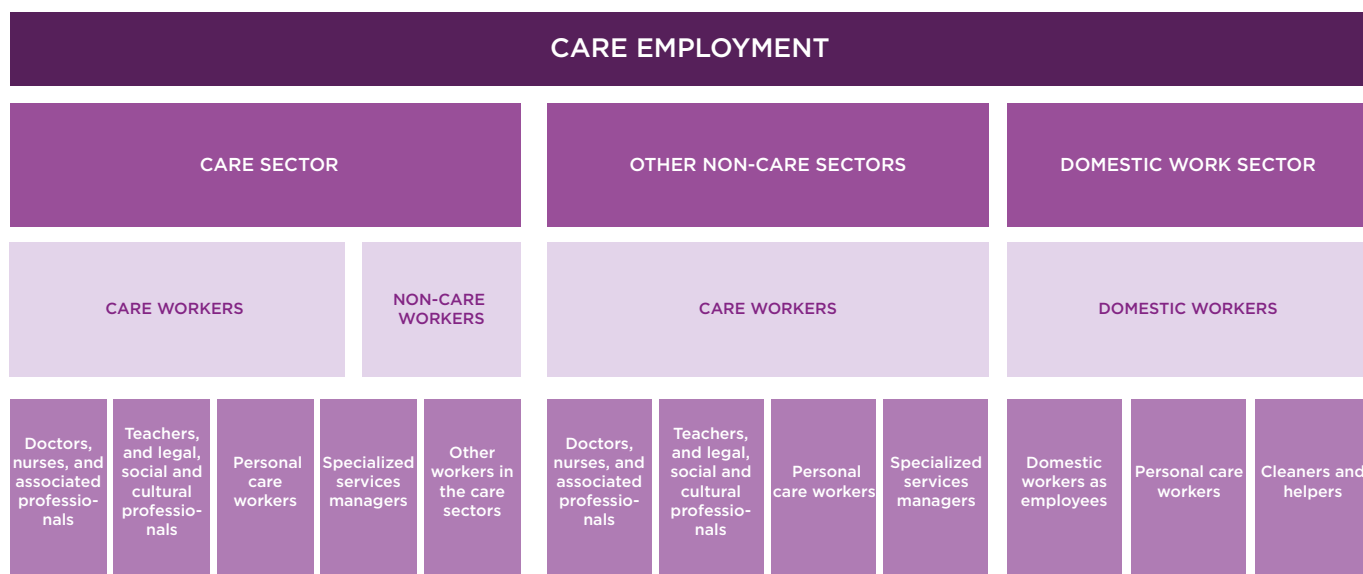


THE PREVALENCE OF **WOMEN WORKERS IN CARE EMPLOYMENT** REFLECTS SOCIETAL NORMS THAT ALIGN CAREGIVING ROLES WITH WOMEN.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data for 35 countries.

**FIGURE 31.**

Schematic representation of the scope of care employment as per ILO experimental series

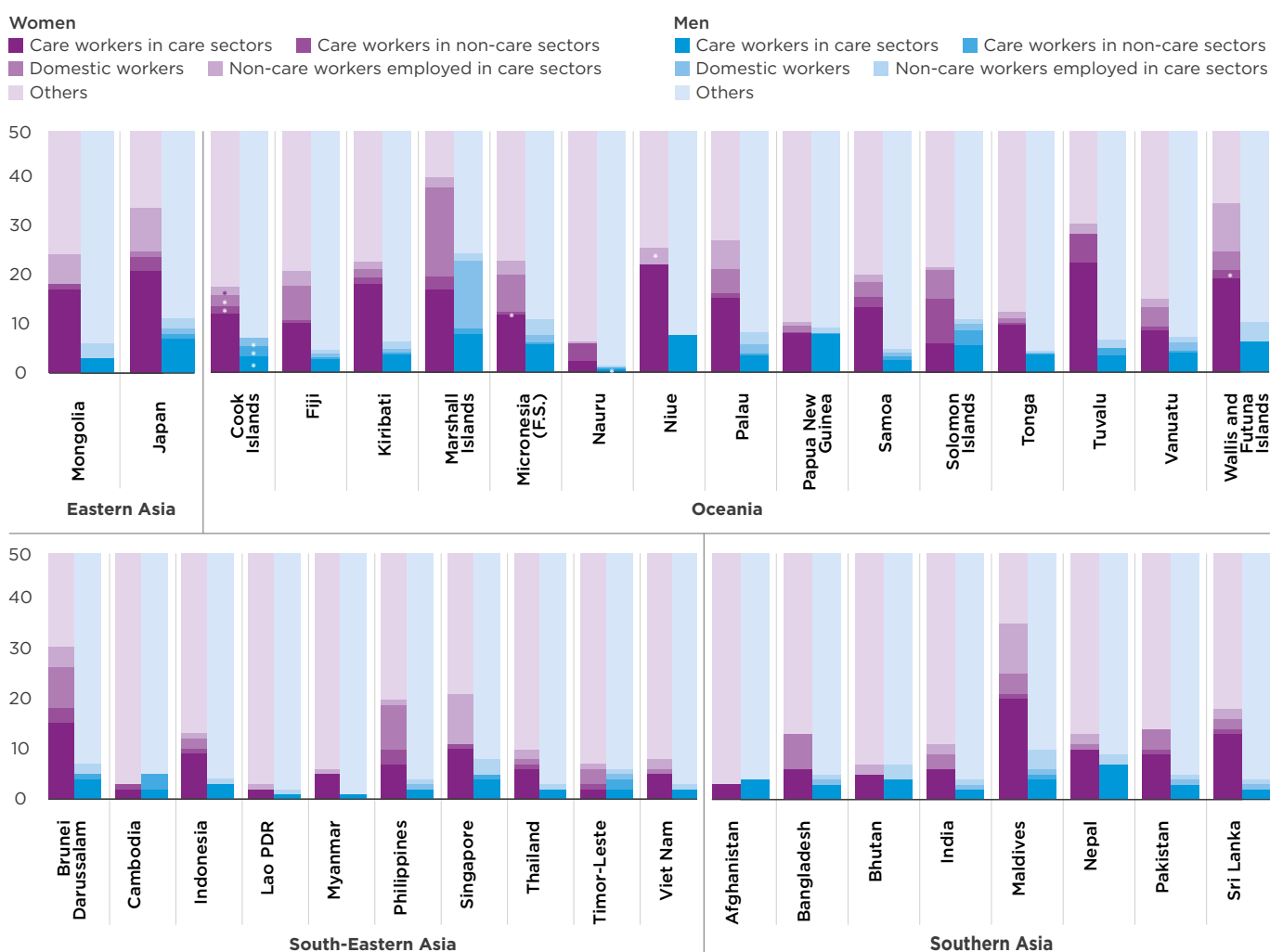


Note: The care sector includes education; human health activities, residential care activities and social work activities without accommodation.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on [concepts and definitions available on ILOSTAT](#).

**FIGURE 32.**

Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and care worker type, latest year (percentage)

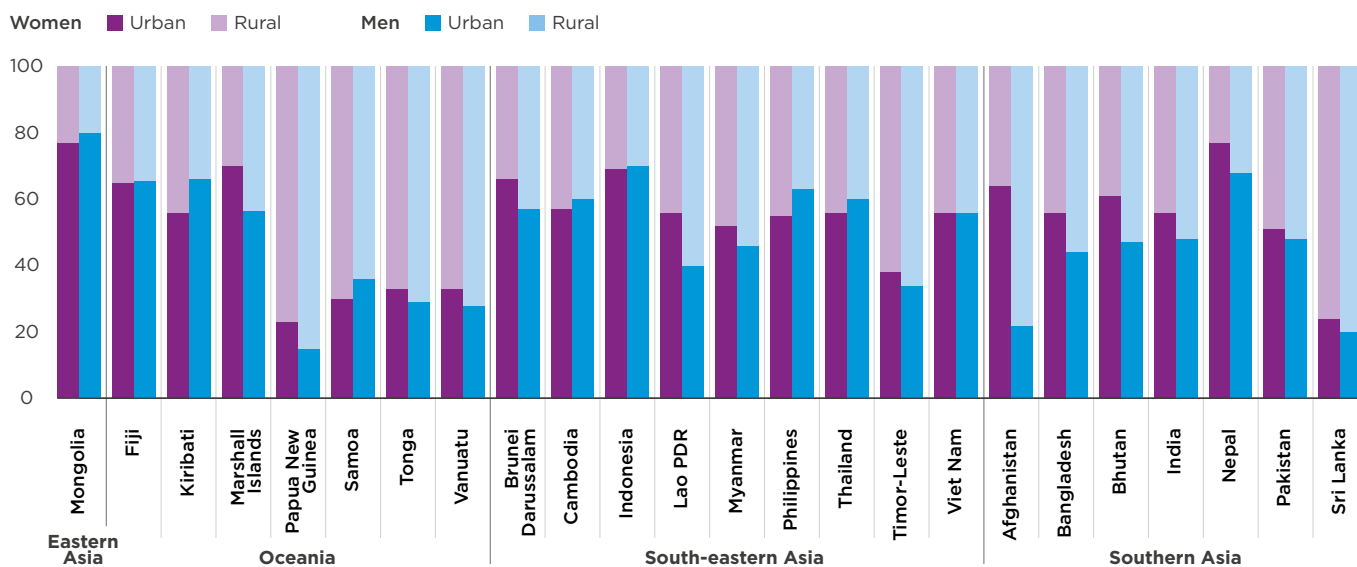


Note: \*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

**FIGURE 33.**

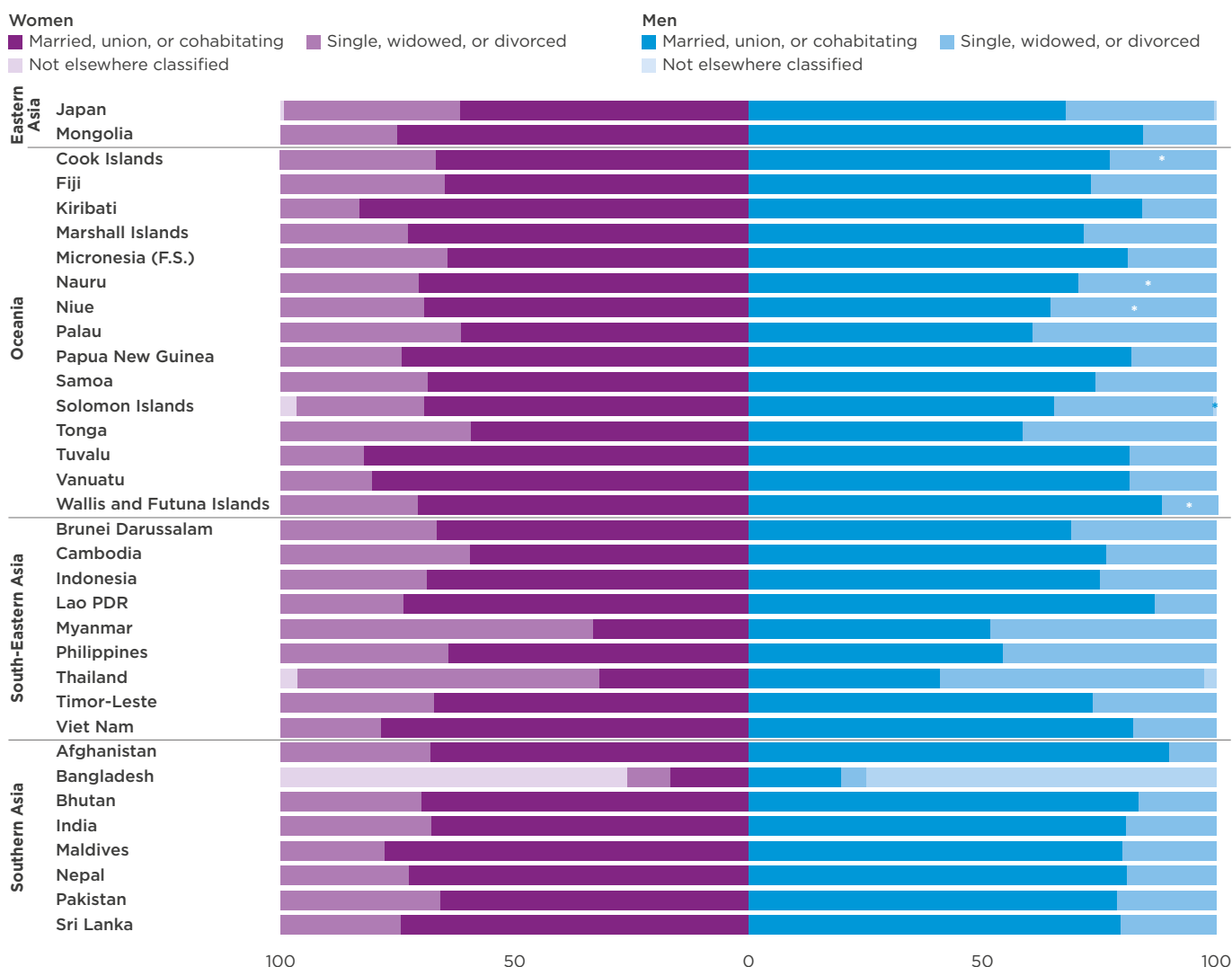
Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and location, latest year (percentage)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

**FIGURE 34.**

Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and marital status, latest year (percentage)

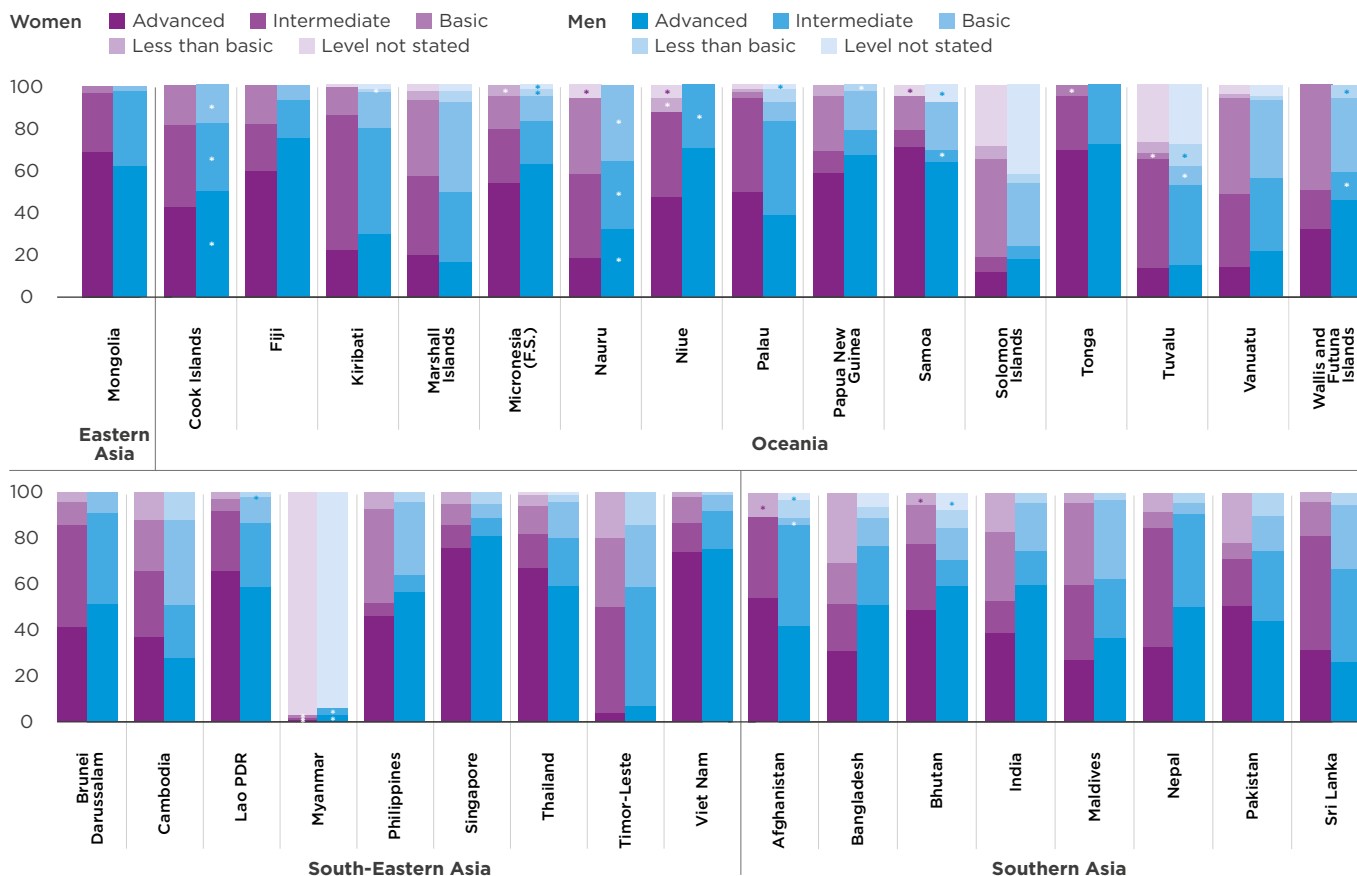


Note: \*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

**FIGURE 35.**

**Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and education, latest year (percentage)**



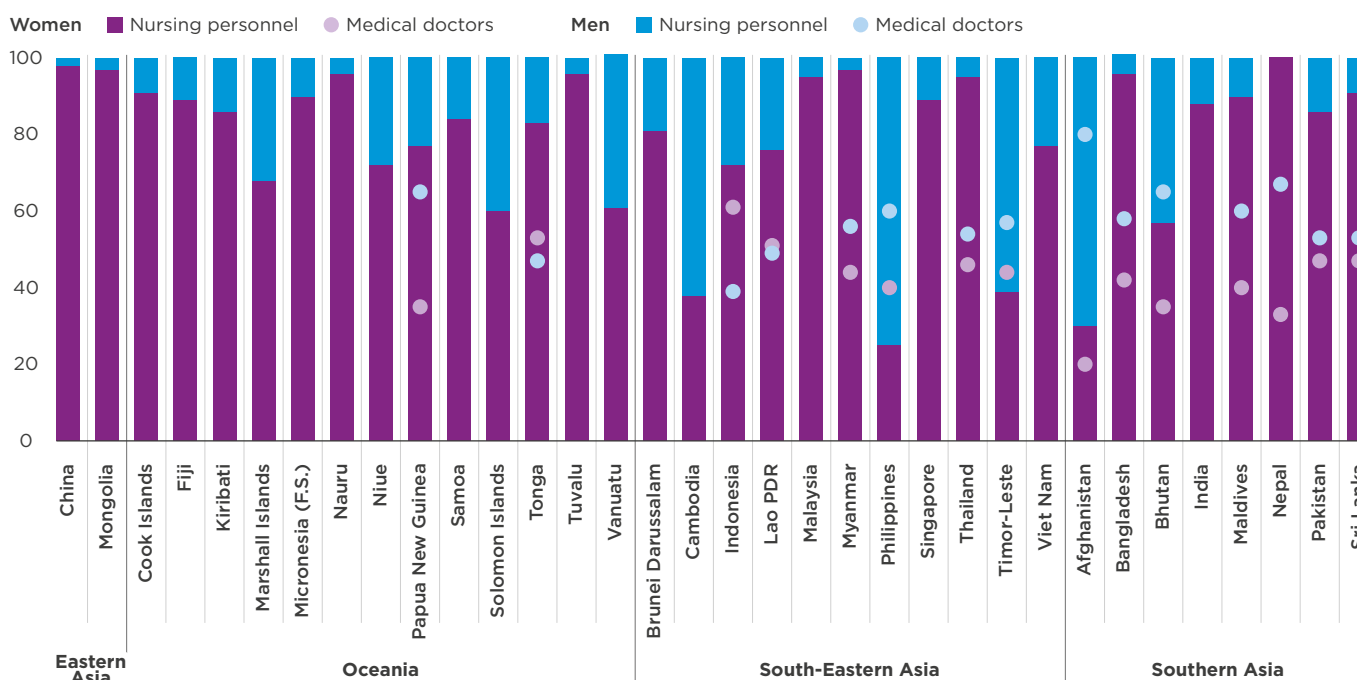
Note: Data disaggregated by level of education are provided on the highest level of education completed, classified according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).

\*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

**FIGURE 36.**

**Proportion of health workers, by sex and type of occupation, latest year (percentage)**

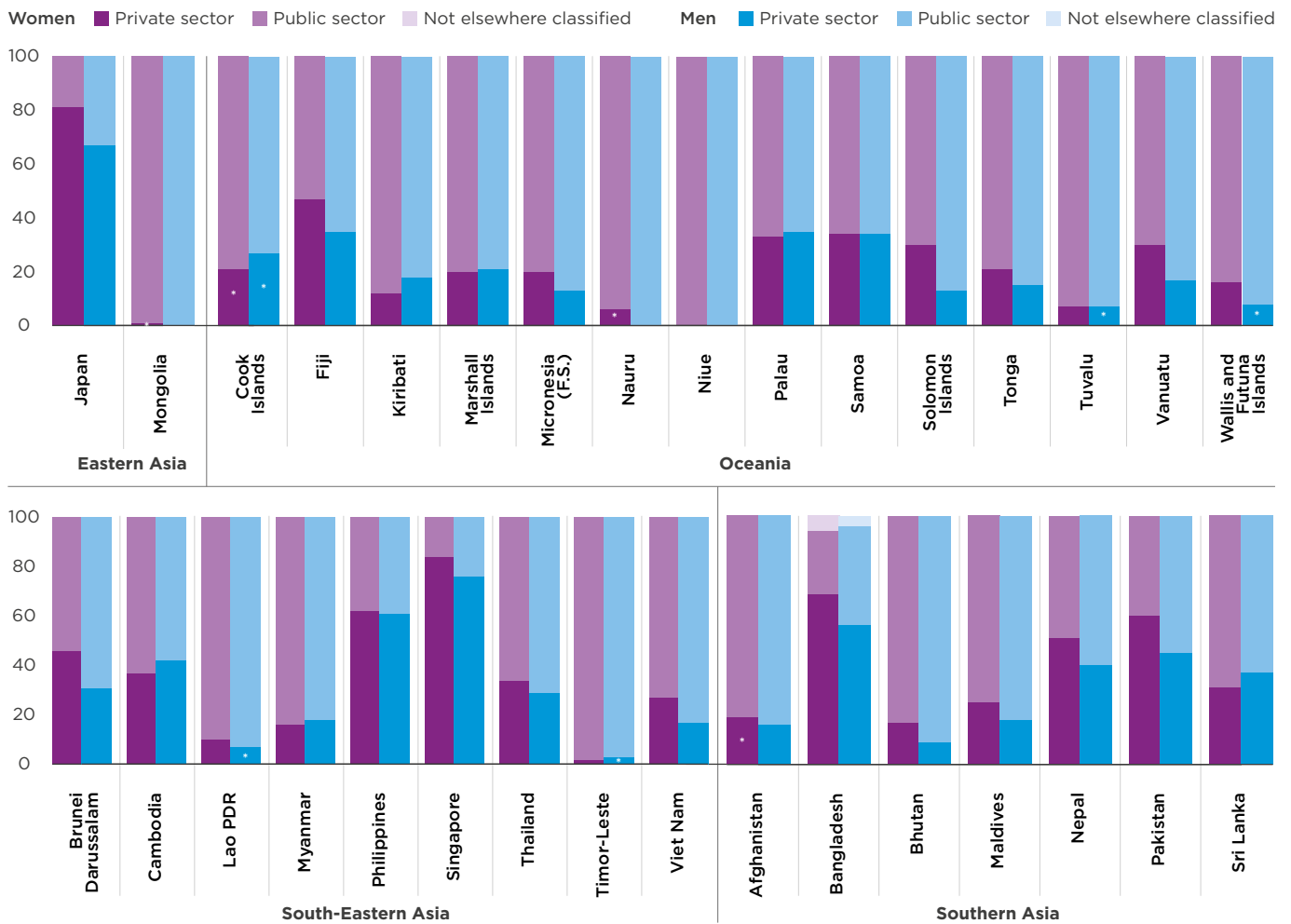


Source: SDG Global Database.



**FIGURE 37.**

**Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and institutional sector, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** Public sector employment refers to persons employed by government units and non-market corporations. It includes all government departments, agencies and institutions that are financed and controlled by government authorities that provide public goods and services. It also includes entities that are owned or controlled by the government such as state-owned enterprises and public corporations, including public hospitals, public schools, and other entities that provide services either for free or at prices that cover only a part of their costs.

\*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

Apart from countries in Oceania, **care employment in the region is predominantly an urban phenomenon, with higher rates of women workers** (figure 33). Better access to health-care facilities and infrastructures as well as care-related services may explain such geographical disparities, thus indicating the need of expanding services in rural areas. This is critical to reduce unpaid care workloads for rural women and girls.

In most countries, more women than men in the care workforce are single, widowed, or divorced (figure 34). Economic factors, such as the necessity to remain in or seek employment in care roles, may explain the gender gaps. In Myanmar and Thailand, a notable percentage of women in care employment are single, widowed, or divorced, and this may reflect a lack of alternative employment opportunities or migration flows within the care economy.

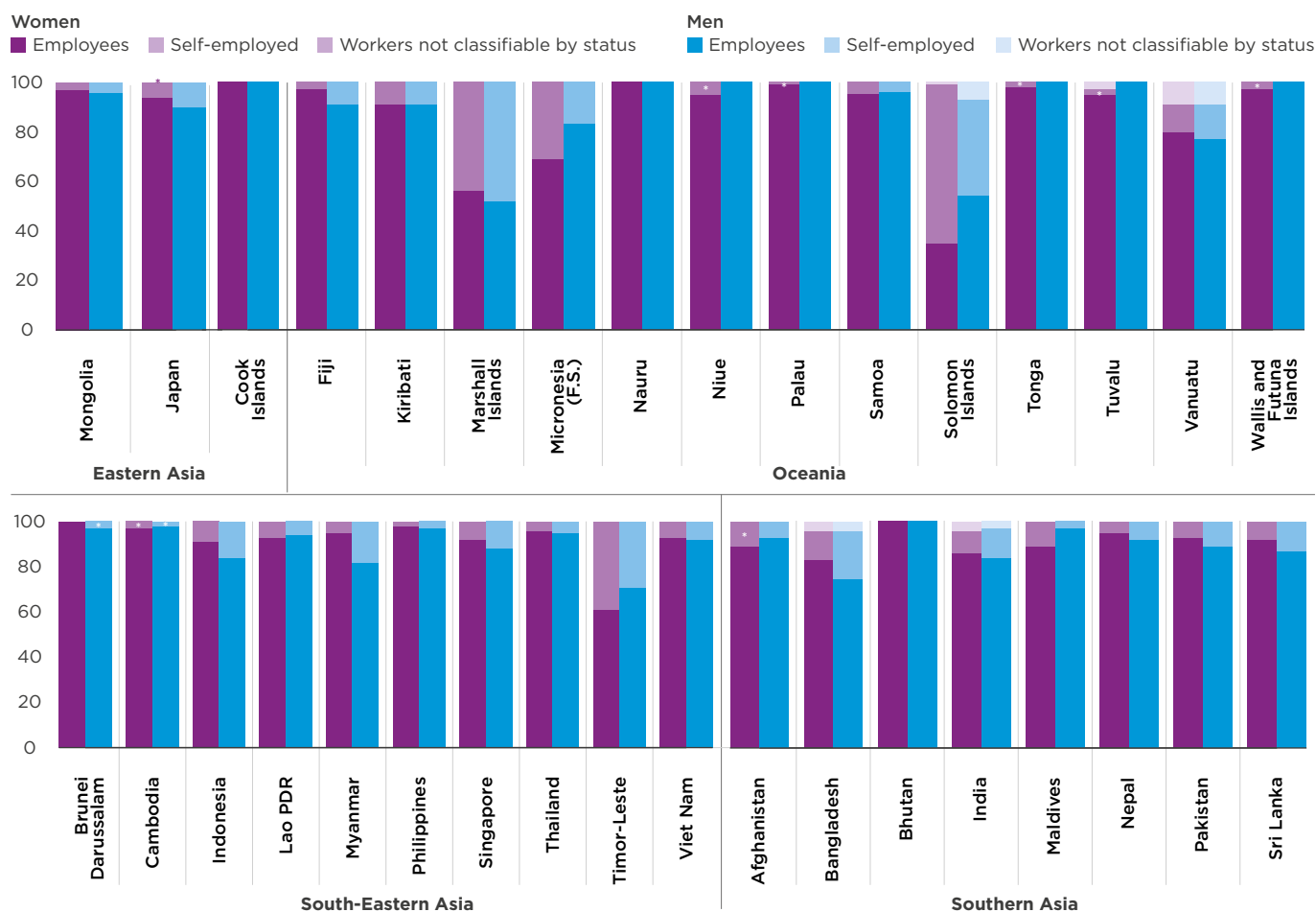
In the Asia-Pacific region, many women and men workers in the care economy have completed educational levels above basic education (i.e. primary education or lower secondary education), which may also imply that most care occupations require a minimum level of education. However, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India have the largest gender gaps and the highest percentage of care workers with an educational background below the basic level. Nevertheless, intermediate education is significantly represented, especially among women. This indicates the need for mid-level technical or vocational education for care employment, as well as the importance of some form of specialized training or education. The highest level of education shows the greatest disparity, with men being more represented than women. This suggests that higher professional roles in care sectors, such as, therapy, or social work are more often occupied by men (figure 35).

The care economy exhibits clear occupational segregation, with women comprising the majority in nursing roles while being underrepresented in more senior or specialized medical positions. Except for Afghanistan, Cambodia, and the Philippines, there is a notable gender disparity in the nursing professions, with China having the highest recorded value (figure 36). Across most countries, both men and women are generally more likely to find employment in the public sector rather than the private sector. However, in Bangladesh, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Singapore, a notable proportion are employed in the private sector, particularly women. In these countries, available data suggest a significant dependence on private institutions, such as households, as sources of employment in the care sector for women. Conversely, men tend to have a strong presence in public sector employment, which may indicate the presence of obstacles for women in terms of entering public sector employment or career advancement within public care institutions (figure 37).

### 2.5.2 Decent care work deficits

In the Asia-Pacific region, most care workers regardless of gender are employees rather than self-employed (figure 38). The status of these care workers as employees would suggest they enjoy a range of protections, including health insurance, retirement plans, unemployment benefits and workers' compensation, to mitigate financial risks associated with illness, job loss and workplace injuries. However, labour laws in many countries do not extend social protection to all workers in the care economy. Many care workers are engaged in informal employment, with women and girls facing disadvantage in most countries (figure 39). For instance, in Bangladesh and Indonesia, approximately 79 per cent and 73 per cent of female care workers are employed in the informal sector compared to 61 per cent and 65 per cent of men, respectively. In addition to the lacking social protection, women also experience other decent work deficits, such as a wage gap. In the care economy of the region, women are also more likely than men to be in part-time working arrangements (figure 40).

**FIGURE 38.**  
Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and status in employment, latest year (percentage)

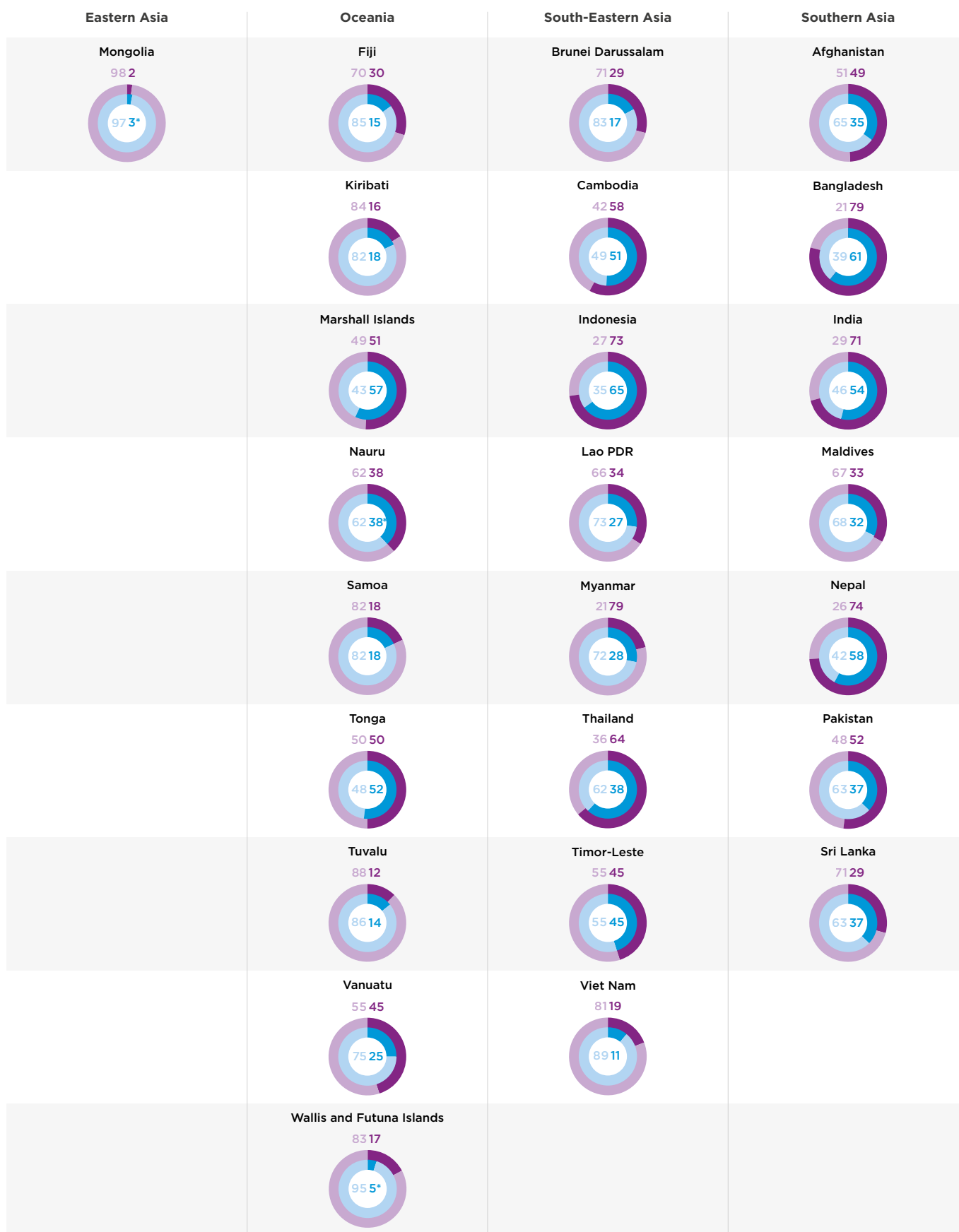


Note: \*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.  
Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

**FIGURE 39.**

**Proportion of care workers in informal employment, by sex, latest year (percentage)**

Women ● Formal employment ● Informal employment      Men ● Formal employment ● Informal employment

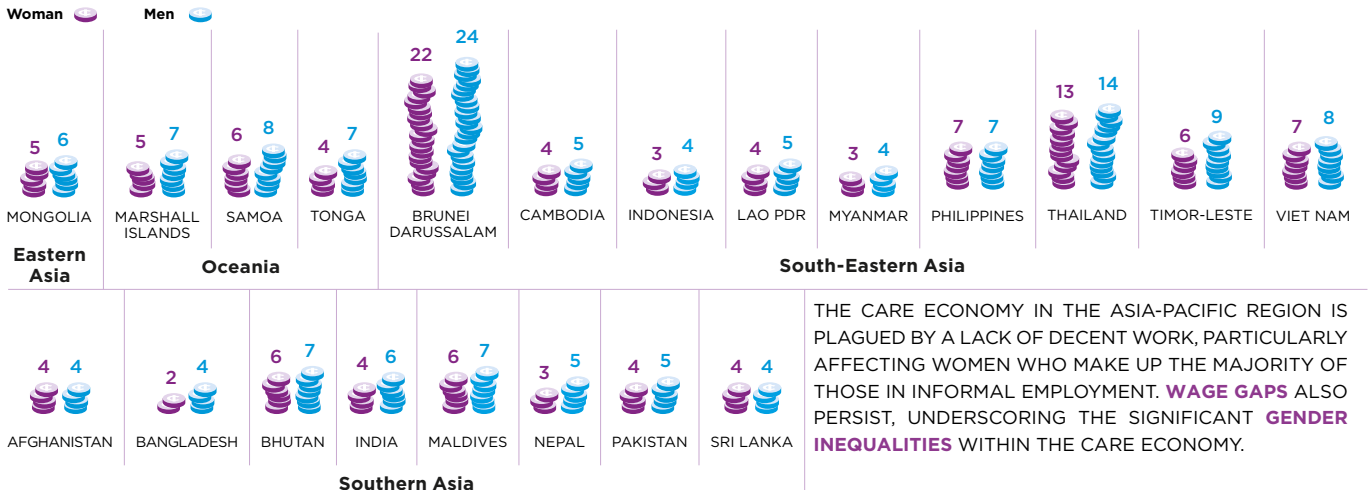


Note: \*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: ILOSTAT.

## INFOGRAPHIC 5

Average hourly earnings of care employees by sex, latest year (United States dollars – purchasing power parity)

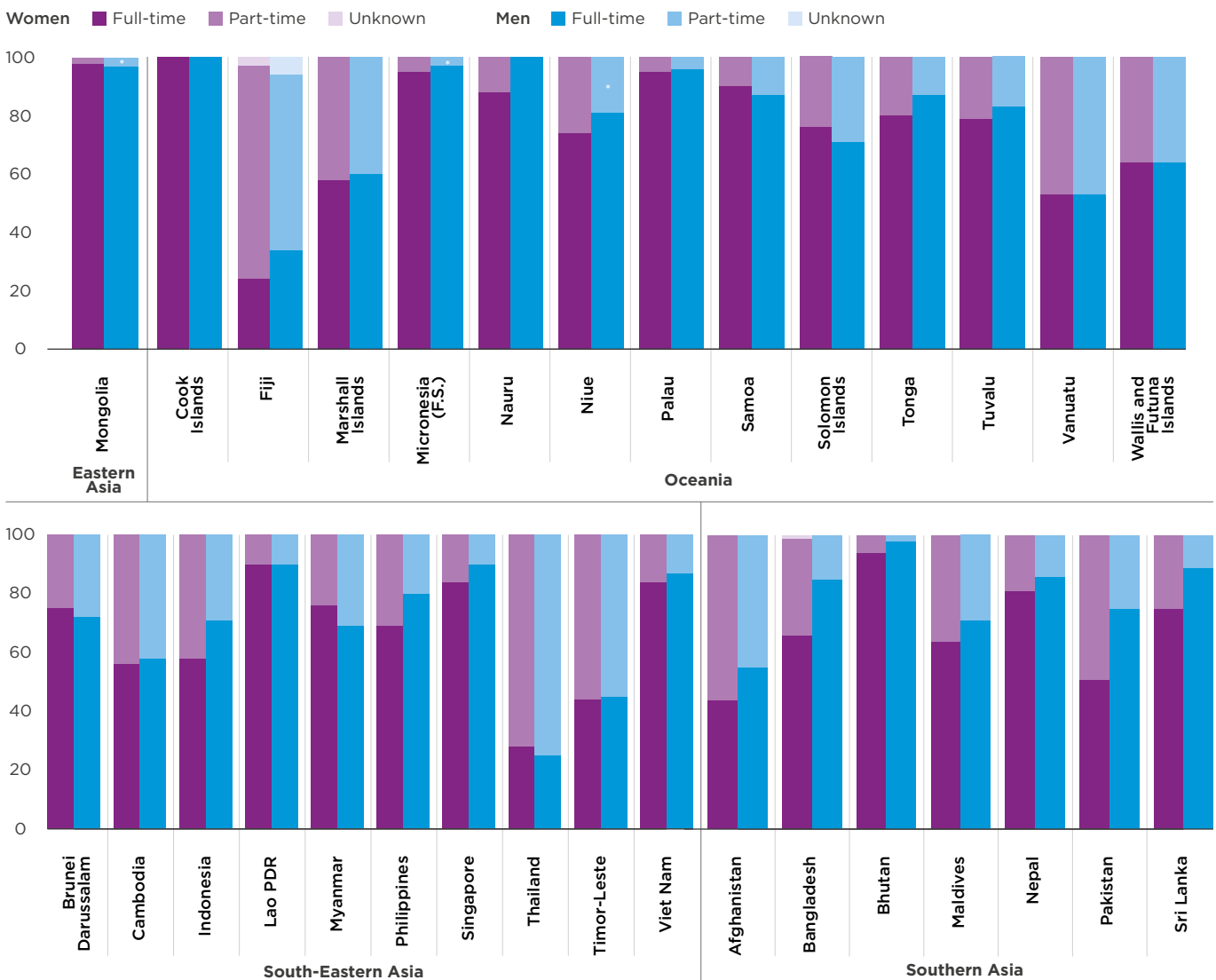


THE CARE ECONOMY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION IS PLAGUED BY A LACK OF DECENT WORK, PARTICULARLY AFFECTING WOMEN WHO MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF THOSE IN INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT. **WAGE GAPS** ALSO PERSIST, UNDERSCORING THE SIGNIFICANT **GENDER INEQUALITIES** WITHIN THE CARE ECONOMY.

Source: ILOSTAT.

FIGURE 40.

Proportion of workers in care employment, by sex and working time arrangement, latest year (percentage)



Note: \*Estimates should be interpreted with caution due to unreliable values.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data.

### BOX. 3

## Transforming care systems Case Study: Gender-transformative approaches and innovation to improve the lives of women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region.

Transforming care systems necessitates a thorough reconsideration and restructuring of the current system. As a vital part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women has actively pioneered innovative approaches within the care economy of the Asia-Pacific region, with the aim of fostering inclusive and sustainable economies that value care work. This entails establishing equitable care systems that not only grant women more time to engage in decent work and green jobs, but also ensure fairness.

Given the diverse range of care needs in the region, in both formal and informal sectors, across urban and rural contexts, and in institutional and home-based care, it is essential to create an environment where multiple models can operate effectively to achieve equitable scaling. Care entrepreneurship offers new and innovative approaches to enhance care delivery. Care enterprises, often owned by women, can offer a wide range of services. These can include on-demand or centre-based child and long-term care services, which aim to reduce the time and effort spent on unpaid care work or provide training and decent work opportunities to professionalize caregiving. Research emphasizes that rapidly emerging digitally enabled care enterprises can enable pathways towards decent work opportunities in the care sector.<sup>a</sup>

Innovation programmes such as the [Gender-Inclusive Care Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Programme \(GICEEP\)](#), a collaborative effort between the International Development Research Centre of Canada, Visa Foundation, UN Women Asia and the Pacific, Bopinc and SAFEEM, facilitate women's economic empowerment and the creation of a more inclusive care entrepreneurship ecosystem. As part of this programme, the Asia-Pacific Care Entrepreneurship Accelerator has supported care entrepreneurs in becoming more gender-inclusive and taking steps to provide decent work opportunities for care workers. Together, the 11 participating enterprises engage 2,995 care workers, most of whom are women, with 311 full-time and part-time employees (73 per cent are women), and serve 9,445 customers. Many of these enterprises have experienced rapid growth, attributed to the exponential increase in demand for care services. In a rapidly expanding care economy, it is crucial that regulations guide responsible business practices and enable care enterprises to become impactful businesses.

Moreover, UN Women research, such as [Innovations in Childcare to advance Women's Economic Empowerment](#), highlights that many care-entrepreneurship models primarily cater to middle and higher-income customers. In this context, UN Women has initiated support specifically aimed at developing care models that serve low-income communities. For example, the transformative child care model of the [Better Skills Better Care](#) programme in India was co-designed by UN Women and the social enterprise Dharma Life, in collaboration with Titli. The model aims

to promote women's economic participation while providing their children with a nurturing environment for learning and growth. Community learning centres offer women access to digitally enabled skills and training while simultaneously providing affordable and high-quality early childhood care and education for their young dependents. This unique setup is designed to complement existing public care infrastructure, extending the centre operating hours beyond those of the government-run *angan-wadi* centres. Doing so allows women to pursue other economic opportunities. Additionally, by co-locating childcare services and skills training, the centres aim to reduce the time women spend on childcare, thus increasing their likelihood of enrolling and staying in vocational training courses. Ultimately, this can enhance their overall participation in the local economy. Ongoing research will assess the impact of childcare support on women's economic opportunities, agency and overall well-being. Encouraging men and boys to share care responsibilities is a crucial aspect of this process. The Better Skills Better Care centres have developed innovative campaigns to promote social norms change on care work within families, involving local government institutions, opinion leaders and the wider community.

Innovation and practical care delivery models are crucial for addressing the persistent gaps between demand for and supply of care services. However, to truly address this issue, a comprehensive and transformative approach to care is necessary, one that encompasses the entire lifecycle and society as a whole and includes innovative financing strategies. To facilitate this approach, UN Women has established platforms for various stakeholders to learn and take action to transform care systems. Together with the Government of Mexico, UN Women co-convenes the [Global Alliance for Care \(GAC\)](#), a groundbreaking multi-stakeholder community. With over 200 organizations as members, GAC serves as the first global platform that promotes collective action, communication and learning on topics of care, its recognition as a necessity and a right and its status as work. In the Asia-Pacific region, UN Women hosts the annual Asia-Pacific Care Forum, one of the largest regional convenings of diverse stakeholders, to come together and inspire action. Recently, UN Women India's support at the G20 summit contributed to the G20 Delhi Declaration, which, for the first time, highlighted investments in care as a crucial element for advancing women's participation. Together with Oxfam and ESCAP, UN Women has supported the launch of the first-ever Care Declaration for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), launched in August 2024.

Note:

- a. UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (2023). [Pathways towards Decent Work in the Digitally Enabled Care Economy in South-East Asia](#).

# 3

## Inclusive and gender-responsive economies: Women and the world of work



### KEY MESSAGES

1. More women than men have digital skills for online purchasing, online product information and content uploading.
2. For a gender-transformative digital transition, gender gaps need to be addressed in computer programming language skills.
3. The time to realize the economic rights of women and girls is ripe to reap the benefits of gender equality in the world of work.
4. For women, asset ownership has transformative potential. It helps them to overcome barriers, advocate for their rights, access finance and participate more extensively in societal decision-making processes.
5. In South Asia, 16 per cent of women and 30 per cent of men own a credit or debit card compared to 66 per cent of women and 69 per cent of men in East Asia and the Pacific.
6. In East Asia and the Pacific 84 per cent of men and 81 per cent of women own an account at a financial institution or with a mobile-money service provider, compared to 70 per cent of men and 66 per cent of women in South Asia.<sup>56</sup>
7. Equal access to and control over assets and financial resources can enhance women's autonomy, strengthen their bargaining power and ultimately enable them to have a more significant say in economic decision-making.

8. **Women's political representation is crucial to bring about the policy changes needed to advance gender equality in the world of work. Strengthening women's ability to make decisions about their own lives requires policy changes in which women have their voices reflected.**

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9. **Ensuring women's access to capital is crucial as it enhances their opportunities to purchase property, establish and expand businesses and ultimately improve their economic status.**

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10. **Gender discrimination in asset ownership and access to credit coupled with gender-blind inheritance laws undermine women's bargaining power in the family and perpetuate unequal status of women and men in the economy at large.**

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11. **The systemic barriers women face in becoming employers are rooted in the challenges associated with owning assets, including land, as well as accessing economic resources and credit necessary to start a business.**

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12. **In 2021, firms with female participation in ownership accounted for 18 per cent in South Asia, 46 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific and 33 per cent globally.**

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13. **Globally, the proportion of women in managerial positions stands at 28 per cent, compared to 20 per cent in East Asia, 27 per cent in Oceania, 39 per cent in South-East Asia, and 16 per cent in South Asia.**

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14. **The gender pay gap is affecting all occupations in the Asia-Pacific region regardless of sector.**

### 3.1 Why it matters

In [Valuing What Counts: Framework to Progress Beyond Gross Domestic Product](#), the United Nations Secretary-General reiterated that current economic models and measurement often fails to consider numerous aspects that are crucial for sustaining life and enhancing human well-being, such as unpaid care provision. Conversely, the current paradigm tends to assign excessive value to an equilibrium that masks severe inequalities and has resulted in increased poverty, debt and cost of living. Most importantly, progress towards overcoming injustices through the achievement of the SDGs is off-track. Associated with shortcomings in economic thinking, GDP metrics are limited in informing gender-transformative policies and programmes as distributional concerns among women and men are not fully integrated.

Despite sustained economic growth and significant gains in education and health prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region still lag behind men and boys in the economy. Gender discrimination in the world of work persists, representing a failure of previous investments to improve the status of women and girls. In the post-COVID-19 era, there is greater awareness that women's contribution is paramount to build the necessary resilience for effectively facing the emerging challenges of demographic, technological and environmental transitions.<sup>57</sup> Advancing gender equality and empowering women economically across the Asia-Pacific region can play a critical role not only in driving economic growth and making economies inclusive, but also in accelerating sustainable development.<sup>58,59</sup> This requires moving away from a focus on reaching specific monetary targets

to a focus on the needs, aspirations, well-being and rights of people and the planet. In inclusive economies everyone counts, and the measure of progress should be the extent to which inequalities are addressed through an intersectionality lens, individual lives are improved and opportunities for living a life in dignity are guaranteed for present and future generations alike.

The move away from monetary targets aligns with the call for innovative and ethical economies to uphold people's rights, centre their well-being and agency and reduce inequalities. Gender inequality in the world of work hampers the capacity of economic systems to enable all individuals and communities, especially the most marginalized, to participate in, benefit from and contribute to economic growth and development. Working towards inclusive economies that are characterized by equitable access to resources, opportunities, services and social and economic justice provides an opportunity to tackle persistent roots of gender discrimination while leveraging investment pathways to deliver the SDGs.<sup>60</sup>

Digital connectivity is one of the critical transitions needed to accelerate progress towards all SDGs. The report of the Secretary-General, drafted in preparation of the 2024 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), underlines that an effective digital infrastructure is crucial for Governments to efficiently deliver public services and target vulnerable groups.<sup>61</sup> During the COVID-19 crisis, developing countries with digital infrastructure were able to provide emergency relief payments to workers in the informal sector and other vulnerable groups who lost their livelihoods. Furthermore, some developing countries have used open artificial intelligence algorithms and models to expand social protection and provide contactless payments to vulnerable groups. The digital revolution can accelerate the transition from the informal to the formal economy in developing countries, which is crucial for reducing poverty and inequality and improving the effectiveness of the business sector. However, despite progress, nearly 30 per cent of people in developing countries lack access to formal financial channels. Scaling up financial inclusion, especially through digital technologies, can play a significant role in driving development. This is important because financial exclusion is often linked to other forms of inequality.

In Asia and the Pacific, digital connectivity holds massive promises of growth.<sup>62</sup> Encompassing the spread of digital technologies and their integration into various aspects of the world of work, the digital economy is critical in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>63</sup> From 2015 to 2022, the Asia-Pacific region recorded a 9 per cent growth rate in digitally deliverable exports, outpacing the global average of 6.8

per cent and reaching \$958 billion. This accounts for 52 per cent of the region's total services exports.<sup>64</sup> Despite intraregional demand driving this growth, digitalization in the world of work may be a persistent source of inequality across countries and between women and men within countries.<sup>65</sup> If the benefits of these technologies are not distributed effectively, inequality in society will increase.<sup>66</sup>

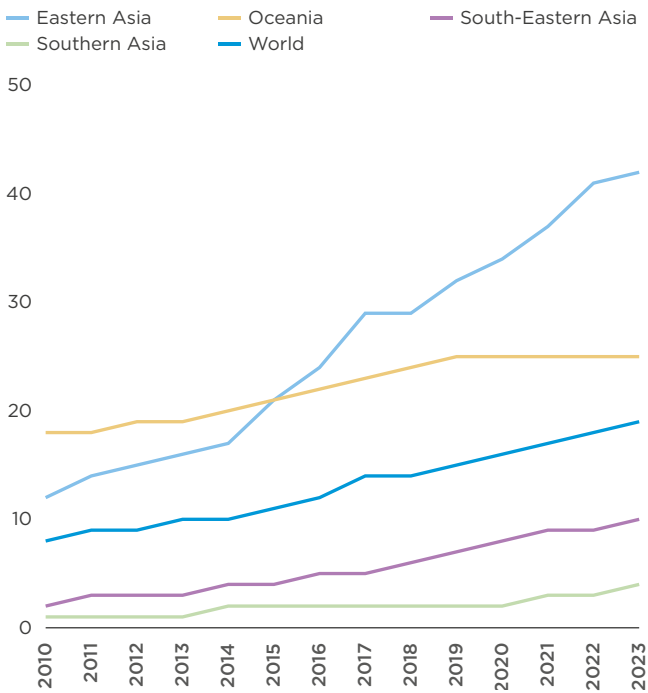
While fixed broadband subscriptions are rapidly increasing, subregional disparities emerge with Eastern Asia recording the fastest pace and South Asia the slowest (figure 41). Within countries, a digital gender divide hinders women and girls from reaping the benefits of digitalization. In most countries with available data in Asia-Pacific, fewer women than men use the Internet with a wider gender gap in Bangladesh (figure 42). While women's participation in the technology sector is essential to build gender-responsive products and services, the gender disparity in the region is noticeable. For example, for every five men with coding abilities, only three women possess the same skills across selected countries. Notably, in most Asia-Pacific economies, less than 2 per cent of women have coding skills, with the exception of Macao SAR, China; Malaysia; the Republic of Korea; and Singapore.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, digitalization in the world of work relies on a multitude of non-standard forms of employment, and this may exacerbate existing challenges for women, such as pre-existing high levels of informal employment, and compound women's economic exclusion through the digital gender divide.

As the global economy continues to evolve, it is increasingly important for women to access and participate in a wide range of employment opportunities. These opportunities require skills that range from basic digital fluency to advanced technical skills in fields such as STEM, as well as information and communications technology (ICT). Despite the digital gender divide, improvements in the past few decades in educational outcomes for women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region, including in STEM and ICT programmes, have prepared them for a change in the structure of labour markets. In countries with available data, the gender gap for women is less severe in entrepreneurial digital skills, such as online purchasing and content uploading, compared to computer programming languages (figure 43). Leveraging the power of science and technology to promote entrepreneurship and economic empowerment in the evolving landscape of the digital economy and ensuring women's access throughout their lifetime to digital resources, skill enhancement opportunities and meaningful employment are essential for harnessing the full potential of digital transitions and calls for tackling longstanding structural drivers of gender inequality in the world of work.



**FIGURE 41.**

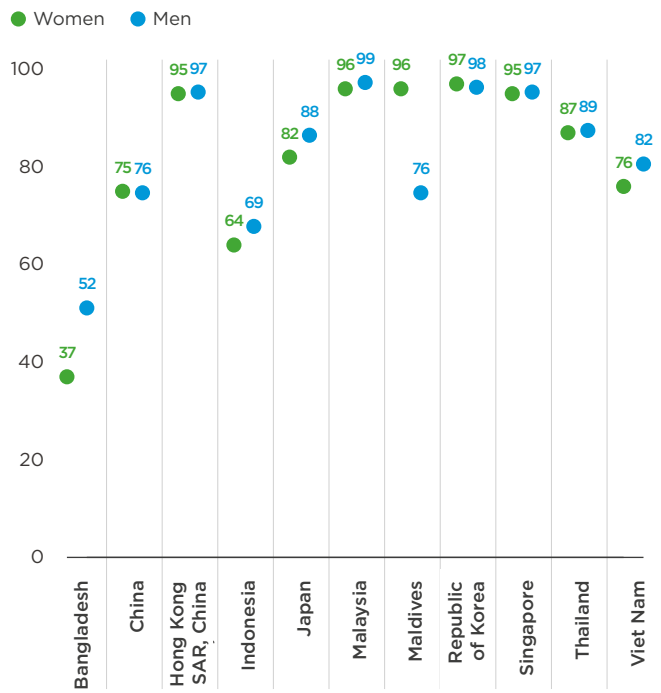
**Fixed broadband subscriptions, by subregion (per 100 inhabitants)**



**Note:** In this graph, Oceania includes Australia and New Zealand.  
**Source:** SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 42.**

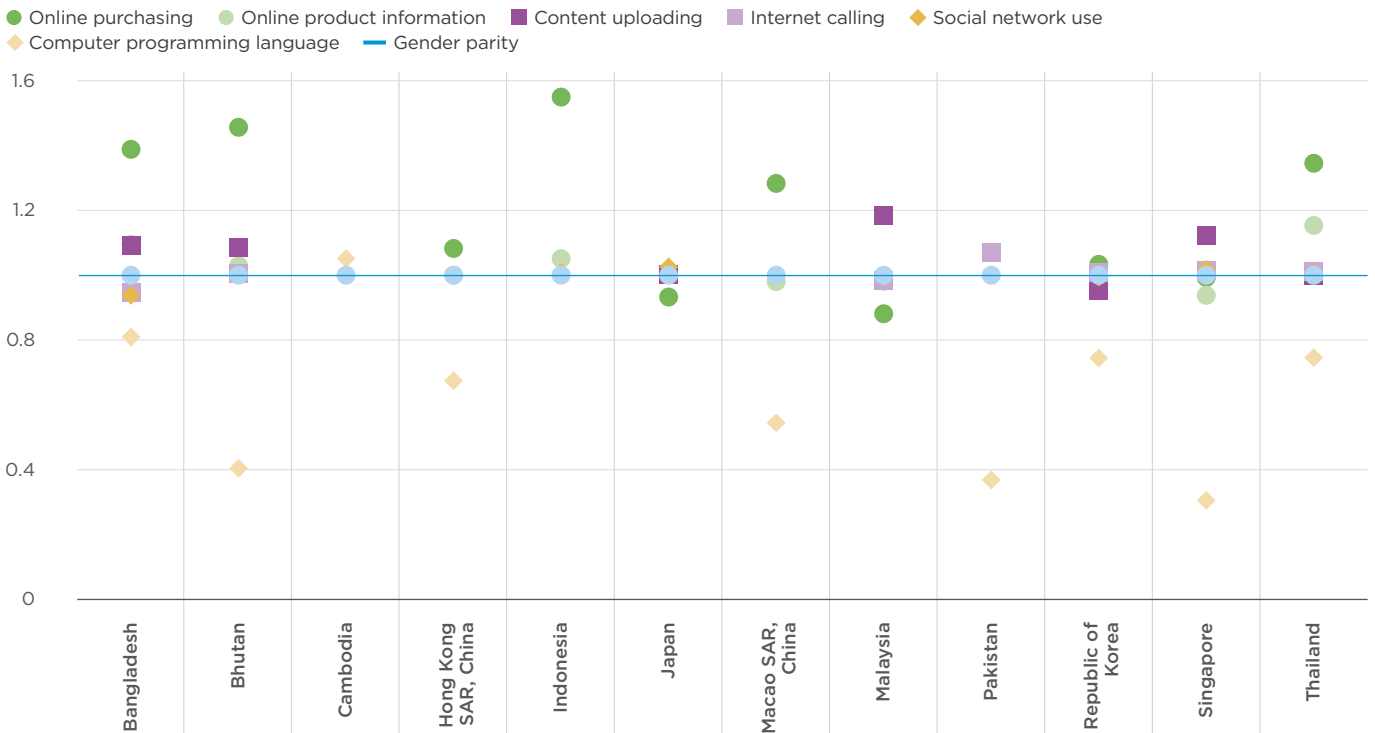
**Proportion of individuals using the Internet, by sex, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** Data for Bangladesh and Indonesia refer to people aged 5+; data for China, Japan, Thailand and Viet Nam refer to people aged 6+; data for Hong Kong SAR, China refer to people aged 10+; data for Malaysia and Maldives refer to people aged 15+; data for the Republic of Korea and Singapore refer to people aged 16–74.  
**Source:** SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 43.**

**Gender parity index for ICT skills, by skill, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** The gender parity index for ICT skills represents the ratio of the indicator value for women and girls to that of men and boys. A value of one indicates gender parity while the further from one the parity index lies, the greater the gender disparity.  
**Source:** SDG Global Database.

Digitalization in the world of work in Asia and the Pacific offers a clear case for increased investment in gender-transformative and inclusive economies and may create unprecedented opportunities for advancing WEE in both the digital and non-digital economy.<sup>68</sup> For instance, improving financial inclusion for digital connectivity provides an opportunity for economic leapfrogging.<sup>69</sup> Achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls and ensuring women’s full, equal, effective and meaningful participation and decision-making in the context of innovation and technological change and education in the digital age, is essential for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere and ensuring the well-being of all.<sup>70</sup> In the technology sector, promoting gender diversity can lead to more innovative outcomes and a broader range of ideas and solutions. Women and girls in STEM can drive technological advancements that are critical for adapting to new technologies and digital transformations in all economic sectors, including the care economy.

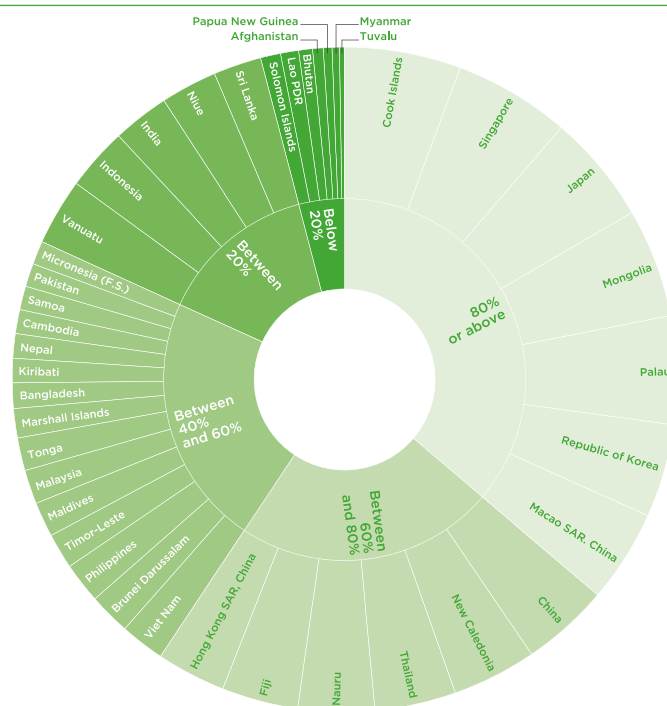
### 3.2 Accelerating gender equality in the world of work

Alongside digital connectivity, breaking the vicious cycles of informal employment and low pay through extended coverage of social protection is a paramount investment pathway to reduce poverty and gender inequality in

Asia and the Pacific. The world of work in the region is far from being inclusive of women and girls. **Asia and the Pacific is home to approximately 1.3 billion informal workers, which is approximately two thirds of the world’s informal economy.**<sup>71</sup> Among informal workers, most women continue to face significant barriers to access decent job opportunities and finance to start businesses or engage in other livelihood opportunities. The proportion of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit in the region varies greatly across countries (figure 44), and though the data are not disaggregated, women are at a disadvantage. Similarly, the proportion of total government spending on health, education and social protection varies significantly across the region (figure 45), highlighting the critical need to enhance resources that support women’s access to health care and social safety nets. These constraints not only limit their rights but also contribute to increased poverty and hinder economic prosperity at a macro level.

Discriminatory laws, policies, practices and societal norms coupled with the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work hinder women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the economy throughout their lives. According to ILO estimates in 2024, 5 per cent of women of working age were willing to work but were not looking for a job compared to 2 per cent of men. Furthermore, the jobs gap rate – measuring people who wish to be in employment regardless of whether they are currently available or searching for a job – was 9 per

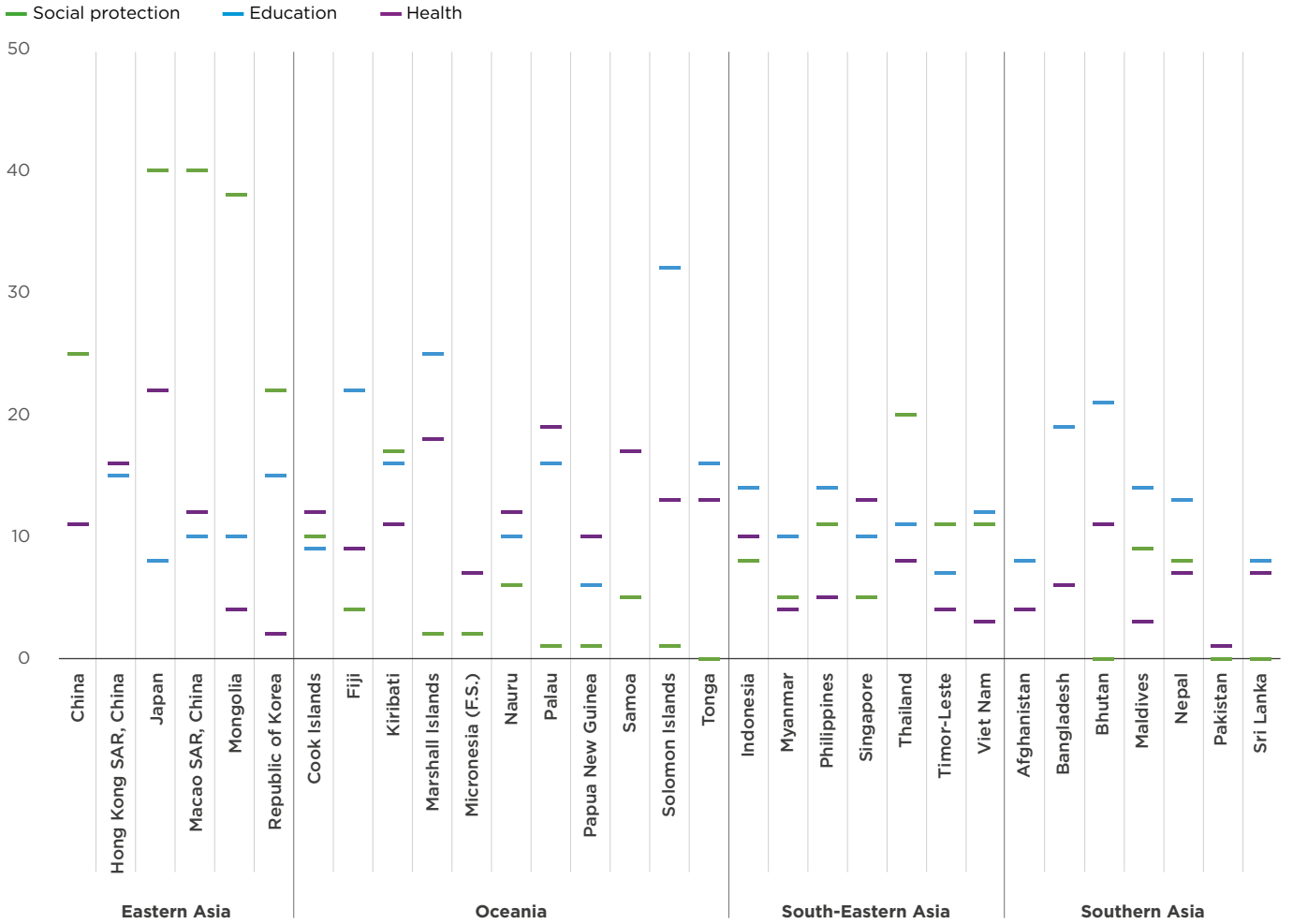
**FIGURE 44.**  
Proportion of population covered by at least one social protection benefit, latest year (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 45.**

**Proportion of total government spending on health, education and social protection, latest year (percentage)**



**Note:** For Bhutan and Viet Nam, estimates for government spending on social protection refer to 2007 and 2001, respectively. For the remaining categories, estimates refer to 2020 and 2000, respectively.  
**Source:** SDG Global Database.

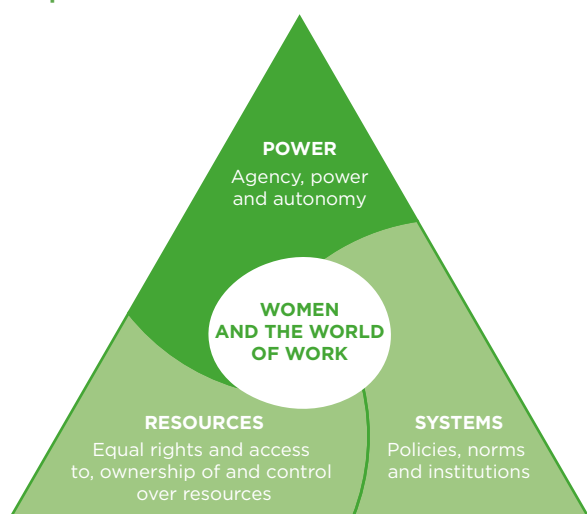
cent for women compared to 7 per cent for men. This adds to lower rates of labour force participation for women than men in all countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although most women in the Asia-Pacific region work in the informal economy where they lack basic rights and protections, women in formal employment must also overcome challenges. They often face unequal pay, inadequate working conditions and a lack of policies that support their empowerment and career advancement. In the Asia-Pacific region in 2023, a gender pay gap was greater than 5 per cent in 88 per cent of countries for health professionals, 58 per cent of countries for food processing, wood working, garment and other craft and related trades workers, 67 per cent of countries for personal care workers and 58 per cent of countries for hospitality, retail and other services managers.<sup>72</sup> These are all occupations with a strong prevalence of women’s employment.

To ensure that the economic and financial systems work ethically and inclusively, it is urgent to tackle structural barriers to gender equality in the world of work. This encompasses broadening access to the means of production by enabling women’s asset ownership, including digital assets, as well as expanding opportunities for financial inclusion and leadership. Women’s advancement in decision-making roles is critical for promoting gender-transformative workplaces, regulations and resource allocation. Decent work and entrepreneurship in the digital and non-digital economy are essential for societies to achieve the SDGs and enable women to generate sustainable income and wealth. When women entrepreneurs thrive, they not only create employment opportunities and economic growth, but also have a positive impact on the overall economy.<sup>73</sup> Entrepreneurship and decent work, including social protection, are crucial foundations for economic empowerment, justice and the realization of human rights and economic rights for all.

### 3.3 Systemic inequalities in the world of work

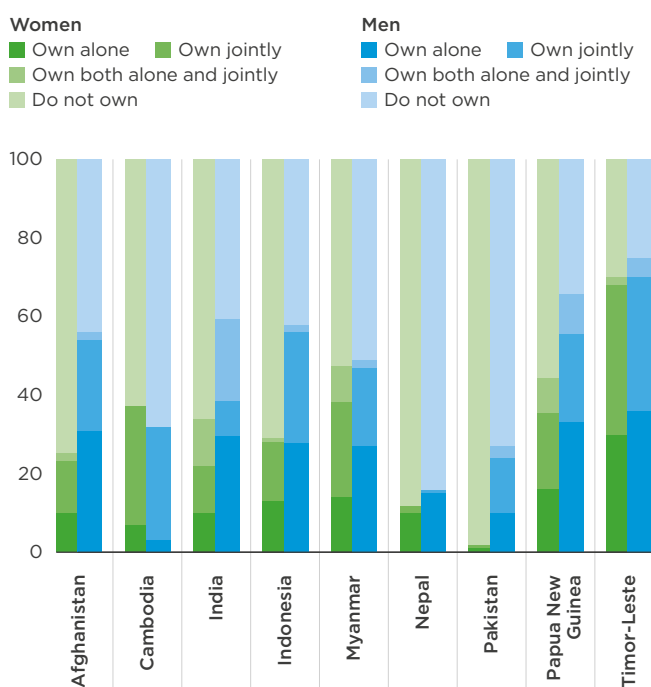
#### 3.3.1 Access to and control over productive assets



Equal access to and control over productive assets, such as land, housing, financial resources and other forms of wealth, provide women with greater bargaining power within the household and in society at large.<sup>74,75</sup> In contrast, the lack of asset ownership perpetuates cycles

of inequality, hinders autonomy in decision-making and limits entrepreneurial opportunities for women to access credit and loans, as women usually have fewer collateral options. Available data for selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region show that, except for Cambodia, more men than women have exclusive ownership rights to land or a house (figure 46 and figure 47). Ownership of assets such as land and housing can offer women income-generating opportunities, including farming, renting, or engaging in business activities. When women lack these assets and economic independence, they often depend on others for financial support. Asset ownership strengthens women’s bargaining power within households with positive implications for both present and future generations. Women who own assets, including financial assets, such as bank deposits, shares, equity in unincorporated enterprises and pension fund entitlements, are more likely to have a say in important family expenditure decisions, including those related to children’s education and health care.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, asset ownership has an intergenerational impact through inheritance; when women own assets they can pass them on to their children, breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering economic stability across generations, especially in those contexts affected by conflict where mortality rates are higher for men.

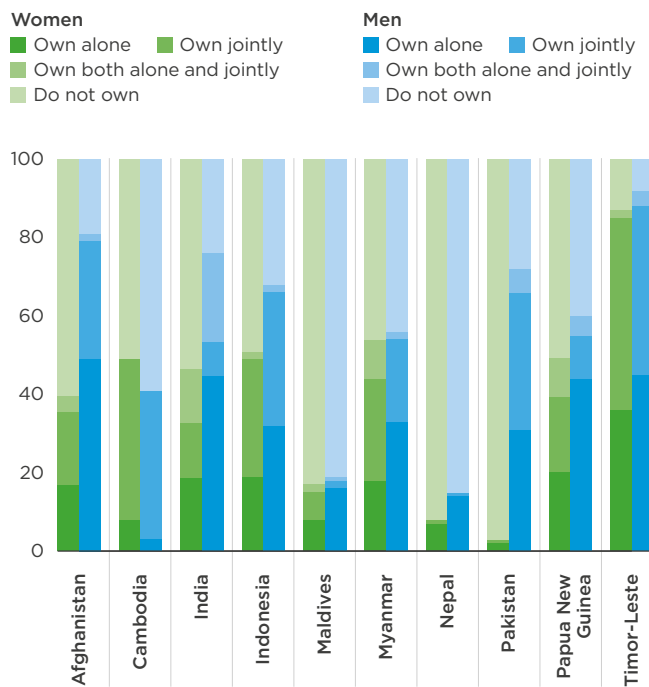
**FIGURE 46.** Proportion of people (aged 15–49) who own land, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Note: For Indonesia, estimates on land ownership refer to 2012 for women and 2017 for men.

Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

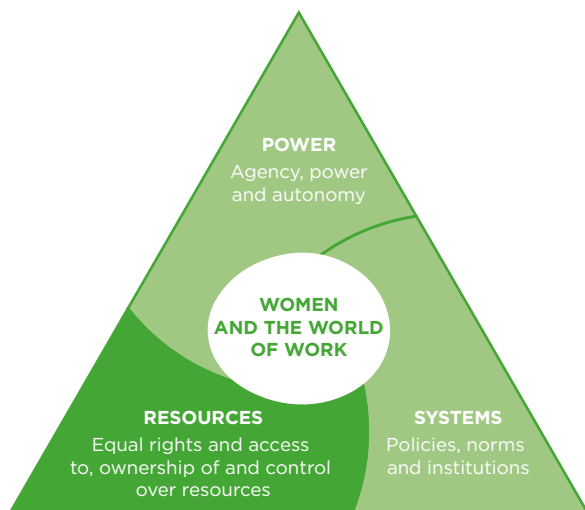
**FIGURE 47.** Proportion of people (aged 15–49) who own a house, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Note: For Indonesia, estimates on house ownership refer to 2012 for women and 2017 for men.

Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

### 3.3.2 Digital and financial assets



To fully experience the advantages and tackle the challenges brought on by the rapidly growing digital economy in Asia and the Pacific, certain productive assets hold key importance, such as owning a mobile phone. Digital technology has the potential to empower women by giving them control over and access to financial services through mobile phones, debit and credit cards and other digital channels. Fostering women's financial inclusion is essential for WEE in the world of work as it enables women to manage risk, start or invest in businesses, or fund expenditures.<sup>77</sup> The advent of digital financial services, such as those utilizing mobile phones or the Internet for financial transactions, is significantly changing lives by improving access to financial services for underserved populations.<sup>78</sup> **Digital financial services can help bridge the gap in account ownership, increase women's participation in the financial system and give women the opportunity to access credit, save formally and access a diversity of financial services.**

Owning a mobile phone is a crucial prerequisite for accessing digital financial services, making gender disparities in mobile ownership a significant barrier for women.<sup>79</sup> Overall, in South Asia, 67 per cent of the population owned a mobile phone, compared to 96 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific. Despite improvements in network coverage, data from 15 countries in the Asia-Pacific region reveal that mobile phone ownership is approximately equal or lower for women compared to men. Gender disparities in mobile phone ownership persist throughout the region, with the largest gap observed in Pakistan, where only 25 per cent of women own a mobile phone compared to 65 per cent of men. Bangladesh, Indonesia and Myanmar also exhibit significant gender gaps in mobile phone ownership, with 55, 63 and 57 per cent of women, respectively, compared to 72, 73 and 68 per cent of men (figure 48). The landscape in ownership of credit and debit cards

varies across the region with smaller gender gaps in high and middle-income economies, such as China; Hong Kong SAR, China; Japan; the Republic of Korea; and Singapore.

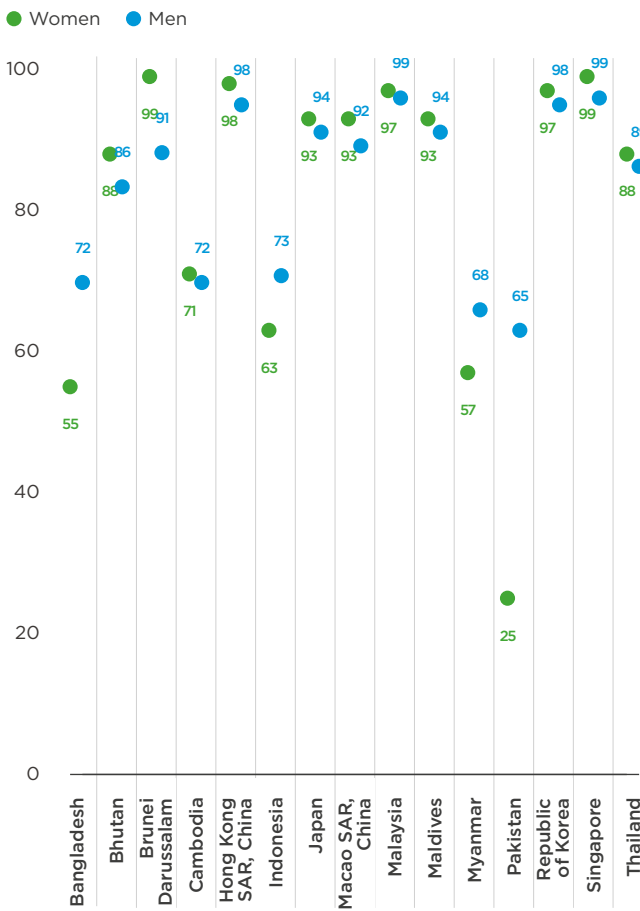
In South Asia, economies rely primarily on cash transactions rather than electronic payment methods,<sup>80</sup> and **gender gaps in ownership of financial assets are more severe, with women at a disadvantage** (figure 49). Being left behind in accessing and using digital financial services impedes women's ability to benefit from a rapidly growing digital economy and bridge the existing divide.

In 14 out of 22 countries with available data, women are less likely than men to own an account at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider. Women's access to financial institutions remains uneven across the Asia-Pacific region. Japan; Mongolia; Hong Kong SAR, China; Indonesia; and the Lao People's Democratic Republic report the highest prevalence of women accountholders. In India, the Republic of Korea and Sri Lanka gender gaps are minimal. In contrast, only 5 per cent of women in Afghanistan and 13 per cent in Pakistan own a financial account (figure 50). At the subregional level, 6 per cent of women owned an account with a mobile money service provider both in South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific compared to 17 per cent of men in South Asia and 6 per cent of men in East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>81</sup>

Gender disparities in digital financial inclusion are reflected in the usage of mobile money accounts and digital payments. In Indonesia, Malaysia and Mongolia, a slightly higher percentage of women than men used a mobile money account, but gender gaps are found in 14 other countries in the region. In South Asia, where cash transactions are prevalent, both women and men had lower percentages of mobile money account usage in the past year. However, broader gender disparities are most pronounced in these same countries. Bangladesh reported the largest gender gap, with only 20 per cent of women using mobile money accounts compared to 38 per cent of men (figure 51). Amid the digital transition, mobile money accounts present opportunities to enhance revenues and savings, bolster financial resilience, decrease transaction costs through swift and transparent systems and ultimately foster women's entrepreneurship.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, due to prevailing gender disparities, not all women can reap the advantages of the positive ripple effects brought about by digitalization. In the Asia-Pacific region more men than women leverage mobile phone technology for digital payment (figure 52). Based on data from 22 countries, only four countries have equal or higher proportions of women than men who made or received digital payments.

**FIGURE 48.**

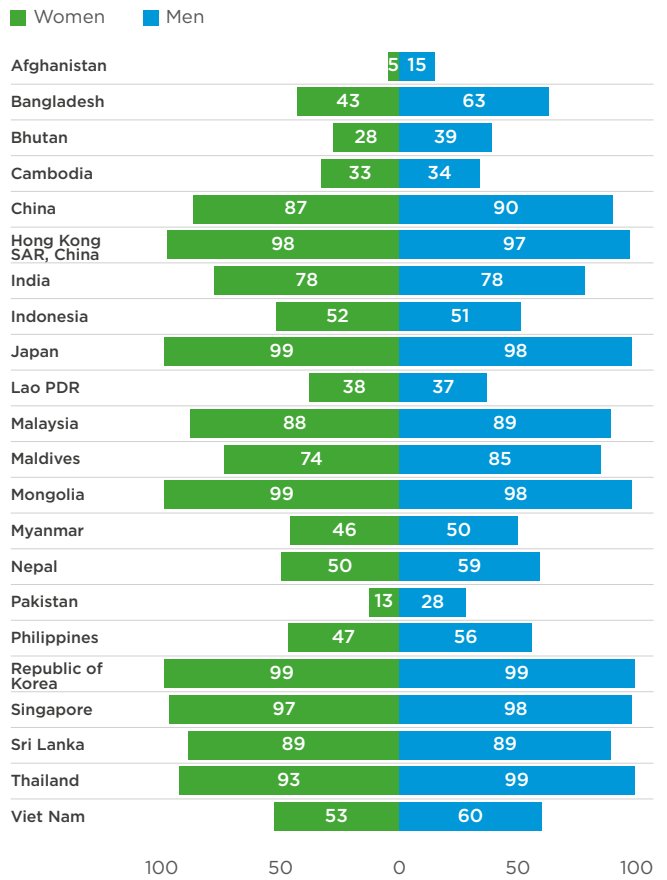
Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 50.**

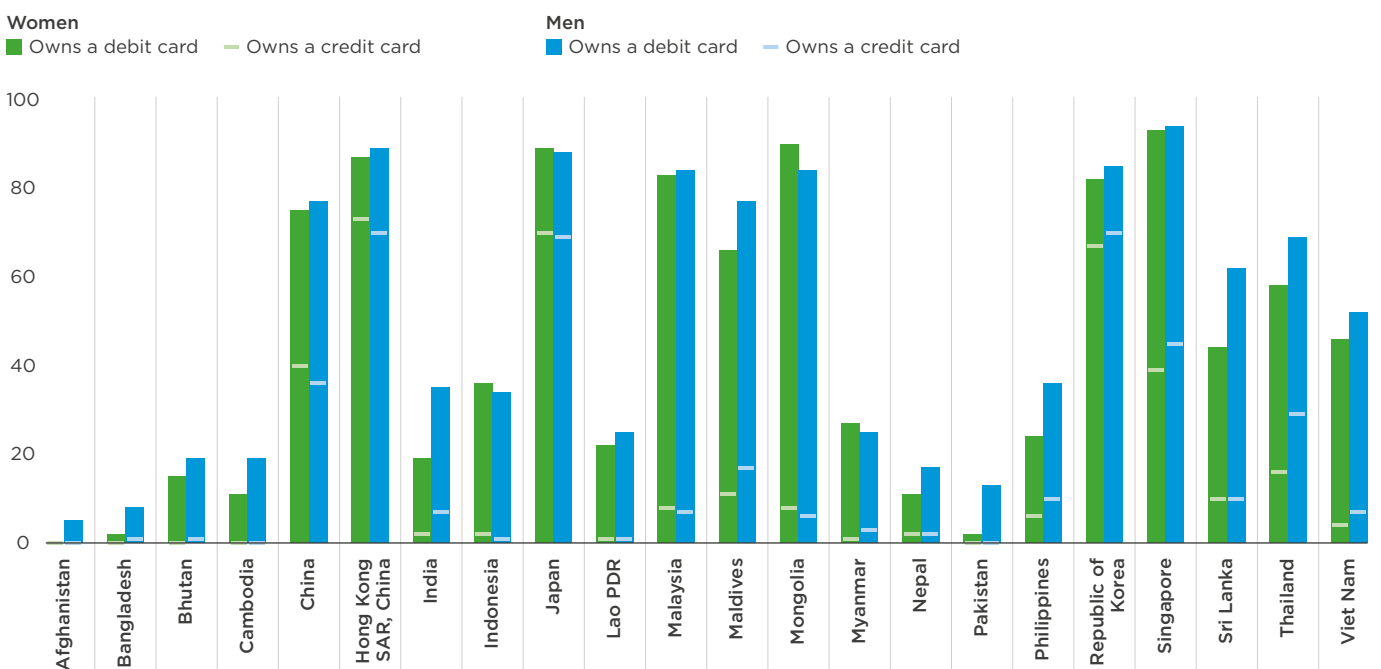
Proportion of people (aged 15+) who own an account at a financial institution or with a mobile money service provider, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 49.**

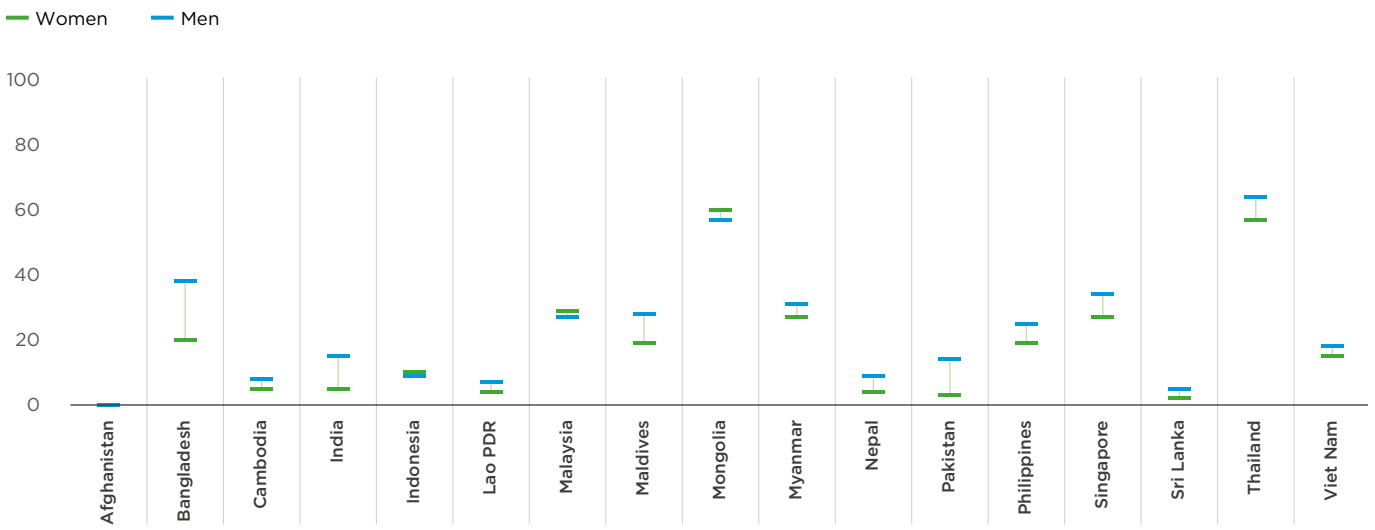
Proportion of population (aged 15+) who own credit and debit card, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 51.**

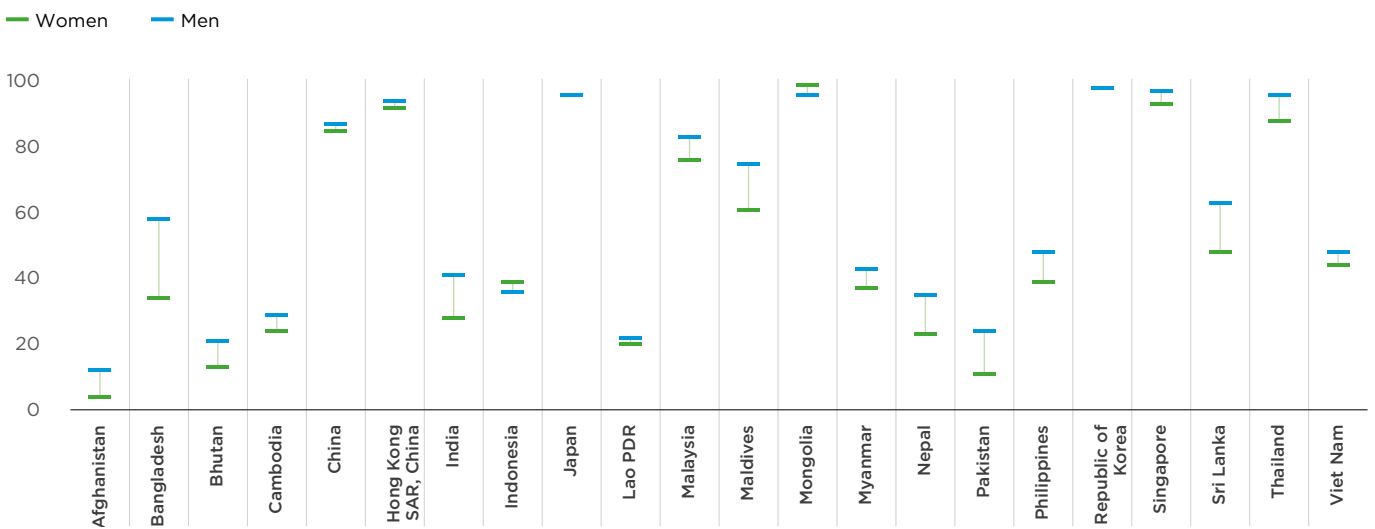
Proportion of population (aged 15+) who used a mobile money account in the past year, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 52.**

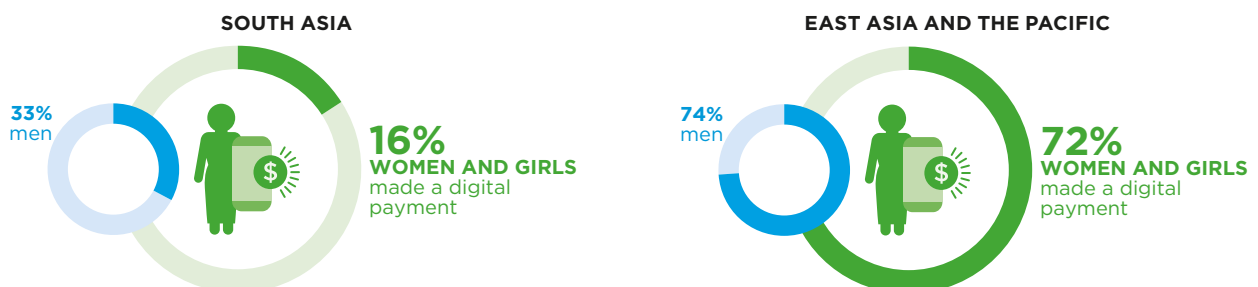
Proportion of population (aged 15+) who made or received a digital payment in the past year, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**INFOGRAPHIC 6**

WOMEN'S CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING AND UTILIZING FINANCIAL SERVICES FURTHER **LIMIT THEIR ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES.**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 53.**

Proportion of people (aged 15+) who borrowed any money from a formal financial institution or using a mobile money account, by sex, latest year (percentage)

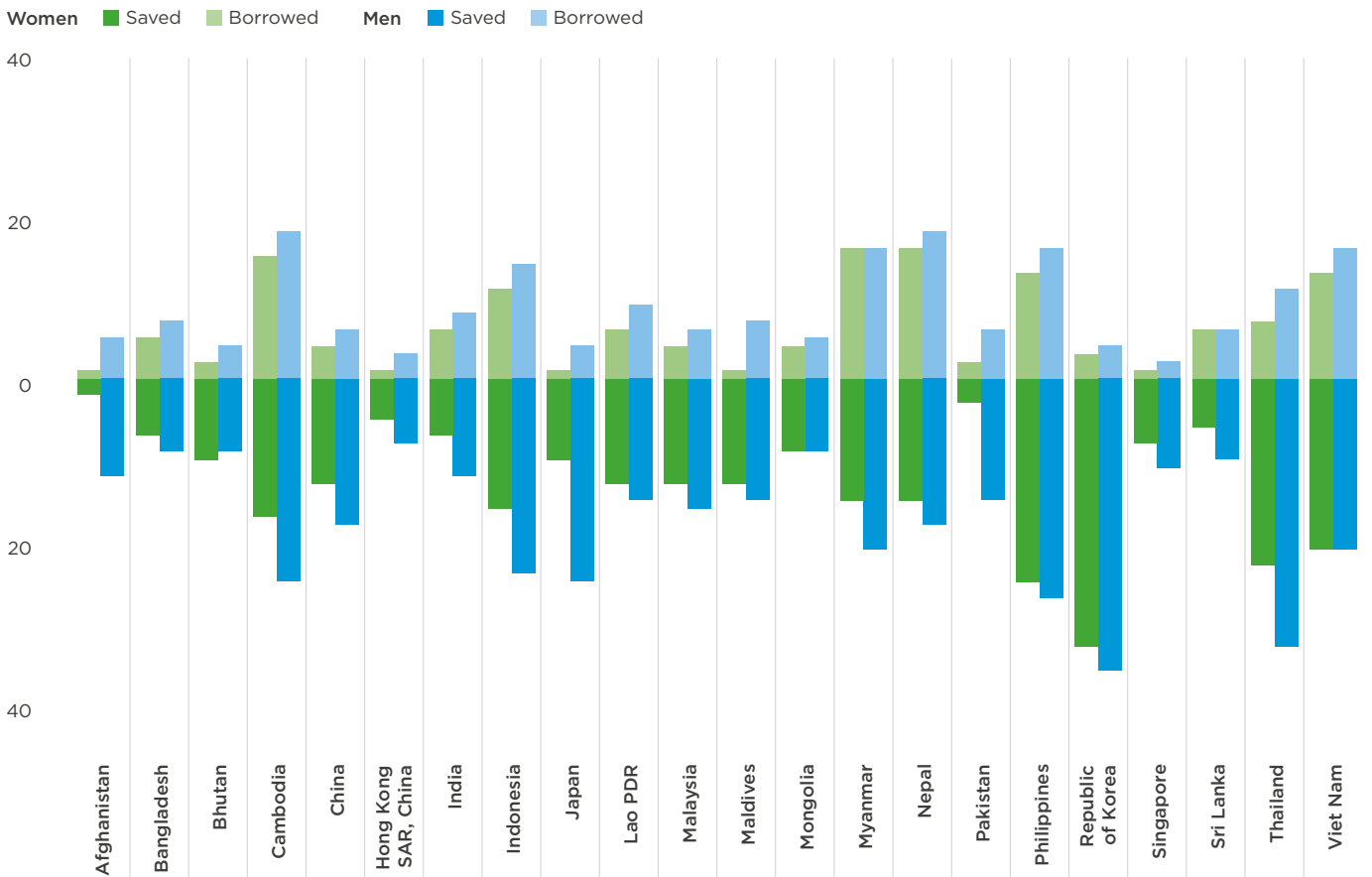


Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.



**FIGURE 54.**

Proportion of people (aged 15+) who borrowed and saved to start, operate, or expand a farm or business, by sex, latest year (percentage)

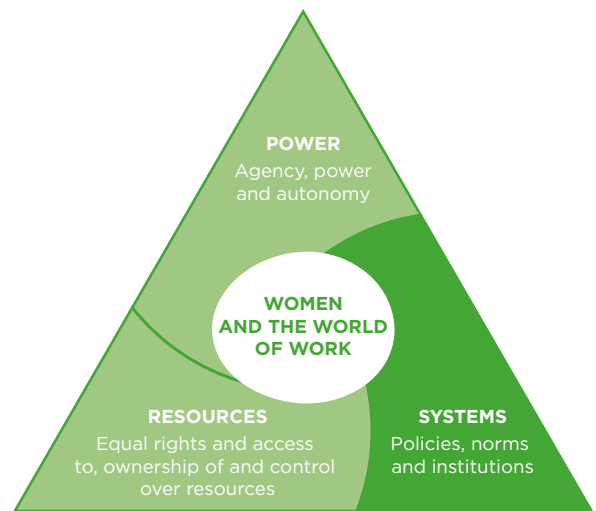


Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

Gender gaps in asset ownership result in women having less collateral to secure loans and other forms of credit. This ultimately restricts their ability to start businesses or invest in economic activities. In the Asia-Pacific region, 13 out of 20 countries with available data show clear gender disparities in borrowing whether from financial institutions (bank or other), credit card, or mobile money services. The largest gender gaps are found in Thailand and the Republic of Korea where only 24 per cent and 64 per cent of women borrowed, respectively, compared to 37 per cent and 73 per cent of men (figure 53).

Gender gaps are evident where saving or borrowing is intended to support entrepreneurial endeavours. The Republic of Korea has the highest percentage of women saving to start, operate, or expand a business (33 per cent). However, a higher percentage of men (36 per cent) save for business activities. The lowest percentages are in Afghanistan where only 2 per cent of women save for these business activities compared to 12 per cent of men. Similarly, in Pakistan, only 3 per cent of women save for business purposes compared to 15 per cent of men (figure 54).

### 3.3.3 Gender-blind systems and institutions in the world of work



Systems and institutions are crucial in promoting gender equality and creating a level playing field for both women and men in the economy. Countries that implement policies that support WEE experience higher rates of women’s labour force participation and a reduction in vulnerable

employment.<sup>83</sup> These countries have increased the representation of women in national parliaments. For such benefits to materialize across the Asia-Pacific region, more inclusive leadership is needed. Progress in developing gender-responsive systems and institutions that advance WEE in the Asia-Pacific region is hindered by discriminatory norms that limit opportunities for women to equally and fully participate in the world of work, including in leadership roles.

## Political participation

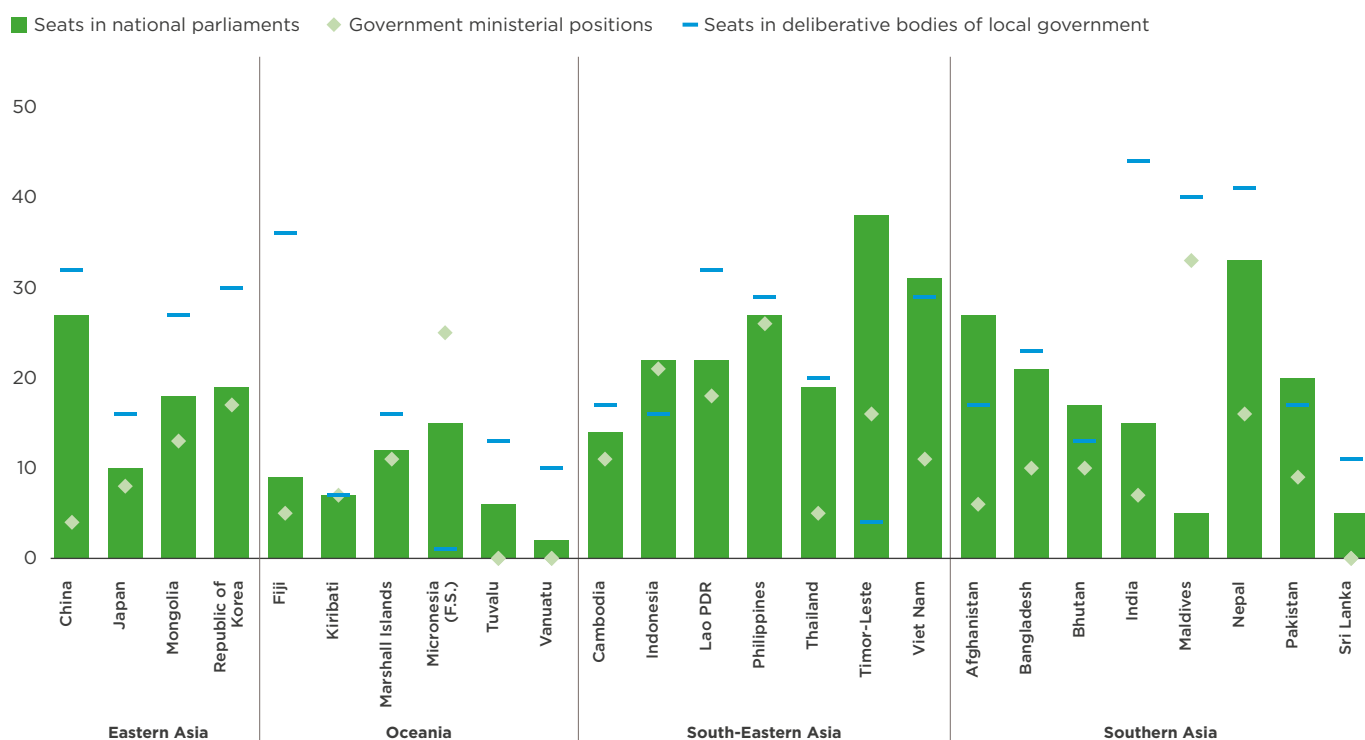
Legislative bodies, which are often responsible for making and influencing laws and decisions, play a critical role in shaping the political, economic and social trajectories of societies. To ensure that policies truly reflect the interests and amplify the voices of all groups, including women, it is imperative to have diverse representation within these bodies. This not only promotes effective governance, but also helps advance gender equality. However, in the Asia-Pacific region, political bodies continue to be male dominated. Progress towards increasing the representation of women in national parliaments has been slow, with only 7 out of 41 countries that report data having more than 25 per cent of seats in parliament held by

women. Although women's political representation is higher at the local level than the national level, women still hold fewer decision-making roles than men in all bodies of deliberation. The proportion of women in governmental ministerial positions varies across countries in the region, ranging from 0 per cent in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, to 31 per cent in Samoa and 33 per cent in Maldives (figure 55). Institutional reforms and policies are also needed to ensure that political institutions are safe places for women.<sup>84</sup>

Chairs of permanent committees continue to be predominantly occupied by men in the region, and there is persistent gender segregation in the allocation of portfolios. Women are more likely to chair permanent committees that focus on gender equality and remain significantly underrepresented in traditionally male-dominated areas such as foreign affairs and finance. Among the 30 countries with available data, only 5 (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu) have a woman chair for a permanent committee on finance or foreign affairs. This further restricts the influence of women in crucial policy domains and reflects gendered occupational segregation (figure 56).

**FIGURE 55.**

**Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and deliberative bodies of local government and women's share of government ministerial positions, latest year (percentage)**

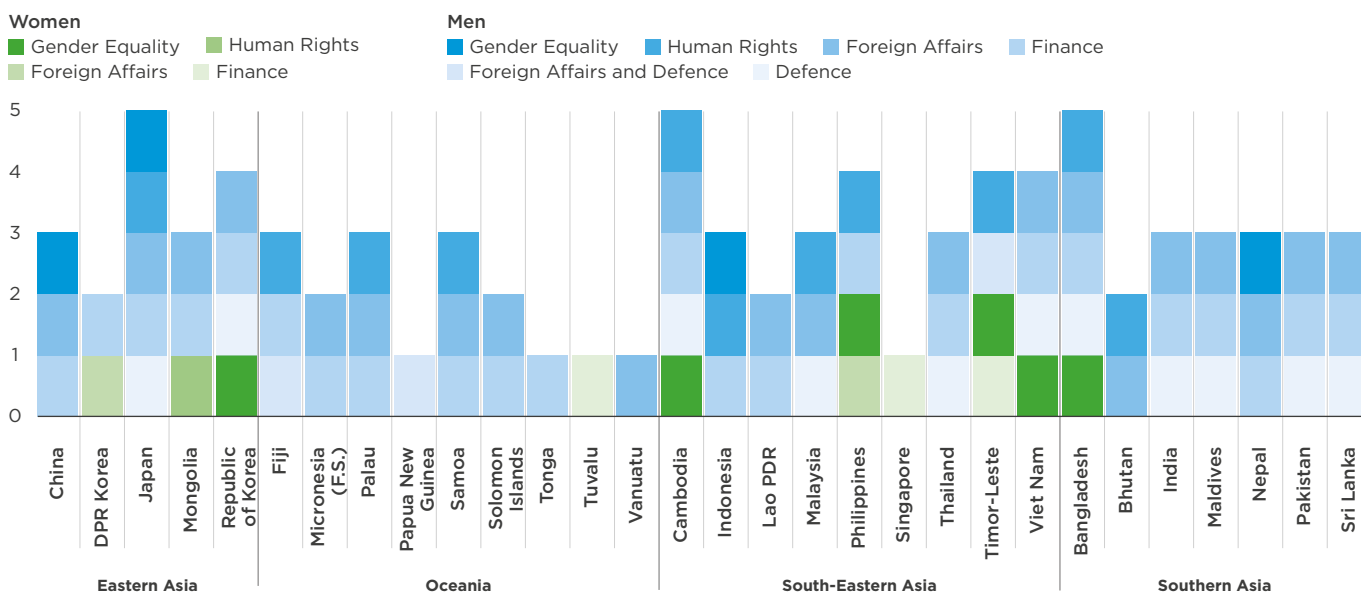


Note: The latest available year per country differs among the three series.

Source: SDG Global Database (proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and deliberative bodies of local government) and UN DESA Gender Data Hub (women's share of government ministerial positions).

**FIGURE 56.**

**Number of chairs (people aged 46+) of permanent committees (Lower Chamber or Unicameral), by sex and focus of the committee, latest year (number)**



Source: SDG Global Database.

Promoting women’s voice in political decision-making necessitates the establishment of robust legal frameworks that enhance women’s access to political institutions. Legislative candidate quotas and reserved seats can contribute to progress in increasing the representation of women in government, although the impact may not always be immediate or as significant as anticipated.<sup>85</sup>

**In the Asia-Pacific region, 25 out of 36 countries with available data do not have gender quotas for parliament,** including legislative candidate quotas and/or reserved seats. Countries in the region that have implemented quotas generally exhibit higher rates of women’s representation in parliament. For instance, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, which have enacted legislative candidate quotas, boast the highest proportions of seats held by women in their national parliaments (33, 38, and 39 per cent, respectively) (figures 55 and 57). Nevertheless, quotas alone are insufficient. To amplify women’s voices, legal frameworks and policies must also address discriminatory social norms and gendered dynamics prevalent in society at large. Inclusive and gender-sensitive decision-making and oversight – notably around issues such as care – is the responsibility of all decision-makers, women and men, alike. Practices such as gender mainstreaming in laws and policies and gender-responsive budgeting are needed. It is also critical for political institutions to maintain constructive feedback loops and consultative mechanisms with women’s groups and civil society representing the needs and interests of diverse groups, such as women with disabilities.

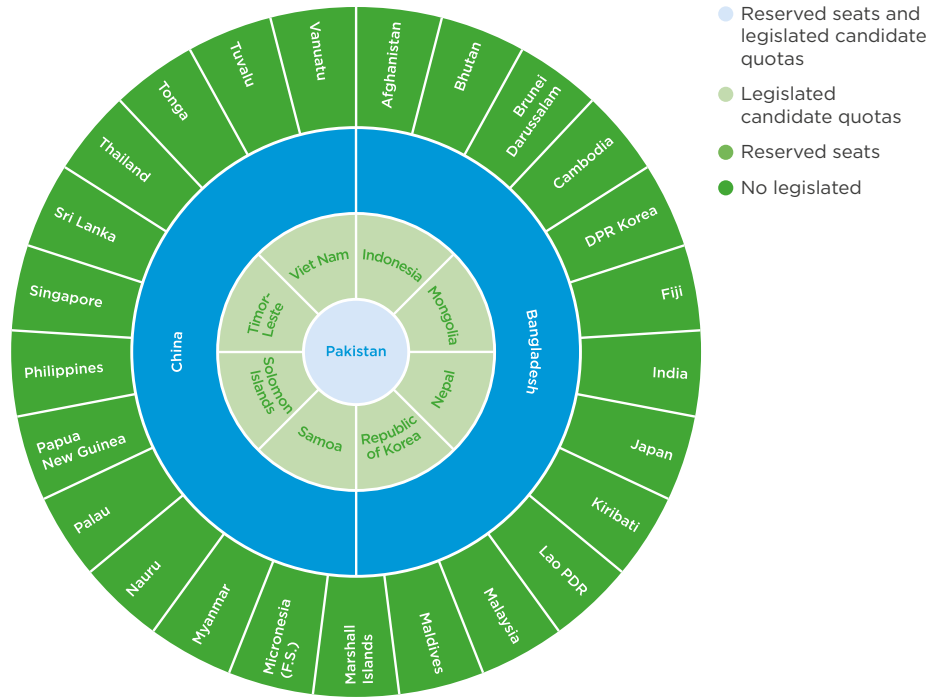
### Inheritance laws and property rights

Gender-blind inheritance law and property rights (asset ownership) act as a structural driver of gender inequality and disempowerment.<sup>86</sup> In Asia and the Pacific, 7 out of 34 countries with available data lack legal provisions guaranteeing equal administrative authority over assets during marriage (figure 58). Furthermore, persistent gender biases in inheritance laws, particularly in South Asia and Oceania, continue to significantly contribute to gender disparities. Out of 34 countries with data, 10 do not guarantee equal inheritance rights for widows and daughters (figure 59). It is crucial to secure women’s rights to productive assets to improve their overall well-being, reduce vulnerability to domestic violence, empower them within their families and communities and enhance their ability to engage in the economy.

Loans and credit can be instrumental in helping women to acquire productive assets. However, women often face difficulties accessing financial institutions and services due to the requirement of land and property as collateral.<sup>87</sup> Across Asia and the Pacific, of the 35 countries with available data, only 10 have laws that prohibit gender-based discrimination in access to credit (figure 60). Eliminating such discrimination can help to create an enabling environment for women’s entrepreneurship to thrive and contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.

**FIGURE 57.**

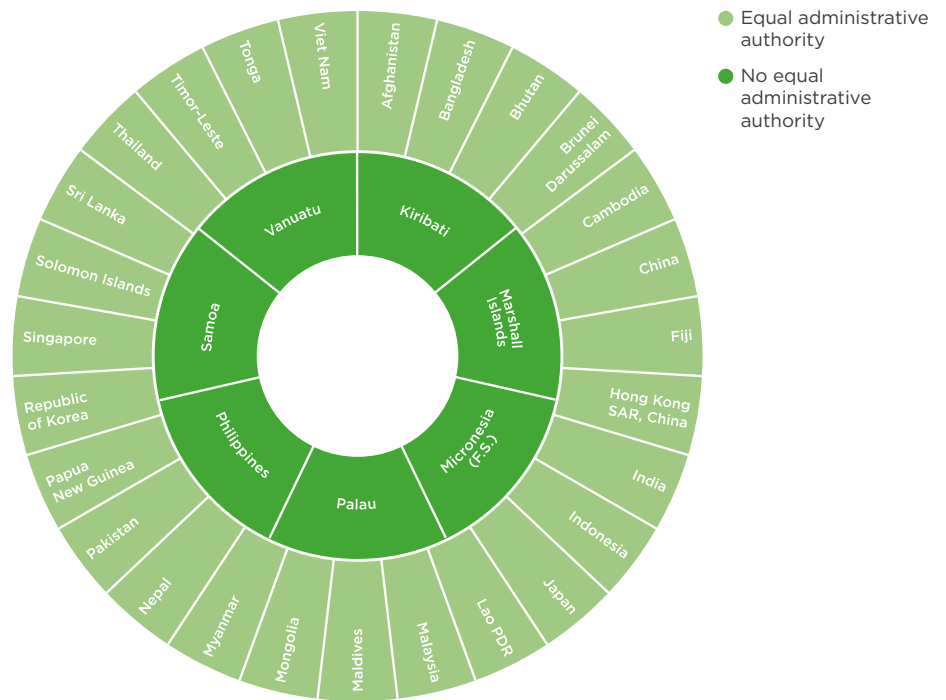
Presence of a gender quota for parliament (reserved seats and legislated candidate quotas), latest year



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 58.**

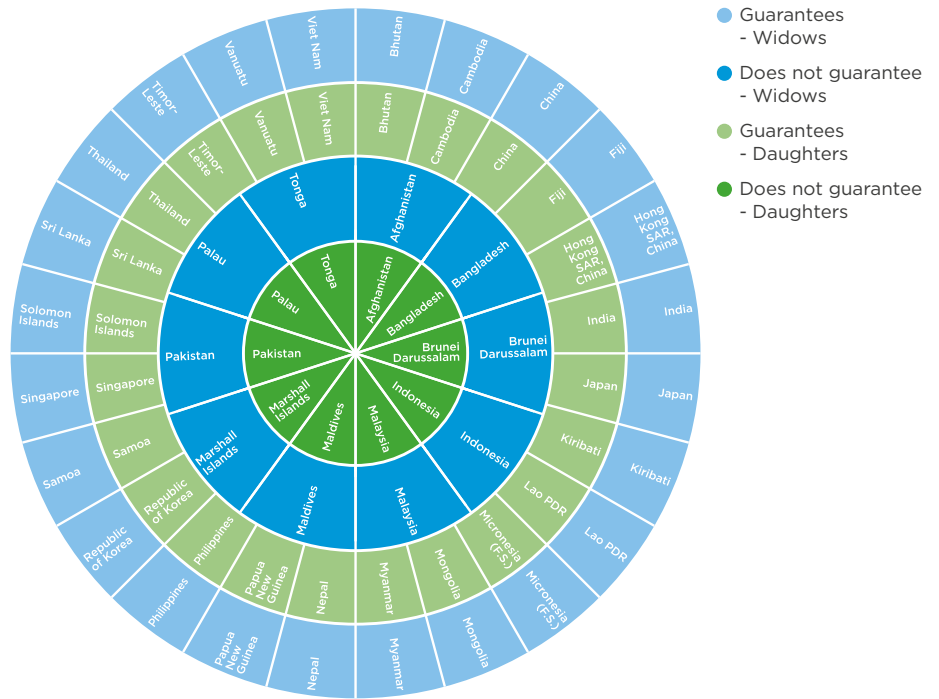
The law grants spouses equal administrative authority over assets during marriage, latest year



Source: World Bank Gender Portal.

**FIGURE 59.**

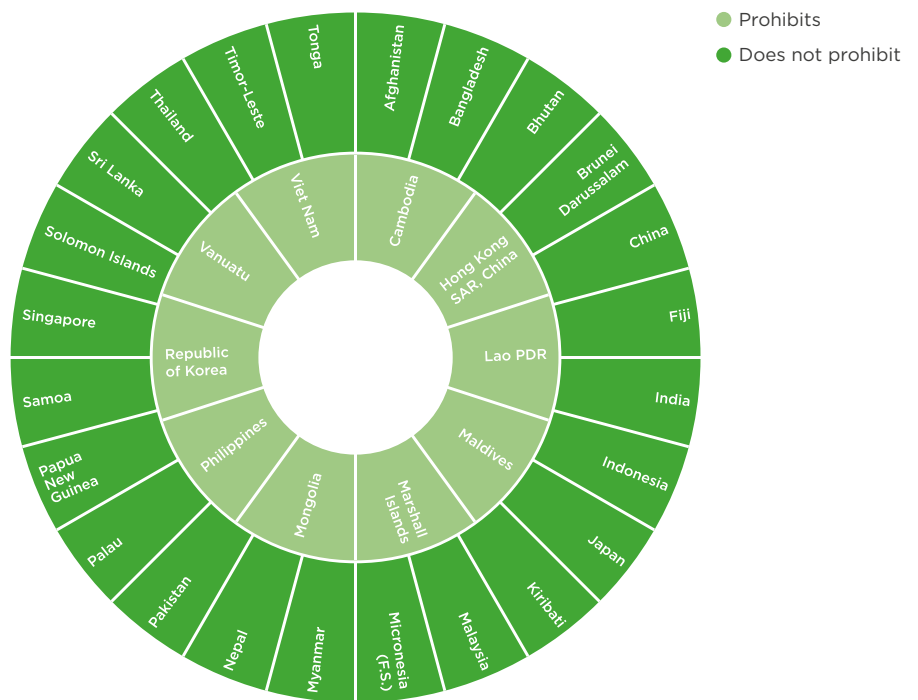
The law guarantees the same inheritance rights of men and boys to women and girls, latest year



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 60.**

The law prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender, latest year



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

## Legal frameworks for gender equality in employment

Improving women’s working conditions and compensation through gender-transformative legal frameworks is key to address economic inequalities, empower women and promote economic rights for all. This is crucial not only to close gender gaps, support women’s participation in the labour market and enhance their income security, but also to improve labour market outcomes and human capital.<sup>88</sup> Data on legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality in employment in the Asia-Pacific region show that only 2 out of 16 countries – the Philippines and Viet Nam – have achieved the target with a score of 100 per cent.<sup>89</sup> Most countries in the region are far or very far from reaching the target, with scores lower than 65 per cent (figure 61).

Slow progress in gender-transformative legal frameworks on employment illustrates the gaps that remain in implementation and enforcement of labour standards. In Asia and the Pacific, many countries ratified the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) (figure 62 and figure 63). Nevertheless, national laws mandating equal remuneration for work of equal value and prohibiting discrimination in employment based on gender are not uniformly in place. Across 34 countries in the Asia-Pacific region with available data, only 9 have mandated equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value (figure 64) and 12 do not prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender (figure 65). Furthermore, policy implementation gaps remain. For

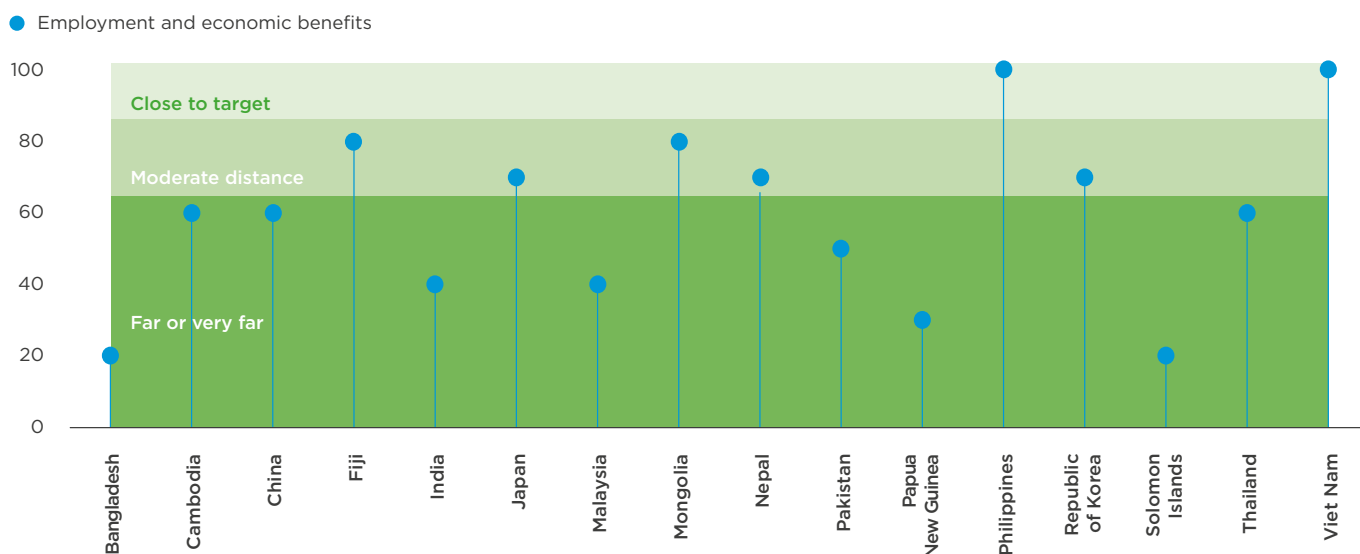
example, although regulations on equal remunerations are in place, gender pay gaps persist across the region alongside a lack of transparency.<sup>90</sup>

Gender-responsive youth employment strategies must respond to structural drivers of gender inequality that affect women’s lifecycle (see section 2). National strategies for youth employment must be developed and operationalized, either as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy, to address gender disparities in the labour market at the onset.

The World Bank report on Women, Business and the Law identifies laws that restrict women’s economic inclusion throughout their lives and careers by utilizing eight indicators: workplace, pay, assets, entrepreneurship, parenthood, mobility, marriage and pension.<sup>91</sup> The framework underscores significant regional disparities. Countries in Eastern Asia show relatively high scores across most indicators, with economies like Hong Kong SAR, China and the Republic of Korea showing the highest scores.<sup>92</sup> However, many countries still lag behind in providing equal pay for women. Countries in South-eastern Asia display greater variance, ranging from Viet Nam, which scores moderately high across most indicators, to Brunei Darussalam, which highlights the need of improvement across several areas. In contrast, indicators scores in countries in Oceania and Southern Asia indicate significant gaps in laws governing gender equality across most areas. This is particularly evident in the area of parenthood, indicating the critical need for legal and policy interventions to ensure adequate protection and benefits for women of reproductive age (figure 67).

**FIGURE 61.**

### Legal frameworks that promote, enforce and monitor gender equality in employment, latest year (percentage)

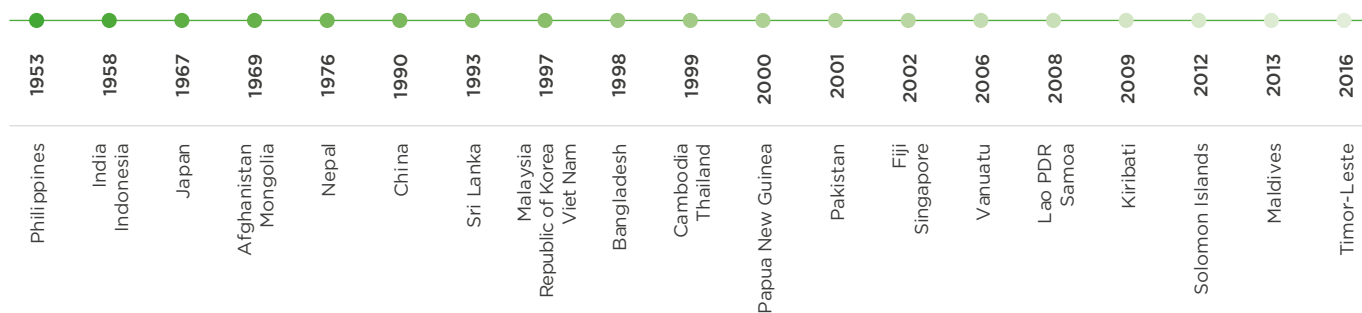


**Note:** Scores range from 0 to 100, with 100 indicating adherence to best practices across all questions. In this context, countries with a score of 85 per cent or above are considered close to the target, countries with a score between 65 and 85 per cent are considered at a moderate distance from the target, and countries with a score below 65 per cent are considered far or very far from the target.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 62.**

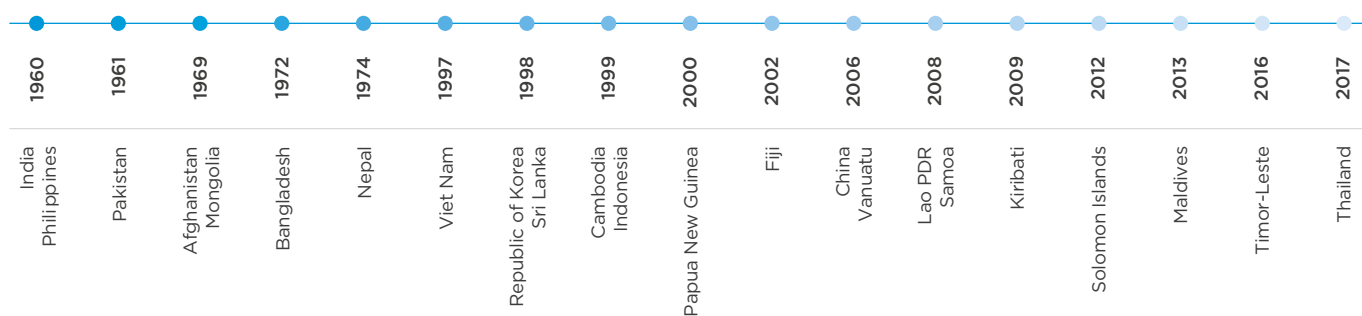
**Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration for women and men**



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 63.**

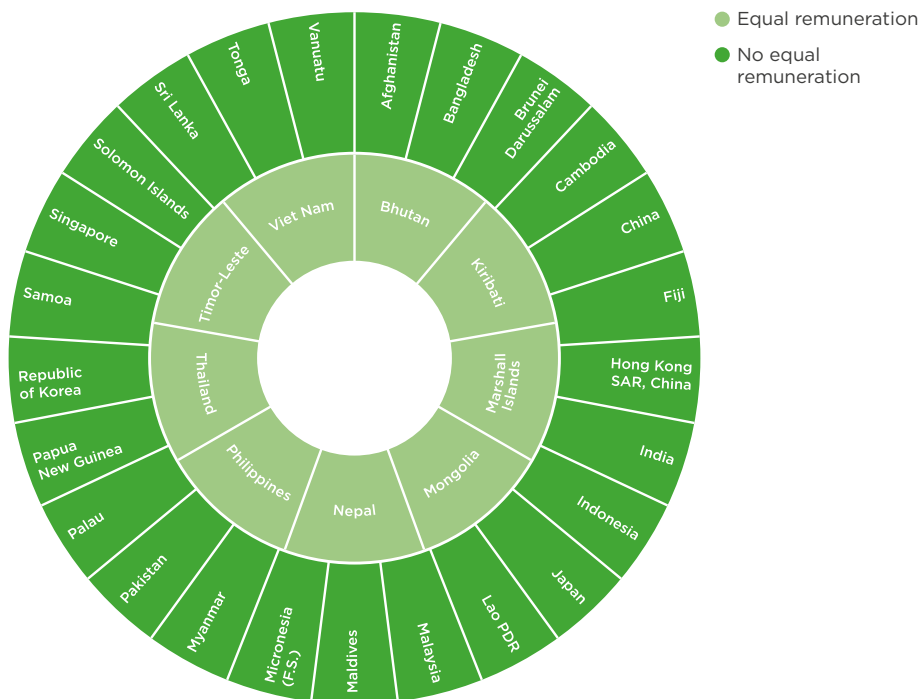
**Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 111 on discrimination in employment and occupation**



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 64.**

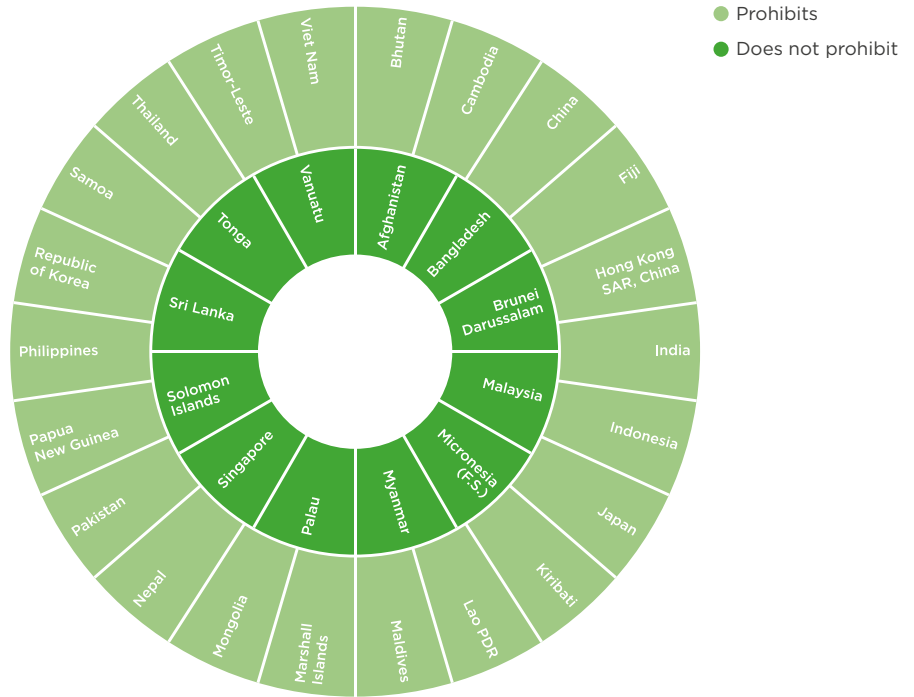
**Law mandates equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value, latest year**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 65.**

Law prohibits discrimination in employment based on gender, latest year



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**INFOGRAPHIC 7**

ADDRESSING LEGAL GAPS IS ESSENTIAL FOR FOSTERING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE WOMEN CAN THRIVE ECONOMICALLY AND HAVE THEIR ECONOMIC RIGHTS SAFEGUARDED. IN THE **ASIA-PACIFIC REGION**



**9 COUNTRIES** have mandated **EQUAL REMUNERATION** for work of equal value.

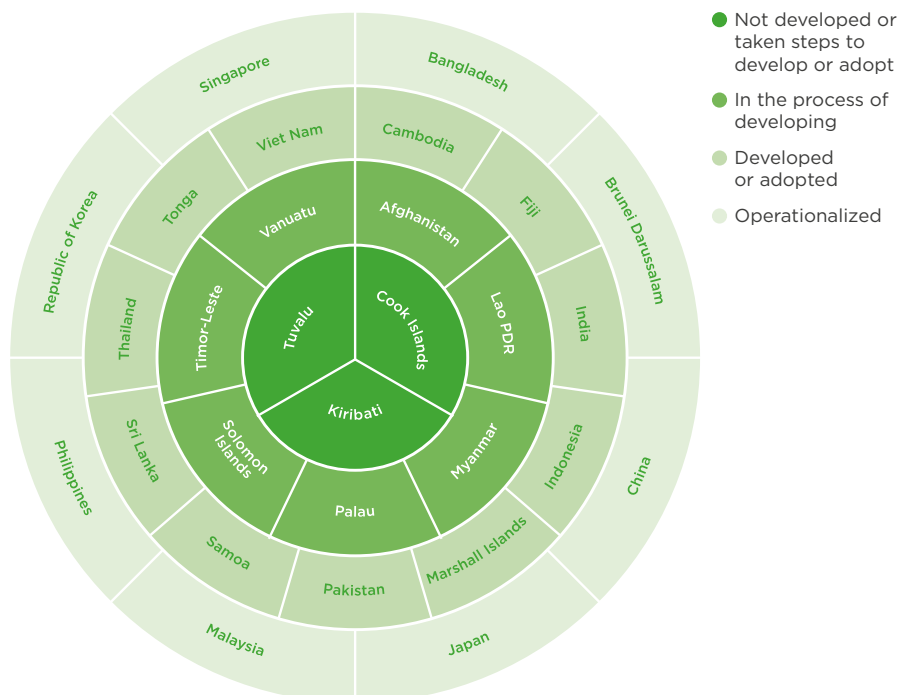


**8 COUNTRIES** have already operationalized **NATIONAL STRATEGIES** for **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT**.

Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 66.**

Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy, latest year

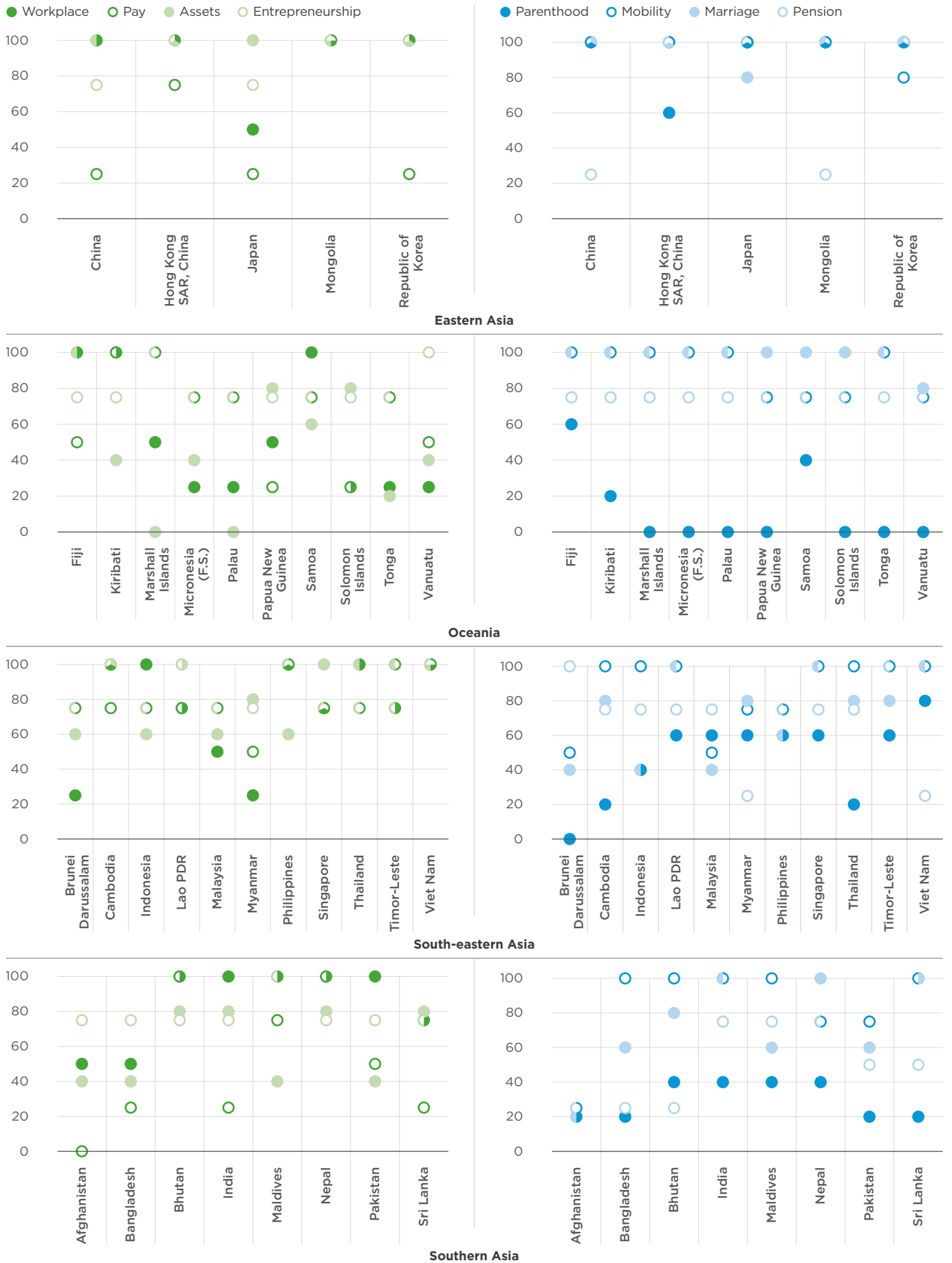


Source: SDG Global Database.



**FIGURE 67.**

**Women, business and the law indicator scores, by indicator, latest year**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

## 3.4 Inequality of opportunities in gendered labour markets

### 3.4.1 Vulnerable employment and female entrepreneurship

Structural drivers of gender equality, such as the economic and societal reliance on women’s unpaid care work coupled with gender-blind systems and institutions and limited economic rights, lead to severe inequality of opportunities for women in the labour market. Inequality of opportunities result in low rates of women’s labour market participation. To date, there remains significant untapped potential in the economies of the Asia-Pacific region, as women’s participation in the labour force consistently lags behind that of men in all countries with available data (figure 68). In 2022, 30 per cent of women participated in the labour force in South Asia compared to 79 per cent of men. Gender gaps were less severe in Eastern Asia and the Pacific with 67 per cent of women participating in the labour force compared to 81 per cent of men.<sup>93</sup>

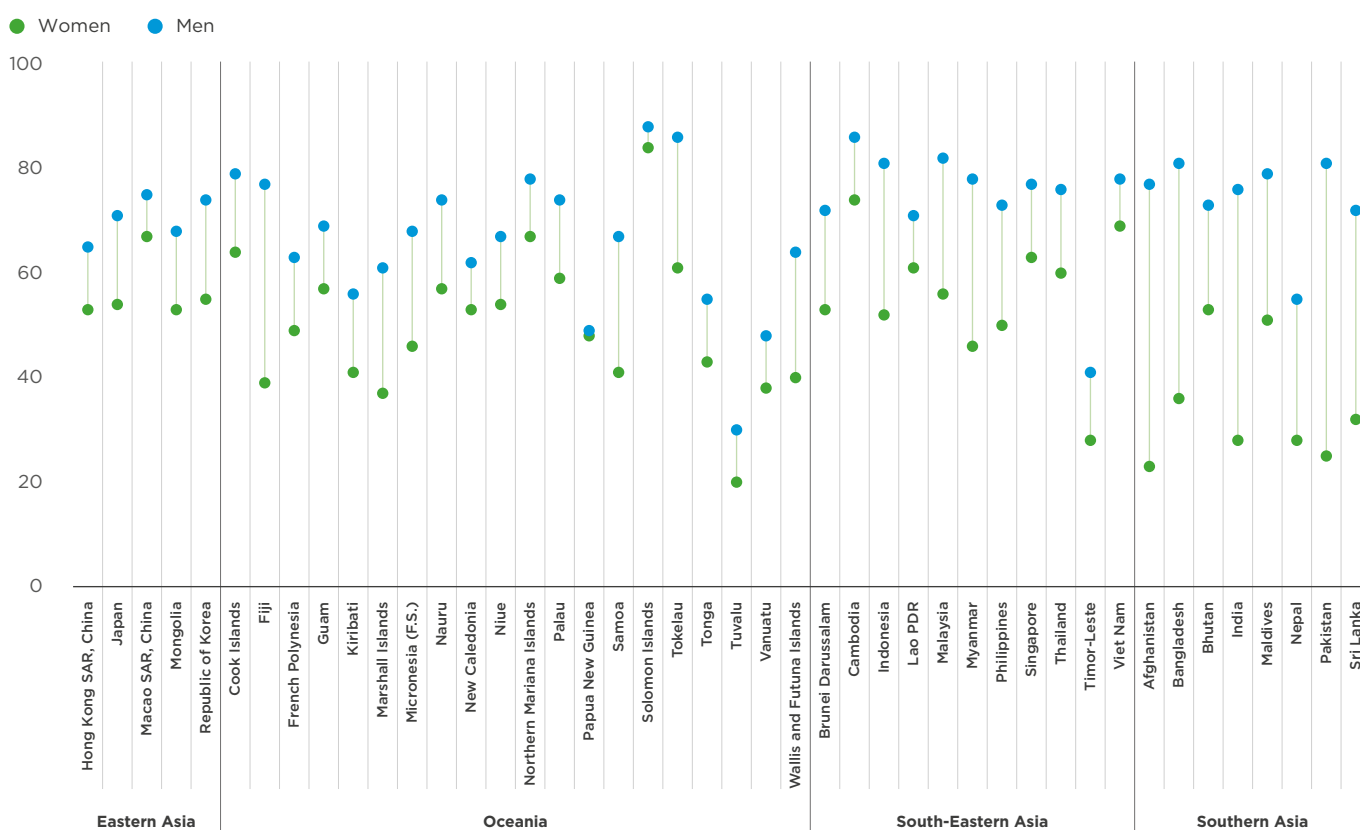
Even though there are fewer women employed or actively seeking jobs compared to men in all countries in the region, a higher proportion of women are engaged in vulnerable

employment. Vulnerable employment, which includes self-employed workers and contributing family workers, is characterized by low job security, inadequate income and limited social protection. The gender disparities in vulnerable employment are particularly evident in 17 out of 22 countries in Asia with largest disparities in Bhutan, Pakistan and Timor-Leste (figure 70). Considering that a significant proportion of contributing family workers and own account workers are women, the reliance of the digital economy on non-standard forms of employment may exacerbate decent work deficits for women.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to heavy unpaid care workload, women in vulnerable employment often lack the resources and opportunities to transition into more stable and profitable entrepreneurial roles or other employment opportunities. Even if they do make this transition, women are less likely to have access to various financial services, including credit and loans (see section 3.3.2). Consequently, women-owned businesses often rely more on self-financing, which makes them more vulnerable to economic shocks.<sup>95</sup> Access to and control over productive assets as well as traditional and digital finance are crucial factors in driving women’s entrepreneurship, which is an important avenue for women’s empowerment and financial agency.<sup>96</sup>

FIGURE 68.

Labour force participation rate (people aged 15+, by sex, latest year (percentage)



Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

## BOX 4:

### Women migrant workers in the Asia-Pacific region

The migration of women in search of higher-paying jobs abroad to support themselves and their families has increasingly become a permanent aspect of international migration. Gender data reveal that the proportion of women from the Asia-Pacific region varies across subregions. In Southeast Asia, women constitute nearly half of all migrant workers.<sup>a</sup> However, in South Asia, the number of women migrant workers varies significantly among countries. For instance, women accounted for 19 per cent of all Nepalese migrant workers in 2021, whereas in Pakistani women migrant workers represented less than 1 per cent of all migration from Pakistan.<sup>b,c</sup>

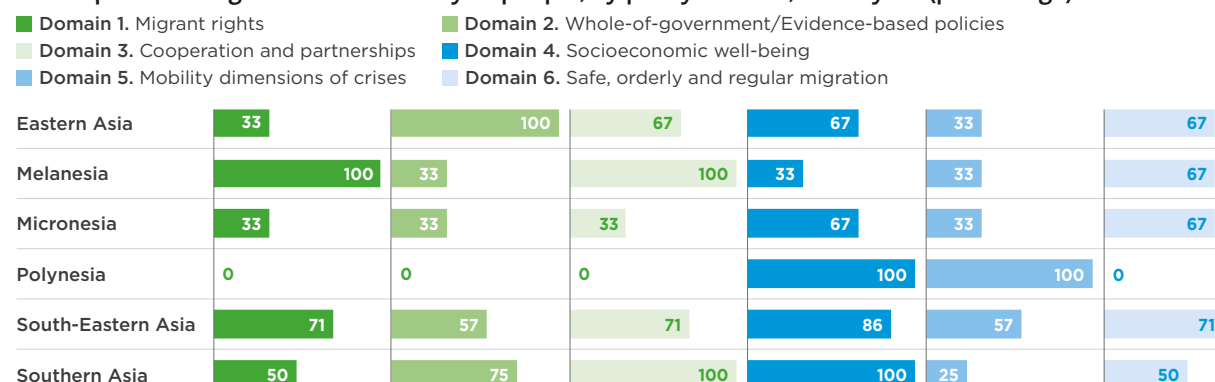
Since the establishment of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration in 2018, it has garnered greater attention on the global agenda and in the region. International labour migration holds the potential for numerous benefits. For destination countries, it contributes to economic growth by providing labour, skills and experience. For countries of origin, the movement of both women and men across borders alleviates unemployment pressures and boosts remittances. Migrant workers can earn higher incomes and develop new skills, and women in particular have the opportunity to achieve greater autonomy and agency. However, these envisioned benefits are not evenly distributed among women and men migrant workers. While men migrant workers are employed in high and mid-skilled occupations, women migrant workers are overwhelmingly concentrated in elementary occupations such as care and domestic work. These occupations are often undervalued, underpaid and provide limited access to social protection and support services.

In the Asia-Pacific region, women migrant workers often experience various forms of violence and discrimination, which intersect with and hinder their ability to migrate safely. These challenges include unfair recruitment practices, limited access to decent work, inadequate social security benefits, including sexual and reproductive health services, maternity care and access to care services for their own dependents. Additionally, women face gaps in protection against violence and harassment at every stage of the migration process. These inequalities are further exacerbated by traditional gender norms, limited educational opportunities and discriminatory policies and practices in both countries of origin and destination. As a result, their ability to pursue formal employment opportunities abroad is significantly constrained.

Gender data on migration governance highlights variations in policy compliance across the Asia-Pacific region (figure 69). Southern Asia demonstrates strong performance in socioeconomic well-being, reflecting robust frameworks and socioeconomic measures. However, notable gaps in migrant rights and mobility dimensions of crises are illustrated, indicating a need for enhanced protections and comprehensive migration strategies. The data show that Eastern Asia excels in whole-of-Government/evidence-based policies, indicating effective institutional frameworks. Nevertheless, poor performance regarding migrant rights highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance migrant protections.

**FIGURE 69.**

### Proportion of countries by subregion with migration policies to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, by policy domain, latest year (percentage)



**Note:** The chart shows the percentage of countries in each subregion that meet or fully meet SDG target 10.7 (Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies) by six policy domains.

Domain 1 measures the degree to which migrants have equity in access to services, including health care, education, decent work, social security and welfare benefits. Domain 2 assesses the establishment of dedicated institutions, legal frameworks and policies or strategies to govern migration. Domain 3 assesses government measures to foster cooperation and encourage stakeholder inclusion and participation in migration policy. Domain 4 assesses government measures to maximize the positive development impact of migration and the socioeconomic well-being of migrants. Domain 5 assesses government measures to deliver comprehensive responses to refugees and other forcibly displaced persons. Domain 6 assesses government measures to address regular or irregular migration.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

#### Notes:

a. UN DESA (2020). [International Migrant Stock 2020](#).

a. UN Women (2022). [Women migrant workers from Nepal: Key statistics](#).

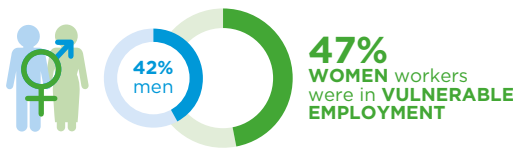
a. UN Women (2024). [Gender assessment of skills development and overseas employment opportunities for women in Pakistan](#).

# INFOGRAPHIC 8

## SOUTH ASIA



## EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



**NO COUNTRY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION HAS ACHIEVED GENDER PARITY IN LABOUR FORCE.** Women continue to face significant barriers when it comes to equal opportunities in employment. Creating a fair and inclusive workforce that empowers women calls for widening opportunities for decent work and tackling their limited economic stability.

Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

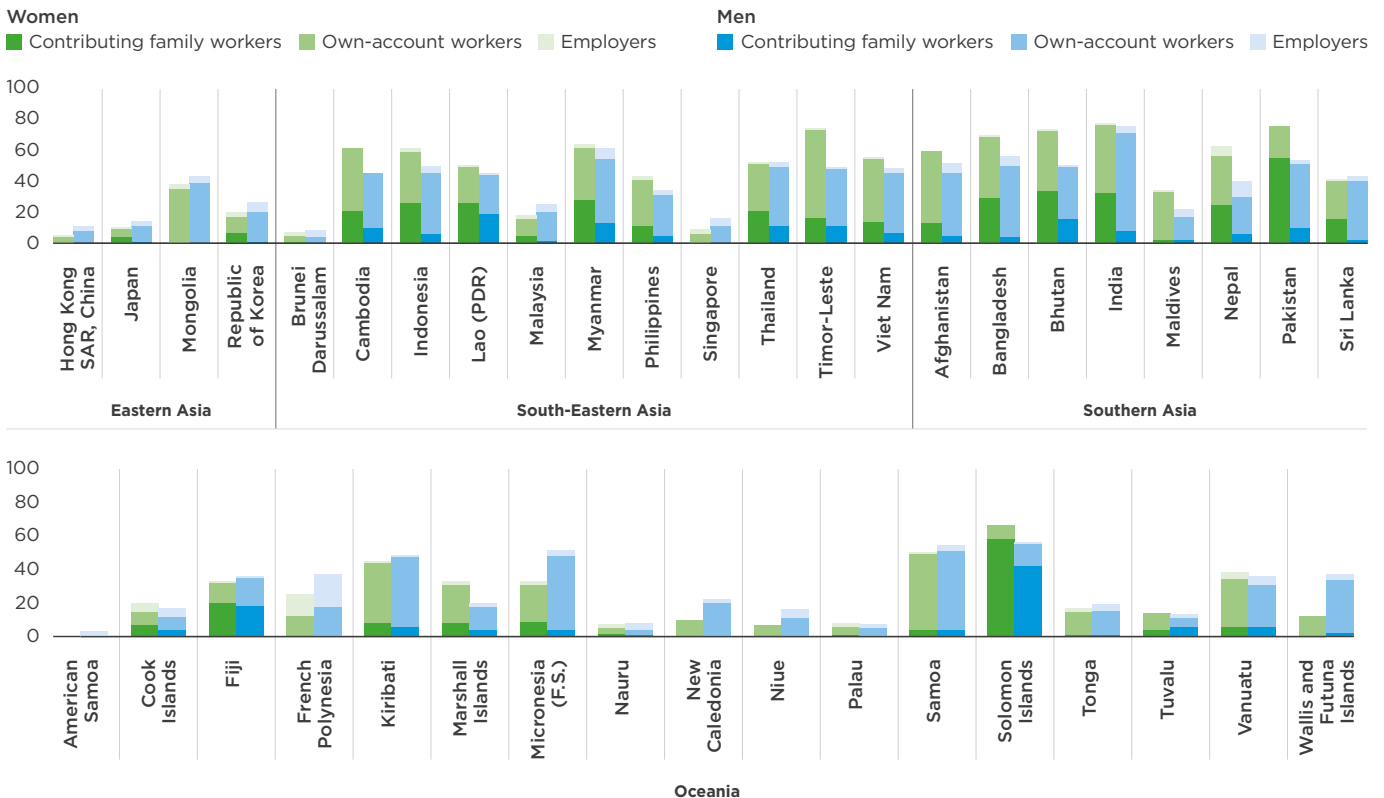
While women in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region have the same legal entitlement as men to register a business, the percentage of women employers is consistently lower than that of men employers in 37 countries in the region. Many women are informal entrepreneurs, own account workers and often operate and/or are classified as microenterprises. This indicates a significant untapped potential for more inclusive and more formalized economic growth and sustainable development. Among these countries, New Caledonia stands out with 14 per cent of employed women being employers, the highest proportion in the data set. French Polynesia follows closely with 13 per cent of employed

women being employers, although the percentage is still higher for men at 19 per cent (figure 70).

Three countries (Cambodia, Pakistan and Solomon Islands) have 0 women in employment as employers, while 15 countries have just 1 per cent. This suggests a lack or minimal presence of women employers. In South Asia, Nepal has the highest percentage, with 6 per cent of women in employment as employers. This is a notably high proportion compared to other countries in the subregion (figure 70). Across the region, there are fewer women business owners than men. This disparity reflects gendered and discriminatory social norms that hinder

**FIGURE 70.**

**Proportion of employed, by sex and status in self-employment, latest year (percentage)**

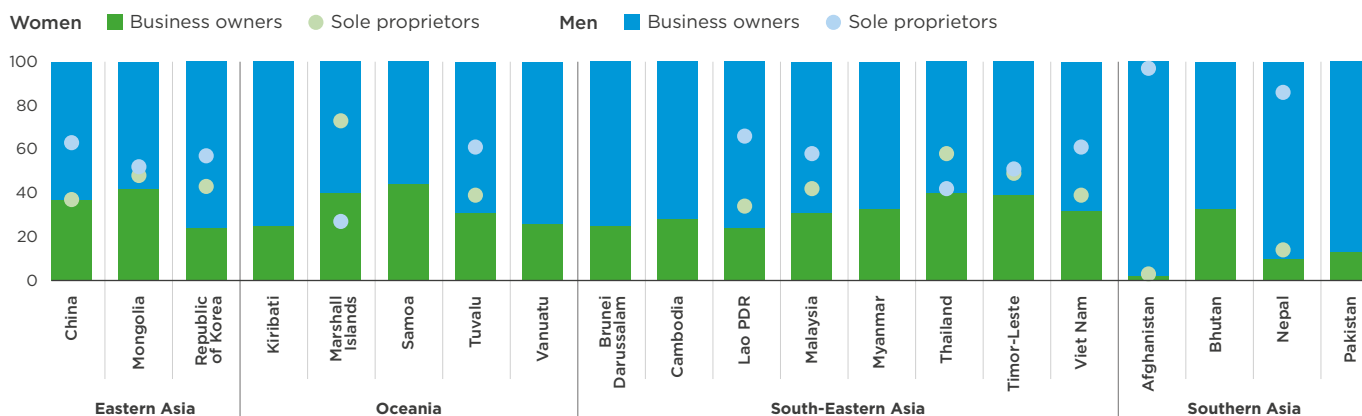


Note: For French Polynesia and Japan, the latest available year for employers differs from the other categories.

Source: UN DESA Gender Data Hub.

**FIGURE 71.**

**Share of business owners and sole proprietors, by sex, latest year (percentage)**

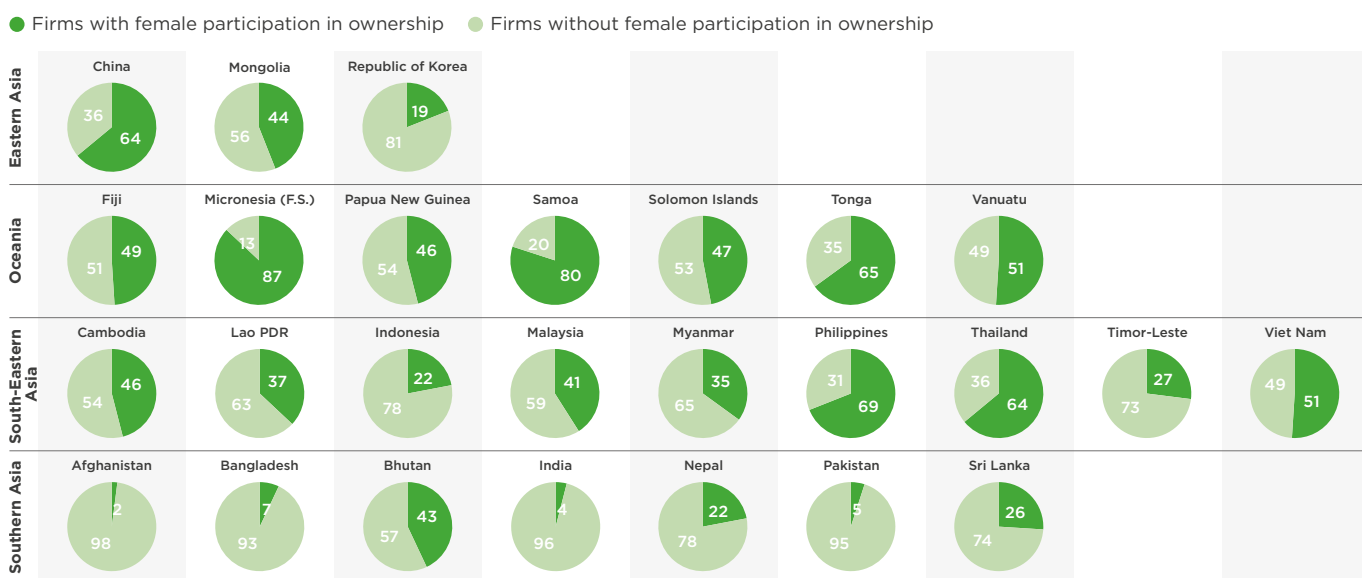


Note: Business owners refer to the individuals who own at least one share of new limited liability companies registered in the calendar year. Sole proprietors refer to the individuals that newly own and manage a business entity and who are indistinguishable from the business and are personally liable in the calendar year. For Marshall Islands and Republic of Korea, the latest available year for the share of business owners and sole proprietors differs between the two series.

Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

**FIGURE 72.**

**Proportion of firms with female participation in ownership, latest year (percentage)**



Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal.

women’s participation in business ownership. Among the countries with available data, **none have achieved gender parity in terms of the share of business owners in newly registered limited liability companies. Only 4 out of 20 countries with available data have at least 40 per cent women business owners. In contrast, in seven countries, 75 per cent or more business owners are men.** The gender disparity reaches a staggering 98 per cent in Afghanistan (figure 71). Among the 14 countries with available data on sole proprietorship, only 3 have achieved gender parity (Marshall Islands, the Philippines and Thailand). In 5 countries, women account for more than 40 per cent of sole

proprietors in newly registered companies. However, in Afghanistan and Nepal, women represent only 3 per cent and 14 per cent of sole proprietors, respectively (figure 71). Similarly, there is a low presence of firms with women ownership in the region. Out of 26 countries, only 8 show a higher percentage of firms with women’s participation in ownership (figure 72). This indicates that women still face significant obstacles in owning businesses. These systemic barriers not only hinder economic growth, but also create inefficiencies in the labour market, reduce competition and innovation and impede progress towards gender equality and WEE.<sup>97</sup>

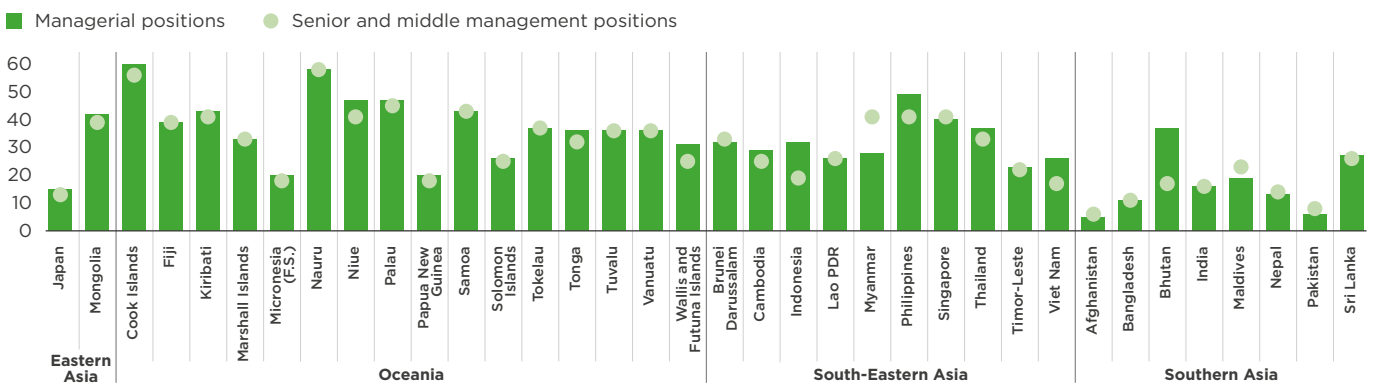
### 3.4.2 Inequalities in the private sector and female leadership

Structural barriers for women in the world of work hinder their ability to assume leadership roles. Gender data reveal ongoing gender disparities in corporate leadership throughout the region, with women comprising a minority of directors and managers at all levels. In 19 out of 40 countries with available data, women comprise less than 30 per cent of directors and managers. For example, in India and China women comprise only 16 per cent and 17 per cent of managerial positions, respectively. The representation of women in middle and senior management positions follows a similar pattern, ranging from 58 per cent in Nauru to 6 per cent in Afghanistan (figure 73).

Across the 18 countries that reported data in Asia and the Pacific, no country has achieved gender equality in terms of the proportion of female directors in newly registered limited liability companies. Only three countries (Thailand, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Mongolia) have a share of women directors exceeding 40 per cent, while the majority of countries (10 out of 18) have less than 30 per cent (figure 74).<sup>98</sup> Addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership in Asia and the Pacific requires concerted efforts to dismantle systemic barriers and foster inclusive workplace cultures. By prioritizing gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership, organizations can unlock the full potential of their workforce, drive sustainable growth and foster innovation.<sup>99</sup>

**FIGURE 73.**

**Proportion of women (aged 15+) in managerial positions and senior and middle management positions, latest year (percentage)**

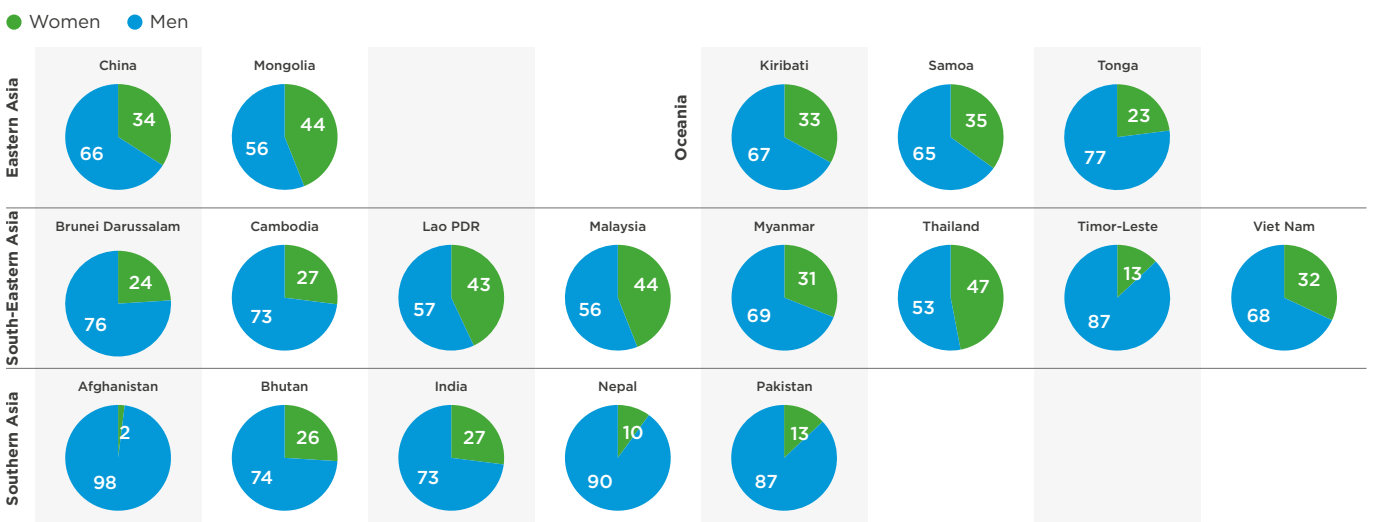


**Note:** The indicator measures the share of women in total management and the share of women in senior and middle management. The latter excludes junior management positions. For Japan and Indonesia, the latest available year for the two series differ.

**Source:** SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 74.**








**Share of directors, by sex, latest year (percentage)**



**Source:** World Bank Gender Data Portal.

## BOX 5:

### Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) Case Study: Transforming the world of work for gender equality

 <b>PRINCIPLE 1</b> Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 2</b> Treat all women and men fairly at work, respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 3</b> Ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all women and men workers.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 4</b> Promote education, training, and professional development for women.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 5</b> Implement enterprise development, supply chain, and marketing practices that empower women.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 6</b> Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.	 <b>PRINCIPLE 7</b> Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.
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The private sector plays a key role towards sustainable development.<sup>a</sup> Its accountability to more inclusive and responsible business conduct is of essence. However, the private sector is not a uniform group, encompassing enterprises of all sizes inclusive of multinational corporations, large companies and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). While the ways these enterprises contribute to better societal outcomes vary, micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises account for more than 96 per cent of all business in the Asia-Pacific, accounting for two out of three paid jobs in the region. In particular, women's entrepreneurship makes significant contributions to local, national, and regional economic growth across Asia and the Pacific, as approximately 60 per cent of MSMEs are owned and/or led by women.

UN Women catalyses private sector action to advance women's economic empowerment and gender equality through the [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\)](#). Launched in 2010 by UN Women and UN Global Compact, the WEPs is a set of seven principles that provide companies a roadmap to become more gender-responsive throughout their value chain. Businesses of any size, including MSMEs, multinationals, stock exchanges, chambers of commerce, and industry associations, can become WEPs signatories. Momentum in the Asia-Pacific region has been rapidly increasing. In 2019, approximately 600 companies were WEPs Signatories, but that number has now jumped to over 2,650 companies. These companies have an estimated 5.2 million employees at the time of this report.

WEPs builds a solid foundation to create transformative change for gender equality in the private sector through multiple channels and a solid network of stakeholders, including stock exchanges, security and exchange commissions, business and industry associations innovation partners, entrepreneurs, investors, complemented by partnerships with governments, CSOs and women's grassroot organizations, among others.

For instance, aligned with Principle 6, the [Unstereotype Alliance](#), a multi-stakeholder thought and action platform led by advertising and media companies, seeks to eradicate harmful stereotypes in all media and advertising content.<sup>b</sup> Innovation and collaboration is essential to advance gender equality in the private sector. The newly initiated [UN Women Gender Action Lab: Innovation and Impact for Gender Equality in Asia-Pacific, powered by WEPs](#) will galvanize efforts for gender-transformative action and impact in the private sector to advance gender equality, women's empowerment and sustainable development and inclusive economies in the region.<sup>c</sup>

**Gender-responsive entrepreneurship is a driver of gender equality and WEE.** WEPs can strengthen **capacities for innovation and multi-stakeholder partnership-building** to co-create more systemic and scalable solutions to advance actions for gender-responsive business conduct and hence contribute to build more ethical and innovative economies. WEPs is not only a framework for large companies. MSMEs make up 56 per cent of Asia-Pacific WEPs Signatories. Often, these enterprises are the motor for transformative innovation to drive sustainable development. Women's entrepreneurship is also well established as a driver of economic growth, job creation and innovation.<sup>d</sup> Leveraging WEPs, UN Women supports MSMEs to grow as gender-responsive enterprises that further advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender-responsive entrepreneurship is an important pathway across all GEAs. The accelerator on transforming care systems leverages an inclusive market-based approach to address the emerging care crisis in the Asia-Pacific region. Here, the UN Women **Care Accelerator Programmes** work 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 WEE and a more inclusive care economy (see case study section 2). The GEA on women in the world of work mainstreams gender in the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem through the [WeRise Toolkit for Accelerators](#) and the [WeRise Toolkit for Entrepreneurs](#).

More recently, UN Women launched a new initiative to enable gender responsive climate action, namely the **UN Women Climate Tech Accelerator (powered by WEPs)**, supported by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea and implemented by [She Loves Tech](#). The programme supports a diverse cohort of women entrepreneurs in Member States of 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.

**Changing systems for more gender-responsive businesses to drive societal outcomes with a colon** beyond private sector entities, business regulators, Governments and regional bodies have utilized WEPs for policy guidance and development.<sup>e</sup> UN Women and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children jointly developed the brief on [Advancing gender and business reporting to implement the WEPs as part of an inclusive COVID-19 economic recovery](#).

At the national level, WEPs are contributing to changes. In India, new corporate reporting guidelines were released, and recommendations were submitted for incorporation in the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights at the request of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. In Indonesia, corporate gender equality guidelines were developed in alignment with the WEPs Transparency and Accountability Framework. In Viet Nam, the Government adopted gender-responsive provisions in its existing SMEs law. In China, the Chengdu 14th Five-Year Plan for New Economic Development included a specific goal of supporting women entrepreneurs in the economy.

#### Notes:

- The fifth Manama Declaration, named after the Bahraini capital where the 2024 World Entrepreneurship Investment Forum ([WEIF](#)) took place, echoed the gathering's theme: innovation can drive development of technologies and products to help address socioeconomic and environmental challenges. The resulting economic advances can provide the resources needed to invest in sustainable development.
- In the Asia-Pacific region, UN Women India worked with the national Unstereotype Alliance chapter to develop the ["You Don't See Me" campaign](#), which shed light on stereotypical portrayals of gender in Indian media while emphasizing the disparity between on-screen and real-life experiences. Members of the Unstereotype Alliance in India have conducted insightful studies and market research such as GenderNext study by ASCI, Gender Equality Attitudes Study by Kantar, Gender Portrayals in Advertising report by GDI and UNICEF, which have identified existing gender stereotypes in advertising and emphasized the need to break free from them.
- Launched in 2024, GAL is a dynamic action platform launched by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Government of Australia and UN Women in Asia and the Pacific. To achieve this, GAL will take a 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.
- ESCAP (2024). [Investing in women is more than just good economics, it's crucial to a sustainable society](#).
- UN Women 2021 report [Ecosystem Landscaping to advance the Accountability to implement the Women's Empowerment Principles in ASEAN](#) provided country scorecards and road maps for Governments in the ASEAN region to align gender equality policies and corporate reporting criteria to WEPs.

### 3.5 Inequality of outcomes: Informality and decent work deficits

Gender inequalities in the world of work extend beyond participation and leadership to the quality of work and the conditions under which women are engaged in the labour market. In East Asia and the Pacific, there has been a notable shift in the engagement of women with the labour market, from agriculture to the service sector, while their participation in the industrial sector has remained consistent. Conversely, men have maintained higher employment rates in agriculture and lower participation in services compared to women. South Asia exhibits an opposite trend, with women predominantly involved in agriculture with significant gender gaps in the higher-wage service sector (figure 75).

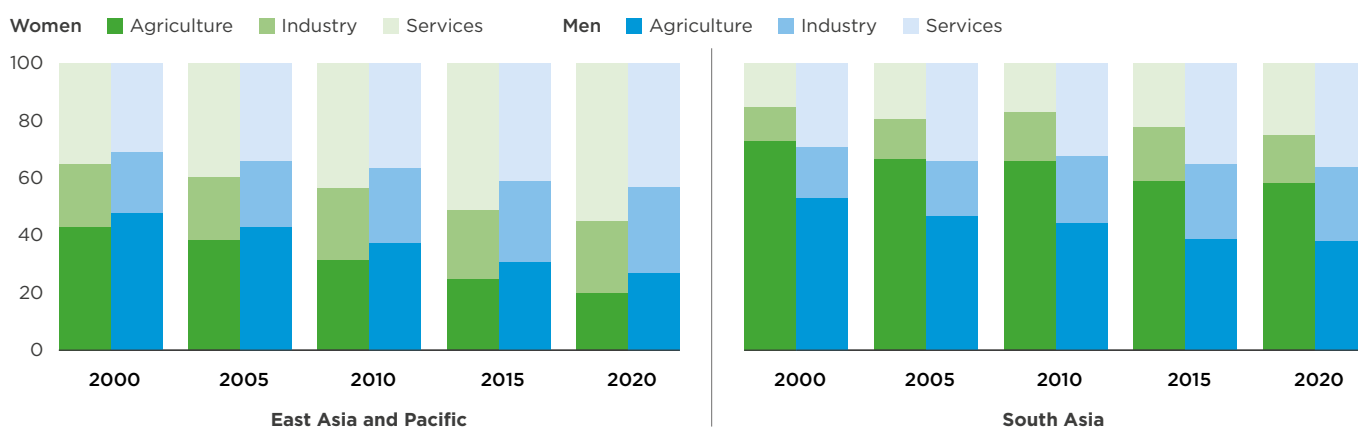
Employment in different sectors along gender lines is a driver of the wage gap. Even in sectors, characterized by high employment of women and lower earning, such as agriculture, women earn less compared to men for work of equal value in Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Viet Nam (figure 76). In most countries of the Asia-Pacific region, men consistently earn higher hourly wages than women with the disparity in average hourly earnings particularly pronounced in professional roles. In these occupations, men generally earn more than women in most of the 23 countries with available data. Notable gaps can be seen in the Republic of Korea (\$24 purchasing power parity [PPP] for women compared to \$37 PPP for men).

Women constitute a disproportionate percentage of workers in the informal economy in the Asia-Pacific region and thus, their livelihoods are among the most vulnerable as they face lower pay, less job security and exclusion from job-related social protection services. Despite moderately

declining rates over the past two decades (figure 77), the informal economy remains significant in terms of scale, encompassing various occupations, such as domestic work, farmwork, garment work, waste-picking, street vending, home-based work and undocumented migrant work, with women occupying most of these roles.<sup>100</sup> This trend is particularly pronounced in South Asia, where rates exceed 90 per cent for women compared to 86 per cent for men, resulting in the highest level of informality in the region as of 2023. Similarly, in Oceania, women’s informal employment stands at 74 per cent, higher than men’s at 70 per cent. As of 2023, Eastern Asia is the only subregion with informal employment rates below the world average for both women and girls (36 per cent) and men and boys (48 per cent) (figure 77).

Most employment in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors is informal, which puts women and girls at a disadvantage. In 7 out of 24 countries with available data, 100 per cent of women’s agricultural employment is classified as informal. In all other countries, except for the Marshall Islands, the percentage of informal women’s agricultural employment is 80 per cent or higher. Men’s agricultural employment follows a similar pattern, but the rates of informal employment are generally lower. Among 24 countries, 4 report 100 per cent informal agricultural employment for men, while 4 other countries report less than 80 per cent of men are informally employed in the agricultural sector (figure 78). Informal employment in non-agricultural sectors is also prevalent. In Tonga, 97 per cent of women and girls are informally employed, compared to 96 per cent of men and boys. In Mongolia, the rates are 18 per cent for women and girls and 19 per cent for men and boys (figure 78). These gender gaps in informal employment outside of agriculture highlight the vulnerable position of women in the workforce.<sup>101</sup>

**FIGURE 75.** Proportion of population in employment, by sex, sector and subregion (percentage)

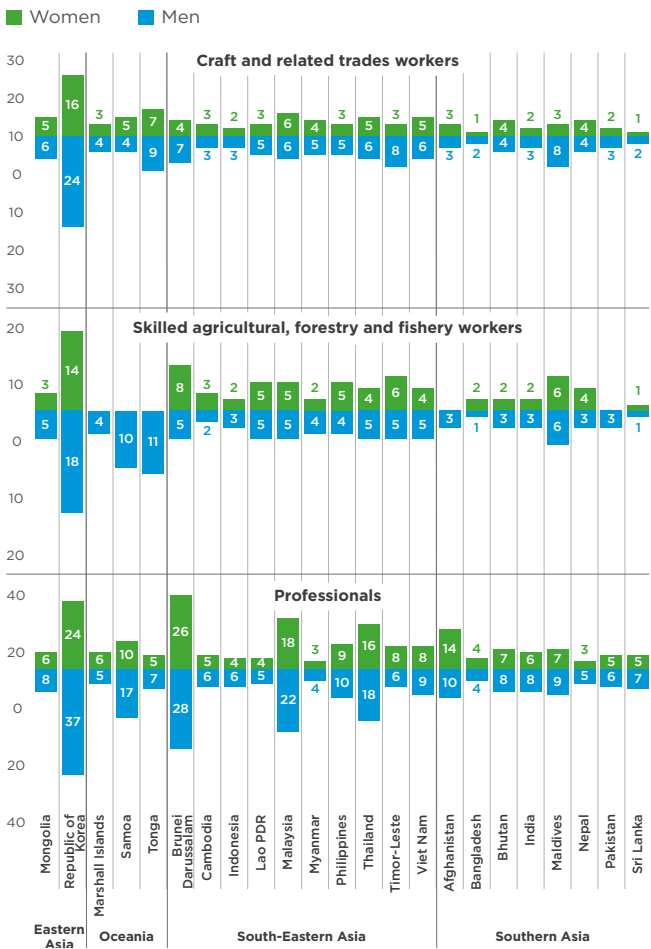


Source: World Bank Gender Data Portal – modelled ILO estimates.



**FIGURE 76.**

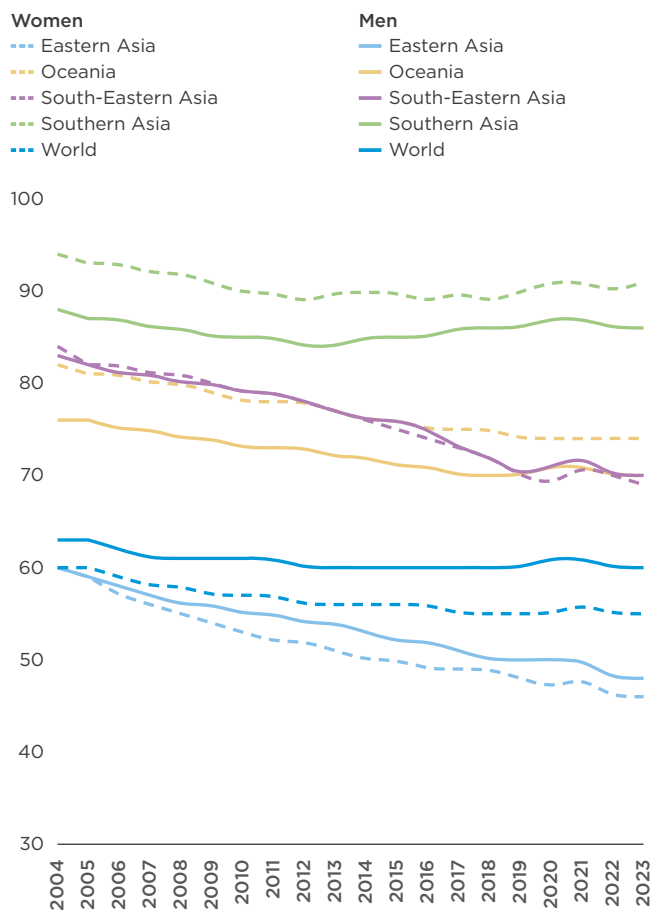
Average hourly earnings (people aged 15+), by sex and selected occupations, latest year (PPP United States dollars)



Note: PPP in United States dollars has been employed to enhance cross-countries comparability. For skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery women workers in Afghanistan, Pakistan and countries in Oceania, there is no available data. Source: ILOSTAT.

**FIGURE 77.**

Proportion of informal employment (aged 15+), by sex and SDG regional grouping (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 78.**

Proportion of informal employment (aged 15+), by sex and sector, latest year (percentage)



Source: SDG Global Database.

# 4

# Implications for gender-responsive climate action

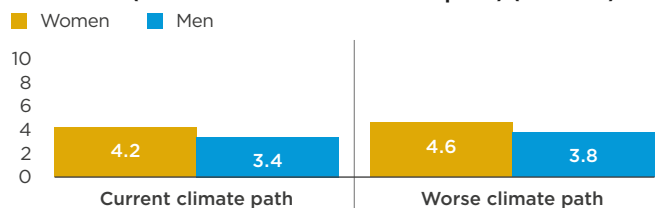


Key negative outcomes for WEE, as articulated in the foregoing discussions of transforming care systems (section 2) and women and the world of work (section 3), are aggravated by climate change. Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region of the world, as measured by the total number of people affected by disasters. Climate-related impacts, such as warmer land surface temperatures and the loss of biodiversity are taking a toll on societies, economies and livelihoods. These impacts are unevenly distributed across the region, with marginalized communities and the least developed countries in particular bearing the brunt, due to their pre-existing vulnerabilities. Moreover, it is widely accepted that the climate crisis is not gender neutral. Women and men experience differentiated climate change impacts, amplified by existing gender inequalities, which pose unique threats to their livelihoods and economic activities, health and safety. Climate change and biodiversity loss have particularly severe impacts on people in poor, rural households since they depend on natural resources for food, water and fuel.

Research by UN Women on the impact of several climate scenarios has highlighted what is at stake in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>102</sup> Under a “worse climate path” scenario, poverty rates in the Asia-Pacific region would increase due to climate change and relative to the rest of the world. While the world would experience a 9.1 per cent increase in extreme poverty by 2030, the Asia-Pacific region would see an 18.1 per cent increase. This would disproportionately impact women and girls, as they are more likely than men

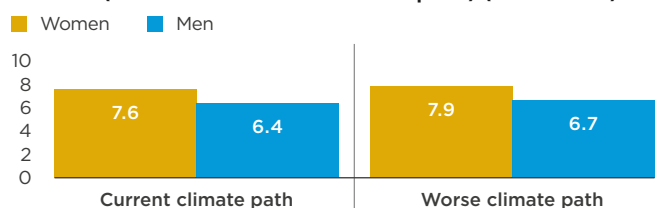
and boys to be living in poverty. The consequences of the worse climate path scenario will differ by country. For instance, in Indonesia, 4.6 million women and 3.8 million men will be living in poverty by 2030. Similarly, in Kiribati 7,900 women and 6,700 men will be living in poverty (figures 79 and 80). These examples underscore the urgent need for gender-responsive climate action.

**FIGURE 79.**  
Total population living in extreme poverty by 2030 in Indonesia (current and worse climate path) (millions)



Source: UN Women Data Hub.

**FIGURE 80.**  
Total population living in extreme poverty by 2030 in Kiribati (current and worse climate path) (thousands)



Source: UN Women Data Hub.

Recognition and action to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change for women and girls and build resilience is increasing, and the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment calls on Governments in the region to address gender equality and women's empowerment in environmental conservation, climate action and resilience-building as an area of immediate concern, particularly in relation to SIDS and low-lying countries.<sup>103</sup> This push is in line with increasing global evidence not only on gender-based vulnerabilities and inequalities that may exacerbate climate impacts but also on the opportunities of gender-responsive climate action. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that gender-blind climate change measures can worsen existing inequalities, leading to maladaptation rather than successful adaptation. This underscores the critical need for inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches. Moreover, IPCC emphasizes the importance of women's participation in climate action, stating that gender-inclusive processes and gender-responsive policies lead to more effective climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>104</sup>

In terms of policy coherence to bring together the commitments to gender equality and climate change, there is a positive trend in Asia and the Pacific in the increased number of gender-responsive nationally determined contributions (NDCs), which are national action plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate impacts. Based on a 2023 review of NDCs in the Asia-Pacific region; out of 49 countries that had developed NDCs by 2023, 37 included gender and 17 had finalized their NDCs through a gender-responsive process, including consultations with relevant stakeholders and ministries.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, an increasing number of stakeholders, including civil society organizations and non-government stakeholders as well as international organizations working at the nexus of gender equality and climate change, have articulated thematic linkages between gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, care work and the climate crisis. However, data gaps

remain, and the collection of data on gender and the environment is emerging but not yet commonplace.

Climate and environmental changes disrupt the status quo, shifting priorities and financial resources to mitigation, adaptation, response and recovery. In Asia and the Pacific, the impacts of climate change have been particularly pronounced, with countries in the region experiencing frequent unprecedented climate induced disasters. The region, which has 70 per cent of the global population at risk of sea level rise, derives one third of its total employment from natural resources-based sectors vulnerable to climate change, such as agriculture, fisheries and tourism.<sup>106</sup> This heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors places the region at a threshold of adverse effects that disrupt livelihoods, reduce income opportunities and endanger the health and well-being of the most vulnerable and poorest communities.

Important normative dialogues have increasingly pointed towards development pathways that promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the changing climate. General recommendation 37 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee) on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the face of a changing climate articulates key areas of concern and attention for government action to reduce the disproportionate impacts of climatic changes and disasters on women and girls. In their periodic reporting to the CEDAW Committee, a number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region included links between environmental degradation and climate impacts on women and the status of measures enacted to remedy these. Moreover, in 2022, the theme of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) was on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.

#### **BOX 6.**

##### **Gender and environment surveys**

UN Women is working to improve the evidence base related to gender and the environment through supporting national governments with the implementation of national gender and environment surveys (GES). The surveys gather information on a wide range of topics and include stand-alone modules on climate change, disasters and environment-related livelihoods, among others. For climate change data, the internationally agreed hazard information profiles are used for considering hazard exposure, preparedness and response. With an increasing number of countries collecting data, significant strides are being made in Asia and the Pacific. Under the Women Count programme, UN Women collaborates with national government partners to generate nationally representative, high-quality data on the gender and environment nexus.

## BOX 7.

### Agreed conclusions of CSW66

In the agreed conclusions of CSW66, the Commission on the Status of Women provided a blueprint for increased focus on gender-responsive climate action. It urged governments at all levels to strengthen normative, legal and regulatory frameworks; integrate gender perspectives into climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes; expand gender-responsive finance; enhance gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex; and foster a gender-responsive and just transition.

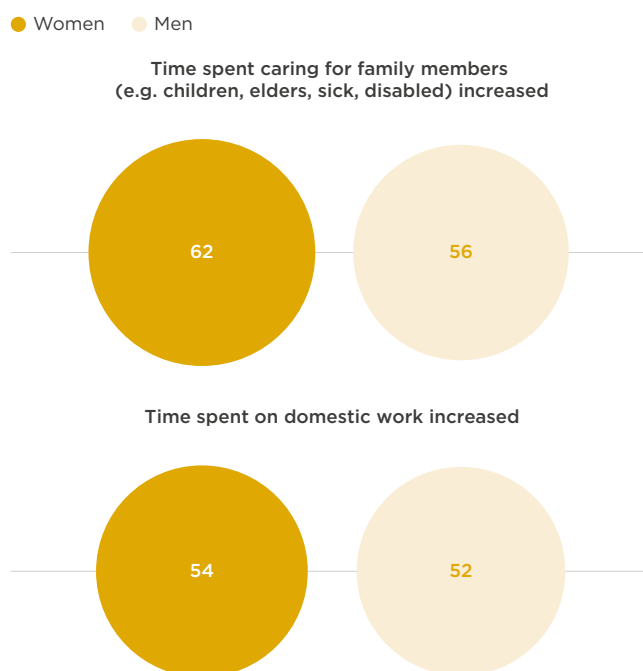
The collective global efforts to address the climate crisis include important opportunities to redress the many gender inequalities presented in the previous sections of this report. Significant economic resources are being invested in mitigating and adapting to climate change and preventing and reversing biodiversity loss and pollution (the “triple planetary crisis”). In 2018–2019, climate finance in the Asia-Pacific region totalled \$519.9 billion.<sup>107</sup> Data on climate financing flows directed to gender equality remain scarce, yet it is important that gender mainstreaming is resourced, and the increasing number of gender-responsive climate policies and programmes provide opportunities to meaningfully integrate and mainstream gender issues and reap co-benefits for both people and planet.

## 4.1 The care-climate nexus

Most of the unpaid, unrecognized and undervalued care and domestic work that households and communities depend on is provided by women and girls (see section 2), and the climate crisis aggravates this disproportionate share of work. The reduced availability of natural resources is a key driver of the increased burden on women and girls, as well as the added responsibility of caring for injured or sick family members and other dependents as a result of sudden onset climate-induced disasters. In Tonga, women take responsibility for childcare in 66 per cent of households and care for older people and other adults in 43 per cent of households.<sup>108</sup> Climate change has increased women’s work burden with an estimated 62 per cent of women compared to 56 per cent of men reporting increased care work, and 54 per cent women compared to 52 per cent men reporting increased domestic work as a result of climate change (figure 81). Similarly, disasters inflicted in 2022 in Tonga led to an estimated 77 per cent of women reporting an increased burden of unpaid work due to disruptions in water and food supply that added to their time spent on collection and processing.<sup>109</sup>

FIGURE 81.

Proportion of the population whose time spent on care work (caring for children, older people, sick, people with disabilities) and domestic work increased as a result of climate change, by sex, Tonga (percentage)

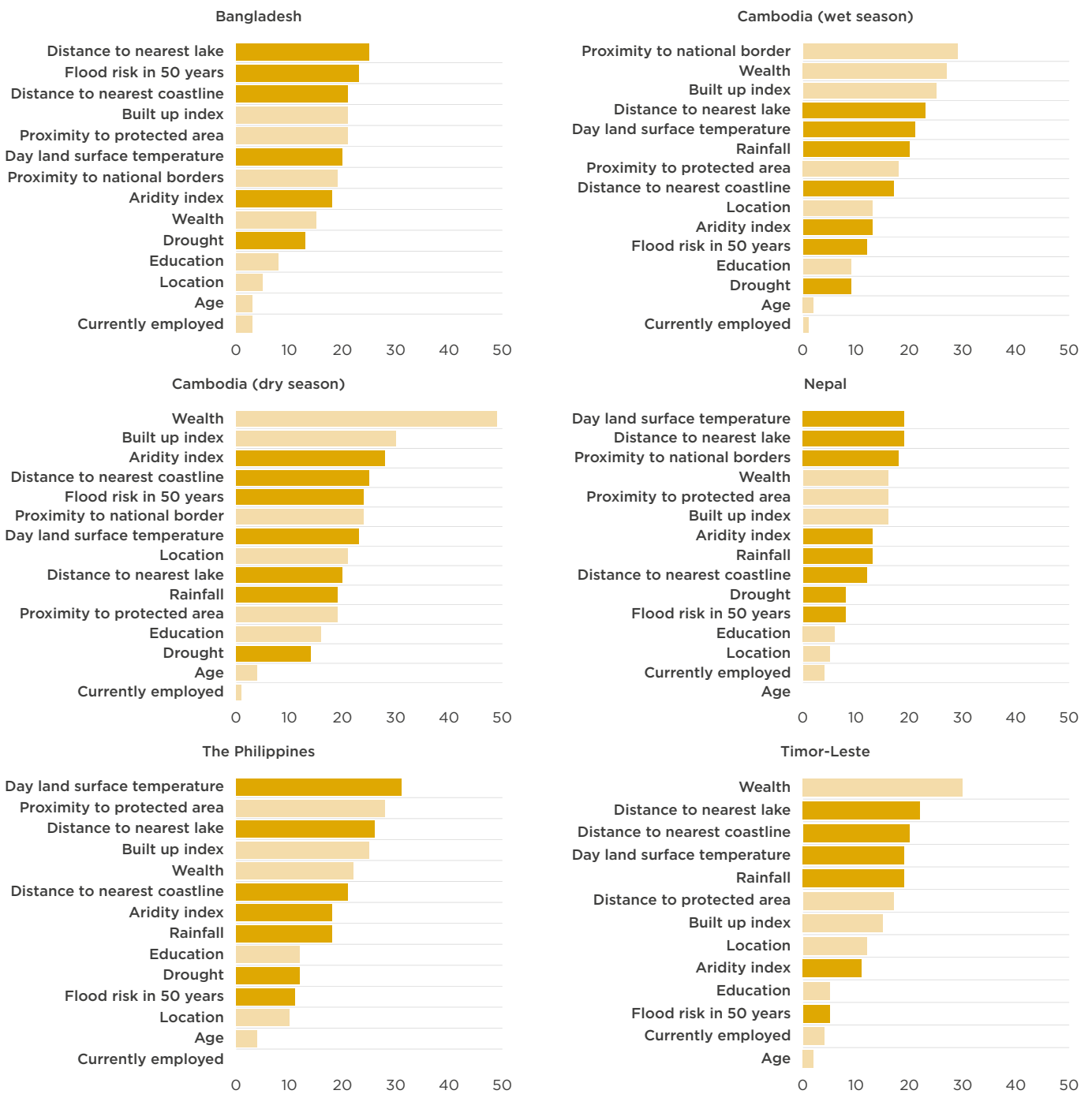


Source: UN Women, TSD and Australian Aid (2023). [Gender and Environment Survey report, Kingdom of Tonga](#).

In addition to the impact of disasters, climate change may also worsen the overall availability of and access to water. For instance, in 2023 a UN Women analysis found that in Cambodia, slow-onset changes in precipitation patterns, aridity and temperatures may affect the availability of and access to clean drinking water (figure 82). The same is apparent for many of the countries for which this analysis was performed. In most of them, flood risk, surface temperature, rainfall, droughts and aridity played a role in outcomes related to access to basic drinking water. As women are in charge of water collection in 80 per cent of the world’s households that lack improved drinking water sources, this will likely worsen their work burdens.<sup>110</sup>

**FIGURE 82.**

Mean decrease in accuracy (in event of variable removal) for lack of access to basic drinking water sources, selected countries (percentage)



Note: Environment-related variables are shown in darker shade of yellow for ease of interpretation.

Source: UN Women (2023). [Gender impacts of climate change: Evidence from Asia](#).

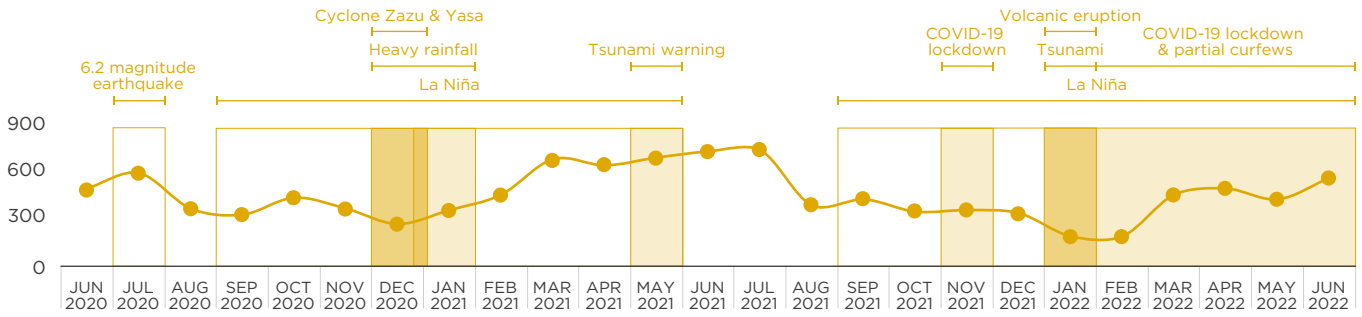
## 4.2 Economic impacts of violence against women and girls during climate-induced disasters

Existing inequalities may aggravate the way women and girls experience climate change. Climate-induced disaster exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence.<sup>111</sup> In the context of climate-induced disaster, women and girls face heightened risks of sexual exploitation, trafficking and violence, whether perpetrated

by an intimate partner or someone else. For example, when overlapping disasters such as cyclones, heavy rainfalls and the La Niña weather pattern occurred in Tonga between 2020 and 2021 there was a surge in Internet searches related to violence against women, signalling a possible rise in incidences of gender-based violence (figure 83). The overlapping crises of adolescent pregnancy and gender-based violence can lead to reduced education and employment opportunities and loss of agency for women and girls.

**FIGURE 83.**

**Total violence against women-related search volume, Tonga**



Note: Darker shades refer to overlapping crises. The darker the shade, the higher the number of overlapping crises.

Source: UN Women (2023). [Disasters, crises and violence against women: evidence from big data analysis.](#)

**4.3 Ownership of climate-relevant productive assets**

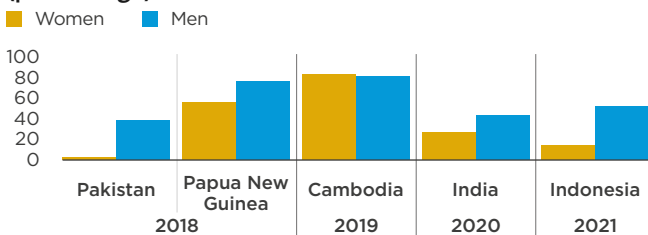
Women have less access than men to control over productive assets such as land, property and technology due to cultural norms and legal barriers. These limitations hinder women’s ability to own or inherit land and access credit and technology, which ultimately impacts their ability to cope with climate change. In the Asia-Pacific region, women engaged in agriculture are less likely to own land than men. For example, in Pakistan, only 2 per cent of women have ownership rights in agriculture, compared to 38 per cent of men (figure 84). Similarly, in Indonesia the difference is staggering. Only 14 per cent of women farmers have land ownership rights compared to 52 per cent of men. Due to limited ownership rights, women are often excluded from opportunities to adopt advanced agricultural technology. The digital divide further limits their ability to access markets, information and support networks to adapt to or mitigate climate impacts.

sustain their livelihoods. This increases women’s vulnerability to climate-induced agriculture loss. For example, in Tonga, 46 per cent of women and 59 per cent of men reported their crops were damaged or destroyed due to disasters. However, the impacts of the agricultural loss may have been greater for women than for men. Agriculture was the sole income source for 8 of every 10 men whose crops were damaged, while 9 of every 10 women reported agriculture as their sole income source. The loss of income may be compounded by women’s limited access to capital and collateral necessary to secure loans and investments, rendering them highly vulnerable.

As the impacts of climate change intensify, barriers preventing women from participating in decision-making may lead to increased vulnerability, poverty and diminished agency. Consequently, limited opportunities for women in climate action reinforce gender stereotypes and perpetuate systemic inequalities, preventing them from contributing equally to and benefiting from climate solutions.

**FIGURE 84.**

**Percentage of agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land by sex, in all Asia-Pacific countries with available data, 2018–2021 (percentage)**



Source: ESCAP SDG Gateway Asia-Pacific Database (accessed on 10 October 2023).

Women often have fewer opportunities than men to diversify their income, and they rely heavily on agriculture to

Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensure equitable climate action. As such it is important for gender equality to remain at the core of climate action. This includes leveraging women’s potential and knowledge to develop effective and sustainable climate solutions. Empowering women through education, capacity-building and equitable resource access can enhance their resilience to climate impacts while improving the overall effectiveness of climate policies and initiatives. It is equally important to design care-sensitive policy frameworks that reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work shouldered by women and girls, recognizing that climate change increases the workload. Improving access to technology and infrastructure can alleviate some of this burden by providing tools and systems that streamline household and caregiving tasks, thereby transforming care responsibilities and helping to ensure that women are able to adapt and contribute to climate solutions.

## BOX 8.

### Gender-responsive climate action Case Study: Integrating gender and human rights into climate action and promoting women's climate resilient livelihoods



The Asia-Pacific region faces significantly greater vulnerability to climate change impacts compared to other regions of the world. Increasing climate-related emergencies and natural hazards present significant challenges, particularly to women and marginalized communities, who have a high dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods. For instance, approximately 58 per cent of the region's agricultural labour force is comprised of women, yet they often lack access to agricultural extension services, technology and financial resources, thereby heightening their vulnerability to climate impacts. Moreover, the double burden of paid and unpaid labour places additional strain on women. Combined with limited resources and support, this heightens their exposure to risks such as gender-based violence, exacerbated by the direct impacts of climate change. A low-carbon transition presents opportunities to address gender inequalities and promote human rights by placing women and marginalized communities at the centre and empowering them as key agents of change.

[EmPower: Women for Climate-Resilient Societies](#) (EmPower) is a joint initiative of UN Women and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), supported by the Governments of Germany, New Zealand, Sweden and Switzerland, which aims to strengthen gender equality and human rights in climate change action and disaster risk reductions across the Asia-Pacific region. The first phase of the programme from 2018 to 2022 took place in Bangladesh, Cambodia and Viet Nam and at the regional level. The second phase, from 2023 to 2027, expanded to include Indonesia and the Philippines. The EmPower programme exemplifies critical collaboration of governments, development partners, civil society groups and local communities to bolster the participation, representation and leadership of women and marginalized communities in building climate-resilient livelihoods. It works to fulfil three outcomes:

- To increase action on gender-responsive climate change adaptation and mitigation among the stakeholders of the Asia-Pacific region
- To enhance the representation of women and other marginalized group as key environmental actors in climate and disaster risk reduction decision-making.
- To increase engagement of women and other marginalized groups in the Asia-Pacific region in climate-resilient livelihoods.

Promoting WEE as a tool for climate adaptation is critical for the EmPower programme. Therefore, it is a priority to remove barriers that prevent women from accessing financial resources for renewable energy technologies and build women's business acumen to contribute to creating climate-resilient livelihoods for women and marginalized communities. In [Viet Nam](#), the EmPower programme worked with women from cooperatives and enterprises to enhance their knowledge and skills on renewable energy and its integration in their business models. As a result, these women reported substantial benefits, with an increase in their production scales by 50–300 per cent, leading to a 50–200 per cent rise in their income levels. The installation of renewable energy systems

significantly enhanced women's capacity to adapt to climate change and led to a reduction in health risks, increased food security and the empowerment of women in decision-making processes.

Building on this momentum and lessons learned from the first phase of the programme, the second phase of the programme is expanding regional collaboration, strengthening country-level implementation and leveraging investment opportunities to enhance access to financial resources for women and marginalized groups. By unlocking financial services and products that meet the needs of women entrepreneurs and promoting gender responsive policies and plans including environmental, social and governance guidelines for financial institutions working with women's enterprises, UN Women in partnership UNEP aims to promote a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The EmPower programme works in an integrated way between national and regional levels to generate momentum and increase commitments and action on gender responsive climate policies and plans. Work with national governments on their national climate policies and NDCs includes capacity-strengthening and fostering regional partnerships, including through events such as the regional training workshop in May 2024, on [Accelerating Gender-Responsive Climate Action and Nationally Determined Contribution Implementation in Asia and the Pacific](#) co-organized with UNEP and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in partnership with the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Global Environment Facility, National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Global Network and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The [UN Women Climate Tech Accelerator](#) is an ASEAN-focused initiative supported by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family of the Republic of Korea and implemented in partnership with She Loves Tech, a startup accelerator. With a blend of expert guidance, peer learning and a focus on personal and professional growth, the Climate Tech Accelerator will enable high-potential women-led climate technology startups to become high-growth, high-impact, gender-responsive enterprises that are investor-ready and market-ready. Over a period of nine months, the programme will support a diverse cohort of 10–12 women entrepreneurs 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.

UN Women underscores the critical need for gender and environment data for informed decision-making. This includes utilizing existing tools and partnerships to increase the production and use of relevant statistics, including implementing [gender and environment surveys](#) and working with national statistics offices in Asia-Pacific countries. Through a holistic approach, the EmPower programme aims to accelerate gender-responsive, human-rights based climate action, empowering women and marginalized communities across the Asia-Pacific region to lead in building a low-carbon and climate-resilient future.

# 5

# Evidence-informed decision-making for the empowerment of women and girls



## KEY MESSAGES

1. In the Asia-Pacific region, severe gender data gaps hinder evidence-informed decision-making in critical areas for WEE, such as unpaid care work, ownership of productive assets, migration, gender-responsive procurement and illicit wildlife trafficking.
2. The year 2025 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and tenth anniversary of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite progress, gender data gaps persist, hampering the ability to monitor of progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.
3. Advancing a gender-transformative Beyond GDP agenda is vital to ensure that women's participation to the economy and society is adequately recognized, valued and compensated.

### 5.1 Monitoring progress through SDGs

Shedding light on the invisible contributions of women and girls to the economy and society as well as limitations on their enjoyment of human rights has long been a central focus of feminism and a key element of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The SDGs reflect this important issue to varying degrees. They expand the evaluation of societal and economic progress

beyond GDP to include gender-related distributional concerns and the promotion of human rights. Investing in achieving the SDGs with a holistic approach is a cost-effective strategy for addressing economic, social and environmental challenges simultaneously.<sup>112</sup> By applying the criterion of realizing the economic rights and autonomy of women and girls, as well as dismantling structural inequalities in economic systems, 112 SDG indicators can be identified as relevant in monitoring



progress towards WEE.<sup>113</sup> This approach uses the SDGs as a transformative tool for women and girls, promoting synergies across different goals.

The SDGs have had a significant impact on the international and national data ecosystems. Monitoring progress through SDG indicators has sparked and strengthened data ecosystems at all levels, such as through the integration of SDGs into national development strategies, budget allocations and participatory processes, such as the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) of progress towards the goals. While data availability in the Asia-Pacific region is limited to 17 countries, 12 of them have included gender provisions in their statistical laws.<sup>114</sup> Ensuring that policies and interventions aimed at achieving the SDGs are guided by the most reliable, accurate, precise and timely data can significantly enhance their effectiveness and transparency.

Despite the increase in data availability over the past decade on critical areas of sustainable development, including gender equality and women's economic empowerment, significant gender data gaps still exist.<sup>115</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, data availability of WEE-relevant SDG indicators varies greatly both across and within goals, and remains limited in monitoring progress in all relevant areas.<sup>116</sup> Out of the 49 countries covered in this report for the Asia-Pacific region, the most severe WEE-relevant data gaps were identified for indicators in SDG 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 16 and 17. These goals have select indicators that record data for fewer than 10 countries (figure 85). Furthermore, among the 17 SDG indicators central to monitoring progress towards the targets outlined in the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy, six indicators have data available for fewer than 20 countries (figure 86). It is crucial to renew the commitment to filling data gaps in SDG 5 and other WEE-relevant SDG indicators to effectively monitor progress towards the empowerment of women and girls while enhancing participatory evidence-informed processes, including VNRs.<sup>117</sup>

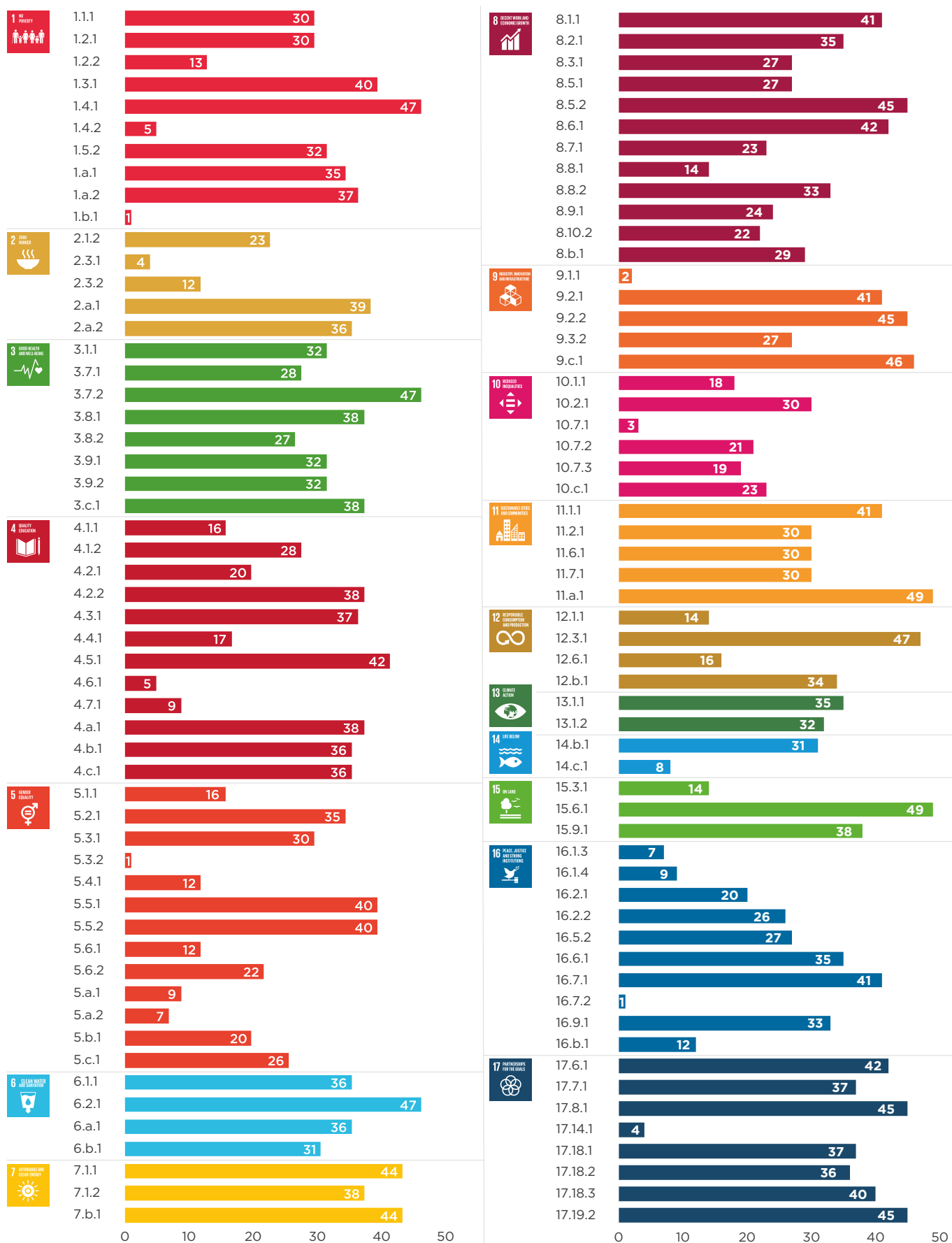
Data gaps on SDG indicators hamper the ability to monitor commitments towards women's and girls' rights. In March 2025, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the United Nations

Commission on the Status of Women<sup>118</sup> will review and appraise progress made in implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). This anniversary marks an important opportunity to strengthen gender-responsive action and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other global commitments, such as those under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on women and peace and security; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (2015); the Paris Agreement on climate change (2015); and regional commitments to promote gender equality and women's and girls' rights, among others. Accordingly, all States are called upon to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly held in 2000.<sup>119</sup> These national reviews are expected to leverage existing gender data and 56 SDG indicators are recommended. Yet, severe gender data gaps are recorded for SDG 1, 2, 4, 5, 11 and 16 (figure 87).

When investing necessary resources in filling data gaps for WEE-relevant SDG Indicators, considerations on inclusivity are crucial to conduct a thorough analysis to fulfil the pledge to leave no one behind. It is essential to disaggregate WEE data on various factors such as sex, urban/rural location, age, nationality, migratory status, ethnicity, disability, educational attainment, employment status and income level to identify and highlight the most vulnerable groups, including women and girls with disabilities in rural areas. Currently, the level of disaggregation for WEE-relevant indicators is limited even for primary categories, such as sex. For instance, out of the 30 countries in the region that reported data on the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line, only 20 provided sex-disaggregated data at the time of drafting this report. Similarly, the proportion of individuals with Internet access is reported at an aggregated level by 45 countries, with sex-disaggregated data available for only 11 countries. This hampers the use of data on WEE to monitor progress towards the eradication of persistent gender inequalities among the poorest.

**FIGURE 85.**

**Number of Asia-Pacific countries with available data on WEE-relevant SDG indicators**

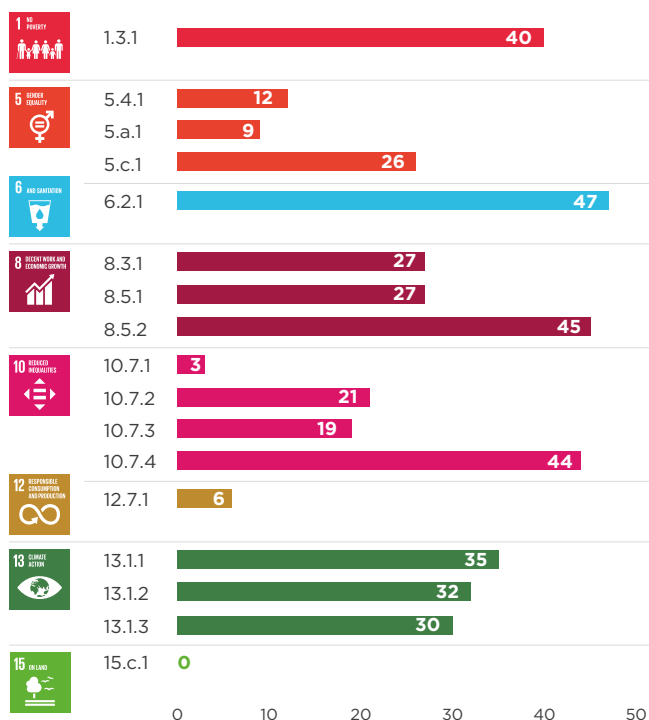


**Note:** The graph depicts the number of countries that have at least one data point for the selected SDG indicator, regardless of series code. Official SDG indicator names have been deleted given space consideration. For full indicator names see Annex 1 and the SDG Global Database.

**Source:** Authors' elaboration based on SDG Global Database.

**FIGURE 86.**

Number of Asia-Pacific countries with available data on SDGs indicators to monitor progress towards the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy

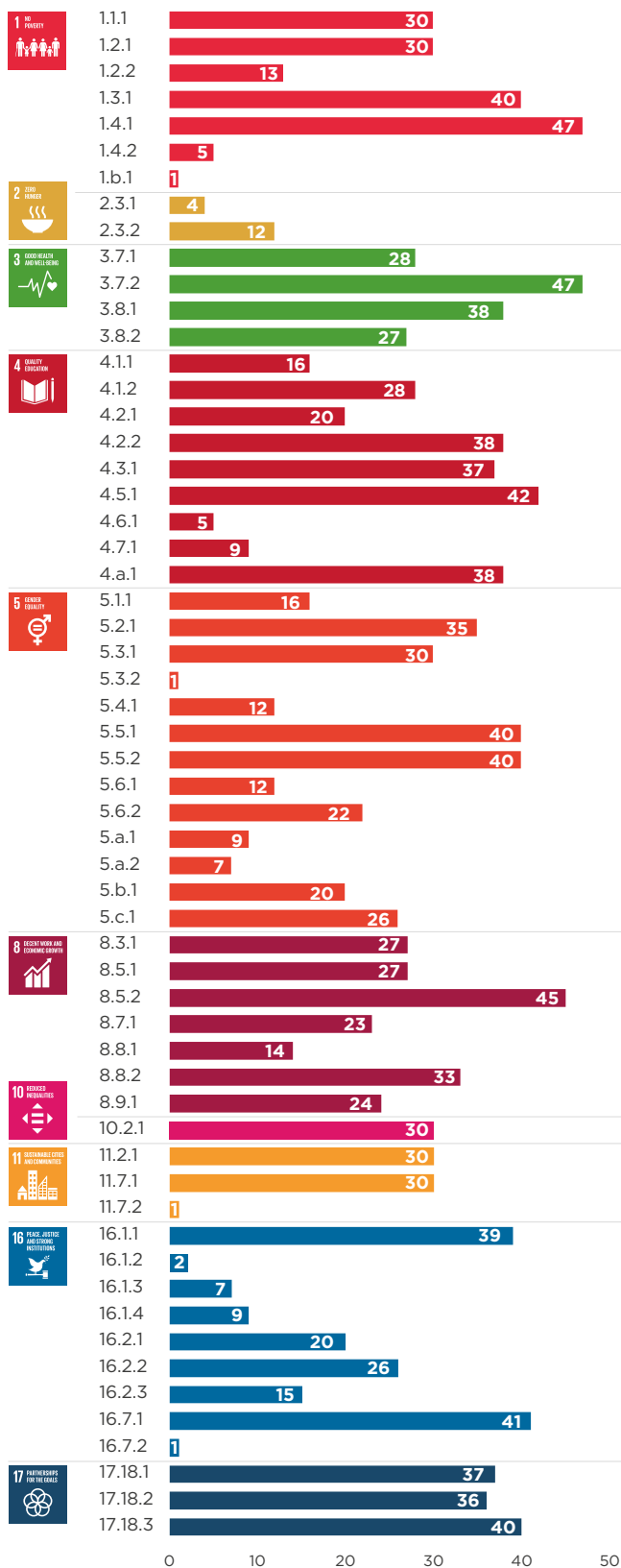


**Note:** The graph depicts the number of countries that have at least one data point for the selected SDG indicator, regardless of series code.

**Source:** Authors' elaboration based on SDG Global Database and UN Women (2024) [Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy](#).

**FIGURE 87.**

Number of Asia-Pacific countries with available data on SDG indicators relevant to monitoring progress towards the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



**Note:** This graph depicts the number of countries that have at least one data point for the selected SDGs indicators, regardless of series code. Some indicators have been excluded due to their availability in aggregated forms, lacking country-level-specific data.

**Source:** Authors' elaboration based on SDG Global Database and ESCAP and UN Women (2023). [Guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews](#).

## 5.2 From monitoring progress to evidence informed decision-making

The dynamic regional landscape requires that WEE data remains relevant. Currently, the availability of WEE data can only partially meet the information needs of various users to inform actions aimed at dismantling root causes of disempowerment. In addition to addressing data gaps in WEE-relevant SDG indicators and the associated level of disaggregation, such as age, sex, location and disability, through increased allocation of resources, policymakers and other decision-makers play a key role in clearly articulating their information requirements at the start of any statistical process. This can potentially increase the likelihood of making gender-responsive evidence-informed decisions once the data is disseminated.

### Transforming care systems

To promote a comprehensive approach to the WEE data ecosystem that aims to transform care systems, the minimum information requirements would relate to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work, as well as the remuneration and representation of care workers (figure 88).

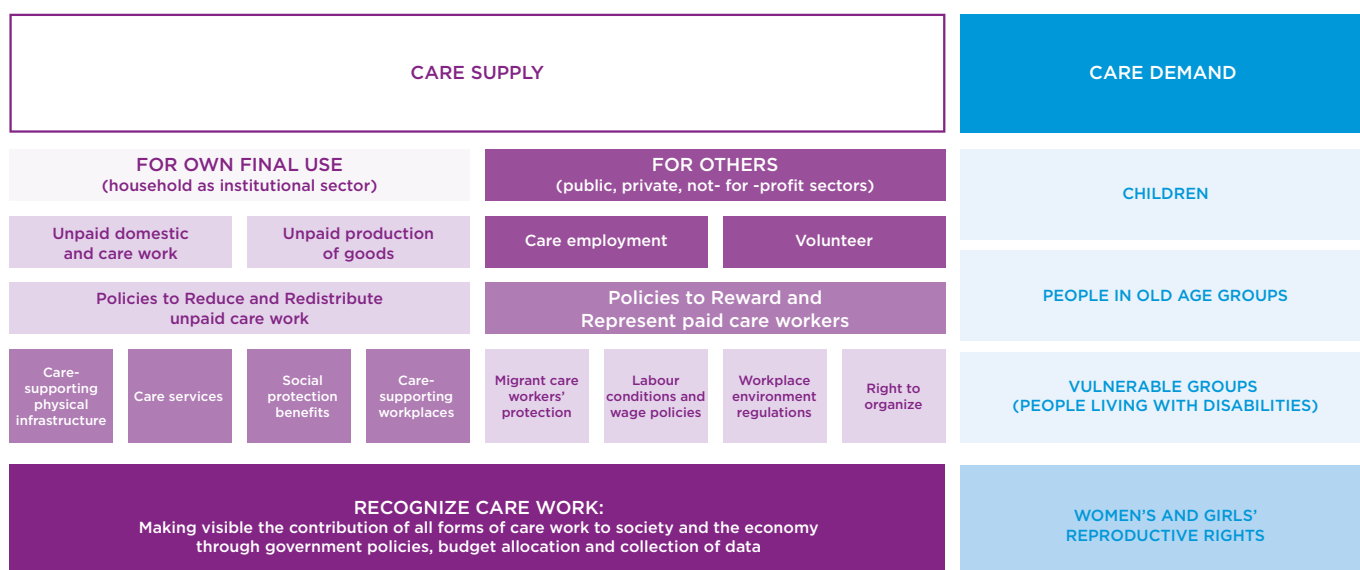
Demographic considerations are an asset for policies aimed at transforming care systems as they quantify the demand for care services in economies and societies through a lens that leaves no one behind. Demographic disaggregation at a minimum would include age, sex and disability to empower stakeholders with a clear

understanding of specific care needs associated with vulnerable groups. For instance, societies with a large population in younger age groups and high fertility rates may call for further investment in early childhood development, while ageing economies demand specialized health-care provision for older people. Furthermore, population projections equip decision-makers with scenarios that can anticipate population shifts in economic structures. Ultimately, the quantification of care demands can allow stakeholders to efficiently allocate scarce resources in shrinking fiscal spaces. While data on the demand for care services by population structure is widely available in the Asia-Pacific region, fewer countries have collected data on decision-making power and rights over reproductive life, such as SDG indicator 5.6.1 (figure 89).

Access to and ownership over resources is a domain of change where significant effort is needed. Time is a valuable but limited resource, and how it is utilized often reflects priorities, values, available opportunities and the extent to which social norms are internalized. In alignment with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), SDG indicator 5.4.1 on time spent on unpaid domestic and care work not only quantifies gaps in unpaid care provision between women and girls compared to men and boys, but also allows for its recognition and valuation. **Time-use data are fundamental inputs to estimate the monetary value of unpaid care work in satellite accounts complementing GDP estimates.** Over time, the valuation of unpaid care work into such accounts can be used to monitor shifts of

FIGURE 88.

Schematic representation of information needs to inform policy decision-making to transform care systems



Source: Authors' elaboration based on based on the Oxfam Policy Scorecard (2021).

unpaid care provision across institutional sectors, such as from the household to the public sector while simultaneously quantifying the contributions of unpaid care work to the economy. Time-use data are therefore critical elements to inform policies aimed at reducing and redistributing unpaid care work among sexes as well as across all actors in care supply chain. Complementing unpaid domestic and care work, data on gender gaps in the unpaid production of goods, such as fetching water and collecting firewood mainly for household consumption, can shed further light on the nexus between care and climate change.<sup>120</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, only 12 countries reported against SDG indicator 5.4.1. Future endeavours aimed at addressing gaps in time-use data could incorporate additional items into background questionnaires to generate estimates to inform the expansion of social protection benefits to unpaid primary caregivers, such as women for which the main economic activity is taking care of a dependent with disability, or the development of care-supporting physical infrastructure.<sup>121</sup>

To leave no woman or girl behind and eliminate structural drivers of gender inequality in the world of work, such as gender gaps in unpaid care provision, the services in the care economy must be expanded with due consideration to both urban and rural areas. Administrative registers of health and education facilities, when available, provide critical input into the assessment of potential mismatches between care demands and supply. Similarly, data on the provision of childcare onsite for women and men workers, alongside parental leave, could greatly help the design of care-supporting workplace policies. To be transformative, evidence-informed decision-making for transforming care systems needs to consider the extent to which systems and institutions are gender-blind. In this domain of change, a set of indicators is available for most countries in Eastern Asia, South-eastern Asia and Southern Asia, while further efforts are needed in Oceania (figure 89).

Monitoring the extent to which policies succeed over time in reducing inequality of opportunities in the world of work arising from the unequal division of family responsibilities between women and men can occur by measuring the degree of attachment of workers to the labour market. For instance, in the Asia-Pacific region, the composite ratio of labour underutilization and/or prime-age employment to population disaggregated by sex and household composition is available in most countries.

Tackling suboptimal outcomes such as informality in care employment calls for rewarding care workers with

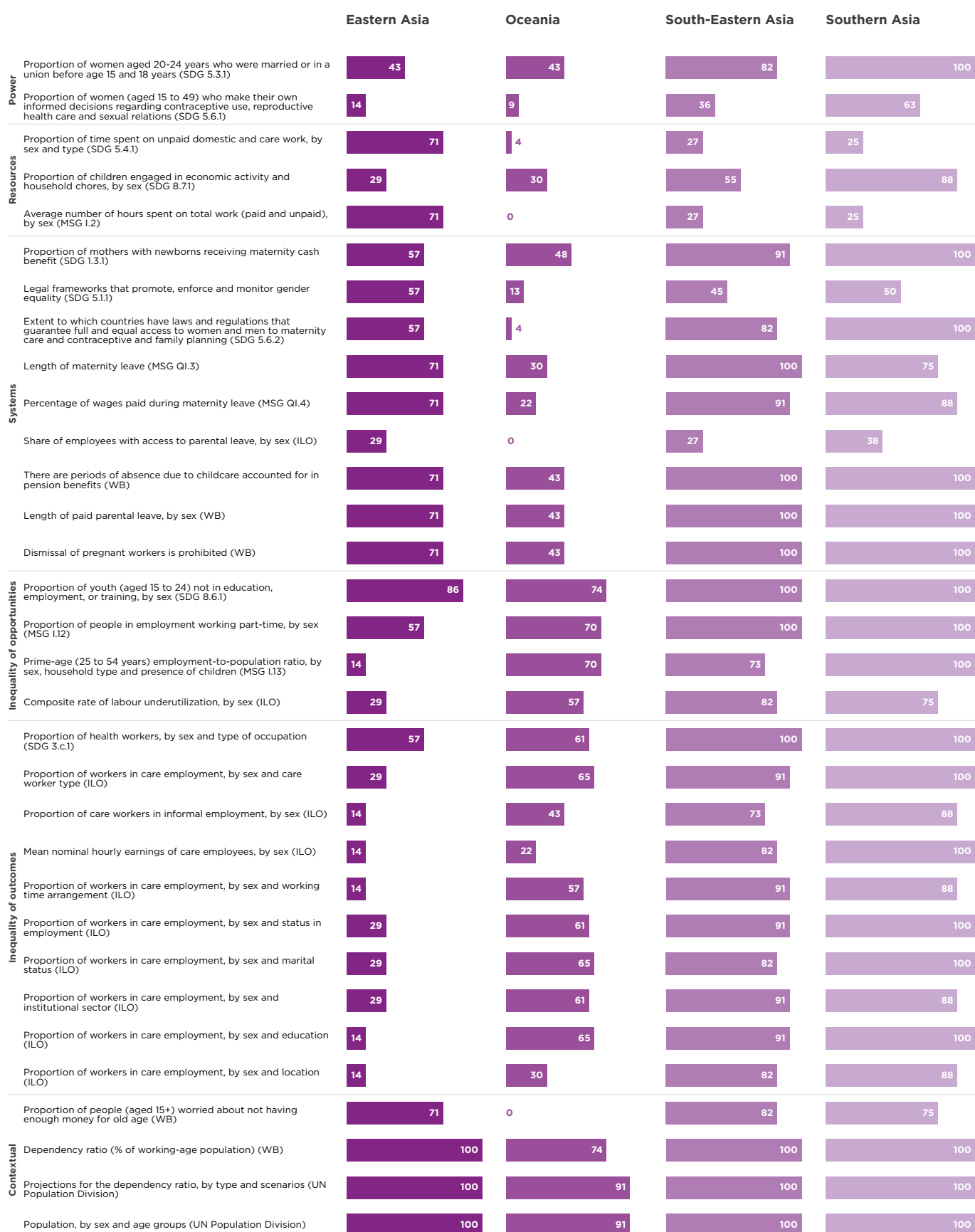
decent working conditions. Thanks to recent efforts in generating experimental series of care employment, policymakers in South-eastern Asia and Southern Asia in particular are well-positioned to understand the prevalence of care workers and their sociodemographic characteristics (figure 89). Data on prevalence and the extent to which the rights of care workers, predominantly women, are protected in the economy are important for policymaking related to labour conditions and wages. Estimates on care employment are a critical input for any analysis of gaps in care jobs. Looking ahead, efforts could be aimed at improving the measurement of informal care work, including migrant care work, and expanding the definition of care employment to include domestic work performed outside of an employment relationship with households. Considering the full spectrum of interlinkages between the care and digital economies could contribute to tackling decent work deficits for vulnerable groups and maintaining the relevance of care data in the Asia-Pacific region. Increasingly, the care supply chain in the region is characterized by a multitude of models for care provision, and efforts are needed to ensure it is reflected in official statistics for policy purposes. Similarly, the disaggregation of statistics on care employment could be enhanced by considering care entrepreneurs as a distinct category to better inform policies on entrepreneurship, including on quality standards. However, this would require the establishment of a reference concept in the future. The ultimate decision on which statistics to produce lies in the degree to which care is considered a foundational human right in societies. To this end, ratification of and compliance with labour standards in the care economy and beyond should be central to any dialogue between users and producers on information needs.

To establish a functional national statistical system and national data infrastructure, data must be acknowledged as a valuable strategic asset in the information age. Although several national statistical systems in the Asia-Pacific region may acknowledge a shared strategic plan for data to inform policies and actions towards WEE, their maturity levels and data strategies may differ, and any efforts to inform WEE policies and actions through evidence must consider those differences.

A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective, thus a stepwise approach that takes into account the realities on the ground would be more prudent. To support the implementation of actions and strategies for transforming care systems, less mature national statistical systems could begin by prioritizing increased collection of time-use data related to SDG indicator 5.4.1. This could

**FIGURE 89.**

**Proportion of countries with available data on WEE-related indicators to transform care systems, by domains of change and subregion (percentage)**



**Note:** The graph assesses the percentage of countries with available data, by indicator and subregion, accounting for 7 countries in Eastern Asia, 23 countries in Oceania, 11 countries in South-eastern Asia and 8 countries in Southern Asia.

**Source:** Authors' elaboration.

be accompanied by reprocessing existing secondary data, such as the existing labour force survey data and census data, to generate estimates on care employment and decent working conditions. At the very least, this would support policies that aim at generating employment in the care economy. More mature national statistical systems could consider utilizing existing time-use surveys to compute a Satellite Account of Household Production every 5 or 10 years, depending on available resources, to monitor the redistribution of care work among different institutional sectors, such as from households to the public and/or private sectors. Furthermore, specialized surveys that capture both the demand for and supply of care services are promising emerging practices in Canada, Mexico and Singapore. Ultimately, national statistical systems may consider integrating various data sources, such as health records, tax and subsidy data, and education in a comprehensive approach to transforming care systems. Where infrastructure allows, technological advancements can support the geographic information system mapping of care demand and supply by leveraging geo-referenced administrative data to reveal where the expansion of care services is needed most.<sup>122</sup>

### Women and the world of work

Transforming care systems can unleash the potential of women in the world of work. However, this has to be accompanied by policies, programmes and interventions that tackle the root causes of gender discrimination in the economy. These refer to deeply ingrained and harmful gender-norms that manifest themselves in the lack of agency, access to and ownership of key productive resources and assets, limited financial inclusion and opportunities for entrepreneurship, as well as discriminatory laws and practices. While data availability is sufficient to advocate change in gender-blind laws and frameworks in most Asia-Pacific subregions, severe gaps remain in indicators on asset ownership, for example. Furthermore, countries in Oceania lack estimates on financial inclusion, including digital assets and the gender dimension of the digital divide. Further investments are needed to promote evidence-informed decision-making to expand opportunities for women in the world of work through increasing data availability on entrepreneurship (figure 90).

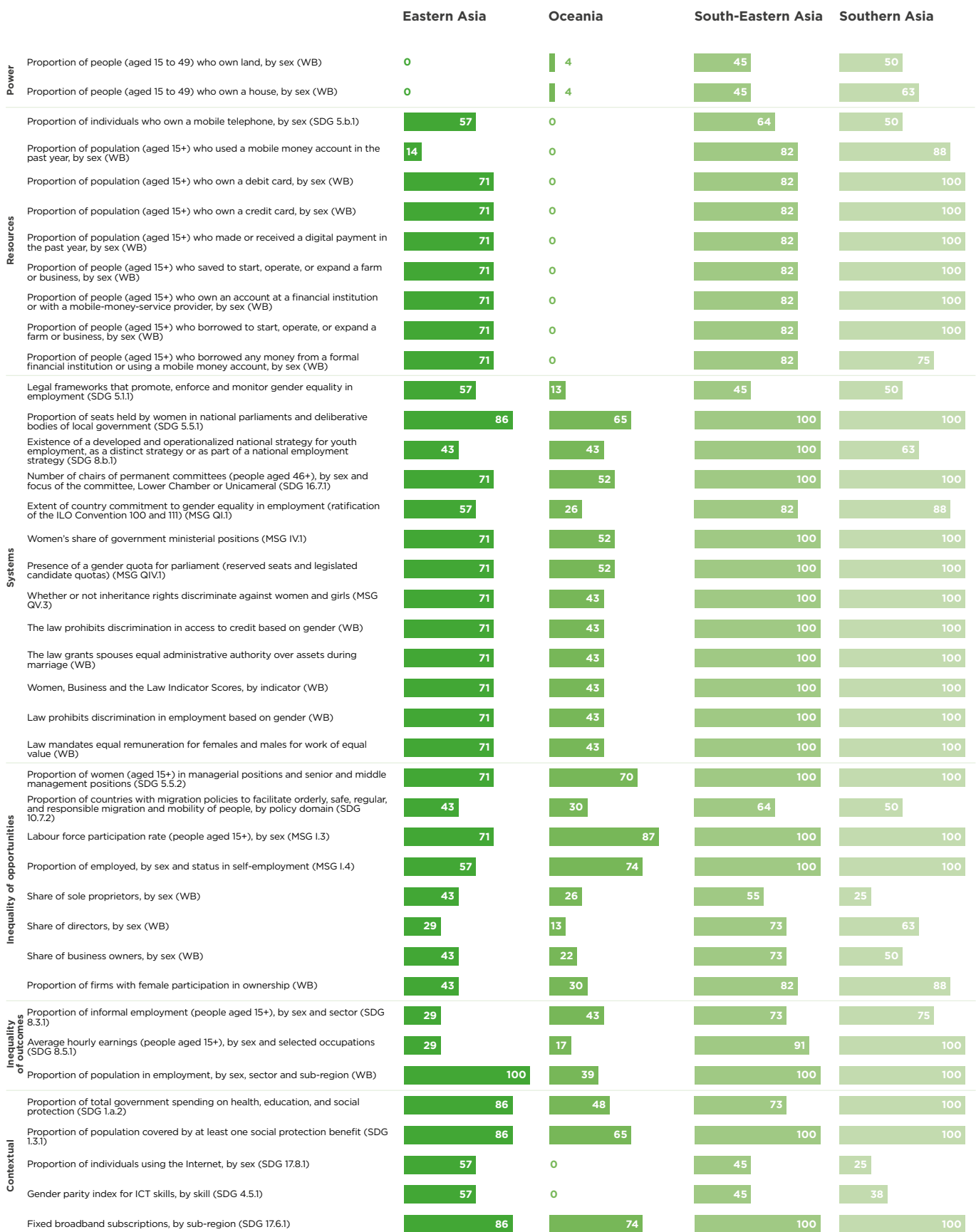
In recognizing the significant contribution of women migrant workers to the economies of their origin and destination countries, it is imperative to ensure that policies and practices are designed to address their specific needs and concerns. To achieve this, there is a pressing need for sex-disaggregated data so that policymakers may better understand the evolving needs of women who participate in international labour migration. Currently, the available data primarily focuses on the number of women out-migrating, while information on those returning and reintegrating is limited. Furthermore, there is a severe lack of data on the sectors in which women migrant workers are engaged. It is crucial to improve data collection and public reporting on the detection of trafficking victims, including their age group, sex and form of exploitation. Insufficient data in these areas hinder the understanding of the specific issues and abuses that women encounter throughout their migration journey.

Remittances play a crucial role in promoting women's financial inclusion in the Asia-Pacific region, yet there is a lack of data on how women remit money. This knowledge gap can significantly impact the financial stability of women migrant workers and their families. While there have been positive shifts in labour migration policies at regional and national levels, there is a dearth of data to monitor and assess the implementation of these policies. Many policies are ineffective due to the lack of a rights-based and gender-responsive approach, inadequate resources for their implementation and inability to address emerging issues. Consequently, migrant workers, especially women, continue to suffer from various abuses, including decent work deficits, exploitation and trafficking, and these abuses are impeding progress towards sustainable development in the region.

Given that a significant portion of migration in Asia and the Pacific occurs at the intraregional level, it is crucial to strengthen the evidence base and enhance capacities at all levels to establish and manage a comprehensive gender data ecosystem on intraregional labour migration. This will facilitate informed policy development and promote information-sharing among stakeholders, enabling them to collaborate on practical measures that safeguard the rights of women in migration and maximize their long-term contributions to development within the region and beyond.

**FIGURE 90.**

**Proportion of countries with available data on WEE-related gender indicators for women in the world of work, by domains of change and subregion (percentage)**



**Note:** The graph assesses the percentage of countries with available data, by indicator and subregion, accounting for 7 countries in Eastern Asia, 23 countries in Oceania, 11 countries in South-eastern Asia and 8 countries in Southern Asia.

**Source:** Authors' elaboration.



### 5.3 Beyond GDP

As a measure of the total value of all goods and services produced within a country over a specific period, GDP has proven to be a resounding success in quantifying economic performance.<sup>123</sup> From a statistical standpoint, this indicator is firmly grounded in sound and rigorous concepts and methods – namely the System of National Accounts (SNA) – making it widely applicable for cross-country comparisons. While GDP is a valuable metric for measuring economic output, it has limitations in capturing the full scope of economic activities, welfare and sustainability. Like any longstanding statistical concept, GDP is currently undergoing a review by experts to refine its measurement and address key measurement challenges, such as informality, digitalization and environmental degradation.<sup>124</sup>

Although the informal sector as well as the digital economy are theoretically included in GDP, it may be difficult to accurately measure their complete contribution to economic performance. Efforts are ongoing to enhance data collection and estimation methods, as it is crucial to have a better understanding of informal activities and integrate them into national accounts for comprehensive economic analysis and effective policymaking. From a gender perspective, women frequently work in the informal sector, for instance, in small-scale and unregistered businesses, as street vendors and as casual labourers. The informal sector includes the proliferation of non-standard forms of employment in the digital economy. When not reflected in official GDP statistics due to data gaps or lack of quality, this may result in an underestimation of the economic activities and contributions of women. Where informal activities, including women's provision of unpaid care and domestic services play a significant role, underestimation contributes to an incomplete picture of an economy's size and structure, thus affecting gender transformative policymaking, particularly in employment, social protection and economic planning.

Ongoing efforts are also aimed at tackling the fact that GDP does not subtract the costs associated with environmental degradation, pollution or the depletion of natural resources, which can lead to an overestimation of economic welfare. The depletion of natural resources, such as deforestation or depletion of mineral reserves, is not deducted from GDP, thus GDP does not account for the sustainability of growth. Women, particularly those residing in rural and indigenous communities, frequently experience a disproportionate impact from environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources. These consequences can significantly affect women's livelihoods and income, especially those dependent on agricultural,

forestry and fishing activities. It is crucial to incorporate environmental sustainability into economic planning and acknowledge the gender-specific ramifications of environmental transformations. It is also crucial to guarantee equal opportunities for women to avail themselves of sustainable economic growth.<sup>125</sup>

GDP has limitations when it comes to assessing how well an economy empowers women. One limitation is the lack of disaggregation shedding light on distributional justice. GDP combines economic output without considering contributions from different demographic groups, such as women and men. Consequently, GDP fails to reveal gender disparities in income, employment and economic opportunities. It overlooks important issues, such as the gender pay gap, variations in labour force participation rates, and unequal access to resources. Similarly, GDP does not capture gender-specific challenges, such as barriers to education, health care and legal rights, which are crucial for understanding and addressing the systemic barriers that affect WEE. For example, legal frameworks governing asset ownership, including laws related to property rights, land and business ownership, are not directly included in the calculation of GDP. However, they play a critical role in shaping the economic environment in which production and investment occur.

The Beyond GDP agenda takes stock of current limitations in measuring economic performance as well as the ongoing efforts to overcome such challenges, and it implies re-thinking of the framework behind metrics of progress and performance.<sup>126</sup> This agenda has significant policy implications that result from a shift in policy objectives, transitioning from a strong focus on economic growth to one centred on well-being and agency, respect for life and the planet, as well as the reduction of inequality and the promotion of increased solidarity. This implies scrutinizing the assumption that human behaviour is solely driven by self-interest and rational motivations aimed at maximizing one's own utility.<sup>127</sup> Welfare so narrowly defined limits the evaluation of well-being to metrics of happiness in an information space that is merely monetary (e.g. expenditures). The ongoing discussion is addressing the shortcomings of current economic models that overlook several aspects central to human well-being while placing disproportionate value on activities that operate under the assumption of unlimited natural resources. It opens the way for the adoption of new theoretical underpinnings that characterize human beings as agents whose choices can be motivated by values such those expressed in the United Nations Charter (peace, justice, human rights and the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples).<sup>128</sup>

This shift in paradigms coherently calls for evaluating societal and economic progress in relation to the enhancement of well-being and agency, exercise bodily autonomy, make decisions about their own lives and actively participate in society in a meaningful way. This encompasses engagement in formal roles, cultural activities and the freedom of expression.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, recognizing the value of solidarity implies an understanding of shared interests, objectives, standards and sympathies, fostering a sense of unity, enhancing collaboration, providing assistance and support and strengthening the interconnectedness of individuals within a society. In this context, a guiding and fundamental principle is safeguarding and conserving the lives of humans, all animal and plant species, and the environment. It promotes sustainable coexistence, free from unresolved conflicts and the excessive exploitation of any particular resource or the dominance of one over another. This principle entails the protection of ecosystems and the preservation of biodiversity. Additionally, it requires adherence to international human rights norms and standards, which encompass the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

A corollary objective of the Beyond GDP agenda is the identification of 10–20 indicators that are concise, well-established, widely accepted, comparable and attractive for decision-making, that can monitor progress in well-being and agency, respect for life and the planet, reduced inequality and increased solidarity while informing processes of participatory governance and stronger institutions, innovative and ethical economies and the movement of societies and economies from vulnerability to resilience. Concurrently, detailed information with multiple levels of disaggregation, such as age, sex, ethnicity and disability is crucial for shedding light on distributional justice and emphasizing the unique characteristics of specific demographic groups and regions, as well as their vulnerabilities and exposure to risks.

To address the Beyond GDP agenda from a WEE perspective, it is important to acknowledge and consider the full spectrum of women's economic contributions. Several exclusions from GDP are particularly relevant from a WEE perspective. These exclusions draw attention to areas where women's contributions to the economy are undervalued or overlooked, and where targeted policies could

be implemented to enhance the well-being and agency and address gender inequalities. GDP primarily focuses on measuring market transactions and fails to account for unpaid domestic and care work. This exclusion implies that **GDP does not fully reflect the extent of women's contributions to the economy or the economic value of these activities.** While SDG indicator 5.4.1 already complements GDP in highlighting women's unpaid contributions, it does not consider unpaid on-call time spent providing supervisory care.<sup>130,131</sup> The time women and girls devote to providing supervisory care constrains the opportunities available to them.<sup>132</sup>

Recognizing and valuing supervisory care is crucial for WEE, as it affects women's ability to participate not only in employment but also in other important life spheres, such as education, leisure and culture. Policies that provide support for childcare, expand childcare services, promote work-life balance and recognize unpaid work in social security and pension systems can enhance WEE by recognizing and reducing supervisory care time. Similarly, women's volunteer work, such as providing caregiving services to other households, is excluded from GDP calculations. This leads to an incomplete picture of the economic and social contributions of women, as such work falls outside the SNA production boundary for GDP computation even though it is considered productive from an economic perspective. By emphasizing market-based activities, GDP does not adequately capture non-market areas where women often make critical contributions to agency, solidarity and resilience and lay the foundation for other economic activities.

The aim of WEE is not solely to increase women's participation in the labour force. It encompasses the enhancement of the overall well-being and agency of women and girls. This includes ensuring that women and girls have sufficient decision-making power and can act in an enabling environment that allows them to thrive, live with dignity and unleash their full potential. GDP focuses on the quantity of economic output and does not account for factors that significantly impact women's economic exclusion, such as access to health care, education, safe working conditions and legal protections against discrimination and violence. A plethora of available indicators contribute to the discourse on Beyond GDP from a WEE perspective.

## BOX 9.

### Proposal for a minimum set of WEE-relevant indicators Beyond GDP

A wide range of available WEE indicators are needed to inform gender-transformative actions in three domains of change – power, resources and systems – and monitor progress towards the economic empowerment of women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region. To better reflect the realities of care workers in the region, continued efforts are needed to fill SDGs data gaps, leverage the availability of existing WEE indicators in decision-making and further refine the definition of care employment. This includes considering domestic workers who are not in an employment relationship with households, as well as the growing number of care delivery models, including those that emerge at the intersection of the digital and care economy.

Extensive data mapping has allowed for the identification of metrics that are not included in the SDG indicators framework, yet these metrics are relevant for informing gender-transformative actions related to WEE that are aligned with the Beyond GDP agenda on well-being and agency, reduced inequalities, solidarity and resilient systems. These metrics are described below:

**Measures of supervisory care and direct volunteer work:** Supervisory care is an unpaid form of work that constrains the time of caregivers and often arises from the unequal share of family responsibility. Direct volunteer work refers to any unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others.<sup>a</sup> When the scope of direct volunteer work relates to the provision of care services, it can be used as a proxy for solidarity among people in meeting their care needs. Both forms of unpaid work fall within the general boundary of the System of National Accounts and are mostly informal activities. Reference concepts for statistical measurement are internationally endorsed and methodologies are available.<sup>b,c</sup> This proposal aligns with the inclusion of supervisory care in the valuation of unpaid household services as recommended by the Sub-group on Well-being and Sustainability of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts.<sup>d</sup> Measures of supervisory care can shed light on unhealthy economic development, such as skewed income and wealth distributions deriving from the root causes of gender inequality and women's disempowerment, and call for institutions to deliver essential services while enabling meaningful participation of both women and men to the economy and society. Supervisory care alongside measures of time-use, including total work time, is well positioned to track the expansion or reduction of gender inequalities over time.

**Measures of the degree to which businesses are gender-transformative and inclusive:** To advance economic fairness and equal opportunities for both women and men, it is crucial to utilize available WEE indicators to identify gender disparities in working conditions, ownership of productive assets and gender-blind systems. Additionally, it would be beneficial to incorporate metrics that assess the ethical standards within the production and consumption value chain, including business adherence to human rights and Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPIs) as well as green jobs. Furthermore, these metrics should encompass the use of innovative technologies to promote a more ethically driven care economy, which holds particular relevance in contexts where informal employment is prevalent.

**Measures on financial inclusion:** Promoting the economy as an ethical employer also calls for understanding the degree of inclusivity in accessing entrepreneurship opportunities. Financial inclusion is a key enabler for the economic empowerment of women, as they are often excluded from formal financial systems. By providing women with access to financial services, they can achieve greater economic independence, exercise control over resources, enjoy greater resilience and invest in their businesses and communities. This includes supporting the empowerment of women in climate action through widening employment opportunities in green and blue economy sectors. Policies that promote financial inclusion, including digital solutions, can help to reduce women's reliance on informal economies and reduce geographical and socioeconomic disparities between women and men by ensuring that marginalized and rural populations have access to financial services, thereby integrating them into the broader economy.<sup>e</sup> Available indicators produced by the World Bank, such as the gender gap in account ownership and the percentage of small and medium-sized enterprises with access to credit, can serve this purpose.

**Measures on women's and girls' participation in climate-related decision-making:** Women often experience the effects of climate change in distinct ways from men, primarily because of their roles within households and communities.<sup>f</sup> This is particularly evident in contexts where women and girls are responsible for tasks such as gathering water, fuel and food. Simultaneously, women's rights to natural resources, including land inheritance and property, are not systematically promoted and protected in law, policy and practices. It is crucial to incorporate their viewpoints to ensure that policies effectively cater to the needs and vulnerabilities of all. UN-Women, in partnership with stakeholders, has developed several measurement **tools** to support countries in filling critical information gaps and strengthen the production of evidence on the nexus between gender and climate.

While this proposal is not exhaustive, it underscores the importance of engaging in further discussion and taking action to advance a gender-transformative Beyond GDP agenda. The aim is to ensure that women's participation to the economy and society is adequately recognized, valued and compensated. This entails conducting comprehensive consultations and analysis to enhance the perspective of feminist economics in the current discourse on our common future.

#### Notes:

- a. International Conference of Labour Statisticians (2023). [Resolution to amend the 19th ICLS resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization.](#)
- b. United Nations (2024). [Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use.](#)
- c. ILO (2021). [Volunteer work measurement guide.](#)
- d. Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Account. Sub-group on Well-being and Sustainability. [WS.3 Recommendations for the effective measurement of unpaid household services within the System of National Accounts Framework.](#)
- e. United Nations Special Advocate for Inclusive Finance for Development (2018). [Financial Inclusion, Technology, Innovation, Progress.](#) Annual Report to the Secretary-General.
- f. UN Women (2023). [The Climate-Care Nexus: Addressing the Linkages Between Climate Change and Women's and Girls's Unpaid Care, Domestic and Communal Work.](#)

## Endnotes

- 1 The ILO [Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2024](#) highlights that across all subregions, employment gender gaps for age 25–64 years have declined substantially over the past 30 years. Across the region, the gender gap has declined by only 3 percentage points, owing to composition effects, such as ageing population and higher educational enrolment rates for youth.
- 2 IMF (October 2023). [Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific: Challenges to sustaining growth and disinflation](#).
- 3 World Bank (2024). [Firm Foundations of Growth. World Bank East Asia and Pacific Economic Update \(April 2024\)](#).
- 4 ILO (2024). [Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2024: Promoting decent work and social justice to manage ageing societies](#).
- 5 The economic losses due to the disempowerment of women have been estimated to range from 10 per cent of GDP in advanced economies to more than 30 per cent in South Asia and in the Middle East and North Africa. See United Nations (2024). [Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions](#). Report of the Secretary-General.
- 6 UN Women and ADB (2022). [Two years on. The lingering gendered consequences of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific](#). See also UN Women (2020). [Unlocking the lockdown. The gendered effects of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific](#).
- 7 ESCAP (2024). [Asia and the Pacific SDG progress report 2024: Showcasing transformative actions](#).
- 8 UNDP (2024). [2024 Regional Human Development Report for Asia and the Pacific. Making our future: New directions for human development in Asia and the Pacific](#).
- 9 UNDP and UN Women (2023). [The paths to equal: Twin indices on women's empowerment and gender equality](#). The Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) is a composite index measuring women's empowerment in: life and good health; education, skill-building and knowledge; labour and financial inclusion; participation in decision-making; and freedom from violence. The Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) shows achievements in: life and good health; education, skill-building and knowledge; labour and financial inclusion; and participation in decision-making.
- 10 The Global Gender Gap Index measures progress towards gender parity and evaluates gender gaps in access to resources and opportunities in four dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. The composite indicator ranges from 0 to 100 per cent and can be interpreted as the distance towards parity (i.e. the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed). See WEF (2024). [Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#).
- 11 The [Global Gender Gap Report 2024](#) groups countries into eight regions: Central Asia, Eastern Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and Northern Africa, Northern America, Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
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- 13 UN Women (2024). [Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy](#).
- 14 UN Women (2023). [Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).
- 15 UN Women and WHO (2020). [RESPECT Women: Preventing violence against women- Implementation package](#).
- 16 IOM (2018). [Migration and the 2030 Agenda. A guide for practitioners](#).
- 17 UN Women and UN DESA (2023) [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023](#).
- 18 UNEP, UN Women, PBSO and UNDP (2024). [Women and natural resources. Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential](#).
- 19 FAO (2023). [The status of women in agrifood systems](#).
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- 21 UNDP has launched its [Gender Equality Strategy for 2022–2025](#), addressing the critical issue of inadequate public allocation systems and the shrinking fiscal space for gender equality and women's empowerment. Without significant investment and innovative financing tools, progress towards gender equality and the potential benefits of women's economic empowerment on achieving all SDGs will be severely hindered.
- 22 The latest report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the SDGs underlines that sustainable development grants to developing countries fell in 2022, and while debt levels decreased slightly, they remained exceptionally high. The report calls attention to the \$4 trillion annual investment gap for developing countries to achieve the SDGs.
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- 24 Evidence on the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, for instance, that women were the main providers of essential services through heightened provision of unpaid care work. See UN Women and ADB (2022). [Two years on. The lingering gendered consequences of COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific](#); UN Women (2020). [Unlocking the lockdown. The gendered effects of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific](#).
- 25 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2022). [What is the Triple Planetary Crisis?](#)
- 26 N. Folbre (2015). [Valuing non-market work](#). Think piece. UNDP Human Development Report Office.
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- 31 World Bank Gender Data Portal.
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- 33 Authors' elaboration based on ILOSTAT data for 26 countries.
- 34 For relevant terminology on care systems, see: United Nations (2024).

- [Transforming care systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda.](#)
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- 37 UN DESA (2023). [Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World. World Social Report 2023.](#)
- 38 World Bank Gender Data Portal.
- 39 UN Women (2023). [Pathways towards decent work in the digitally enabled care economy in Southeast Asia.](#)
- 40 UN Women (2021). [Investing in free universal childcare in Sub-Saharan Africa: Côte D’Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania: Estimating spending requirements, gendered employment effects and fiscal revenue.](#)
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- 45 United Nations (2024). [Transforming care systems in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals and Our Common Agenda.](#)
- 46 UN Women (2024). [Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy.](#)
- 47 The UN DESA database for MSG reports data on the legal minimum age at marriage by sex for 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific.
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- 49 Marriage and family assesses whether the minimum age of marriage is at least 18 with no legal exceptions, equal rights to enter marriage and initiate divorce, legal guardianship of children during and after marriage, recognition as head of household or head of the family, to choose where to live or a profession, to obtain an identity card, to apply for passports, and to own, access and control marital property. It also assesses whether marriage under the legal age is void or voidable, and the establishment of dedicated and specialized family courts.
- Overarching legal framework and public life assesses whether customary and personal laws are invalid if they violate constitutional provisions on equality or non-discrimination, prohibition of both direct and indirect discrimination against women, equal rights and access to hold public and political office, quotas for women in national parliament, equal rights to confer citizenship to spouses and children, establishment of a specialized independent body to receive complaints on gender discrimination, mandated legal aid in criminal and civil/family matters, equal evidentiary weight for women’s testimony in court, existence of laws requiring the production and dissemination of gender statistics, and sanctions or incentives related to mandated candidate list quotas.
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- 53 [Informal unions](#) are generally defined as those in which a couple lives together for some time, intends to have a lasting relationship, but for which there has been no formal civil or religious ceremony (i.e. cohabitation).
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- 66 United Nations (2024). Report of the Secretary-General. [Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: The effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions.](#)
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- 90 Across the region, Securities and Exchange Commissions in only a few countries are requesting listed companies to disclose their data on remuneration.
- 91 The workplace indicator analyses laws affecting women's decisions to work. The pay indicator measures laws and regulations affecting women's pay. The Assets indicator considers gender differences in property and inheritance. The entrepreneurship indicator analyses constraints on women starting and running businesses. The parenthood indicator examines laws affecting women's work after having children. The mobility indicator examines constraints on freedom of movement. The marriage indicator assesses legal constraints related to marriage. The pension indicator assesses laws affecting the size of a woman's pension.
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- 113 The list of 112 indicators includes most gender-specific indicators across the SDGs as identified by UN Women in 2018. However, four SDG indicators are excluded from the list as they are central to other areas of work. These indicators are 3.3.1, 11.7.2, 16.1.1, 16.2.3.
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- 116 ESCAP (2024). [Asia and the Pacific SDG progress report 2024. Showcasing Transformative Actions](#).
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- 118 ECOSOC resolution [2022/5](#).
- 119 Resolution [S-23/2](#), annex, and resolution [S-23/3](#), annex.
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- 121 In 2023, the 21st International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) adopted a [resolution](#) that aims to enhance and modernize measurement standards pertaining to the informal economy. This resolution seeks to incorporate the latest developments in the world of work and provide a more accurate representation of individuals' circumstances. Additionally, it aims to align these standards with the recent guidelines on measuring all types of work, not just employment, and work relationships, as adopted by the 19th and 20th ICLS.
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