

BEIJING
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**CHARTING NEW PATHS FOR
GENDER EQUALITY AND
EMPOWERMENT: ASIA-PACIFIC
REGIONAL REPORT ON
BEIJING+30 REVIEW**

CHAPTER 4



ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
for Asia and the Pacific



CHARTING NEW PATHS FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT: ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL REPORT ON BEIJING+30 REVIEW

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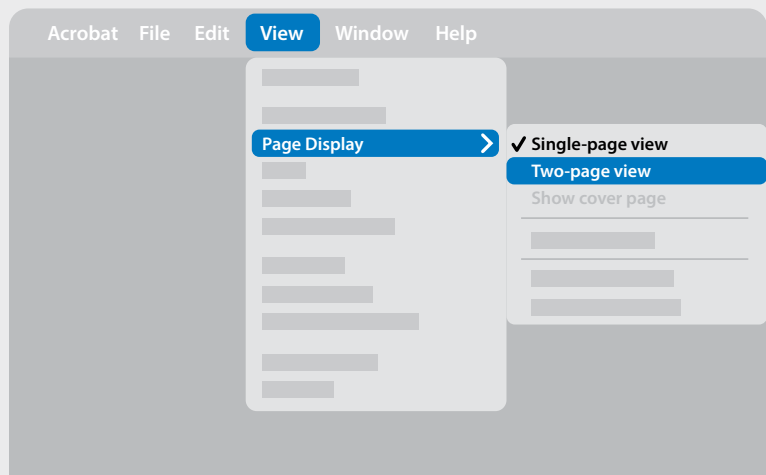
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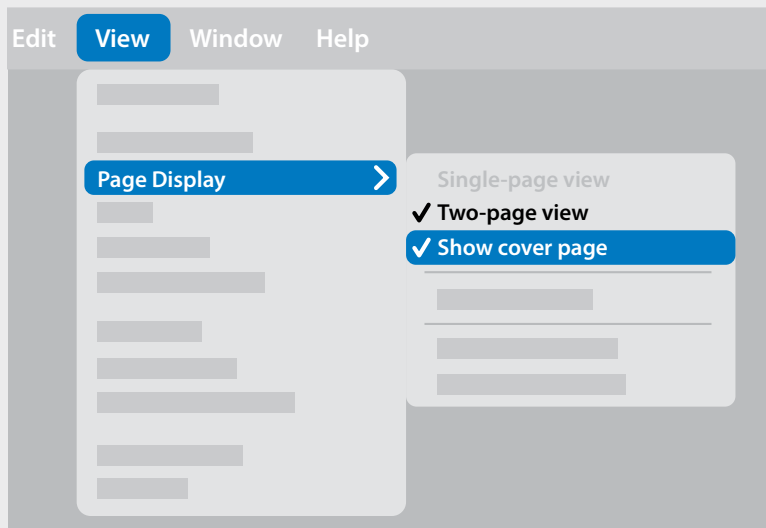
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CHAPTER 4

Freedom from gender-based violence



Fijian volunteers have lunch during the launch of the Voices Against Violence curriculum in Suva. © UN Women

KEY MESSAGES

Rooted in gender inequality, violence against women and girls represents one of the fundamental social, economic and political means that perpetuate the subordinate position of women and girls in relation to men and boys. Occurring in private or public spaces and spheres of human interaction, violence affects women and girls to different degrees and in different ways throughout their life cycle.

The impacts of violence extend far beyond immediate physical and emotional trauma for victims/survivors. The burden of violence also imposes an economic toll on the health, social services and justice sectors, and harms society at large by causing a considerable loss of women's productivity.

Despite widespread underestimation, the prevalence of violence against women and girls is alarmingly high in Asia and the Pacific.

- + More than 1 in 4 women aged 15–49 years of age in the region are estimated to have experienced **physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence** at least once in their lifetime.¹
- + Sub-regional estimates of lifetime non-partner sexual violence range from 2 per cent to 19 per cent among women aged 15–49 years of age.²
- + Home is not a safe place for many women and girls in Asia. An estimated 18,400 women and girls were **killed by their intimate partners or other family members** in 2022, the second highest ranking globally after Africa.³
- + Despite South Asia leading the global decline in **child marriage**, it is still home to almost half of child brides worldwide. The pace of decline must be seven times faster than the 2012–2022 period to eradicate child marriage in this subregion by 2030.⁴ Declines in child marriage rates in East Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia have stagnated.⁵

1 World Health Organization (WHO), *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women* (Geneva, 2021).

2 Ibid.

3 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide): Global Estimates of Female Intimate Partner/Family-Related Homicides in 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

4 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *A Profile of Child Marriage in South Asia* (New York, 2023).

5 UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest Trends and Future Prospects, 2023 Update* (New York, 2023).

- + Women and girls are overrepresented among detected **trafficking** victims/survivors in East Asia and the Pacific (79 per cent of all victims/survivors), Central Asia (64 per cent) and South Asia (56 per cent), with forced labour and sexual exploitation being the most common forms of violence.⁶
- + Estimating the prevalence of **technology-facilitated violence against women** remains challenging, but some studies suggest a high prevalence.⁷

Some Asia-Pacific Governments have made strides towards eliminating violence against women and girls through a multi-sectoral and multistakeholder approach on the prevention and response continuum. Noticeable efforts include, among others, strengthening laws, policies and institutional mechanisms; investing in holistic prevention measures; providing multi-sectoral and victim/survivor-centred services; and improving data collection on violence against women and girls to inform policy.

Accelerated actions are needed to invest in quality, coordinated multi-sectoral services for victims/survivors and evidence-informed, longer-term prevention efforts that address the root causes of and risk factors for violence, with active engagement of men and boys.

4.1 OVERVIEW

Gender-based violence (GBV) constitutes a pressing public health crisis, a pervasive violation of human rights and a significant impediment to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. While GBV can impact individuals of any gender, the majority of victims/ survivors⁸ are women and girls. The violence is most often perpetrated by men who are current or former intimate partners.⁹ This section primarily centres on addressing violence against women and girls, which is defined by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."¹⁰

Eliminating violence against women and girls in all its forms primarily corresponds to critical areas of concern D (violence against women) and J (women and the media) outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It also lies at the heart of the SDGs, including targets 5.2, 5.3, 16.1 and 16.2. General recommendation No.35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urges States parties to strengthen

the implementation of their obligations in relation to ending violence against women and girls, with accelerated efforts in the areas of prevention, protection, prosecution and punishment, reparations, data collection and monitoring, and international cooperation. In addition, General recommendations no. 31 (revised in 2019) and no.38 (2020) call for accelerated action to address harmful practices and trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration. Furthermore, the agreed conclusions adopted at the 65th (2021) and 67th (2023) sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women specifically encourage efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public life, as well as violence that is facilitated or amplified by the use of technologies.

The discussion in [Chapter 4](#) provides an overview of different forms of violence in Asia and the Pacific, focusing on intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, femicide, child marriage, trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, technology-facilitated violence and other harmful practices against women and girls. The chapter also highlights promising practices and achievements in ending all forms of violence against women and girls in the region.

6 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

7 The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women", web page, 1 March 2021. Available at <https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/> (accessed on 15 February 2024).

8 The term "victim/survivor" refers to women and girls who have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence to reflect both the terminology used in the legal process and the agency of these women and girls in seeking essential services. Some people suggest that the term "victim" should be avoided as it implies passivity, weakness and inherent vulnerability and fails to recognize the reality of women's resilience and agency, while for others, the term "survivor" is problematic because it denies the sense of victimization experienced by women who have been the target of violent crime. UN-Women recommends the use of the term "victim/ survivor." UN-Women, "Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes, Sixth Session, 21 August–1 September 2023, UN Women submission", brief (New York, 2023).

9 Michaela M. Rogers and Parveen Ali, "Understanding gender-based violence", in *Gender-Based Violence: A Comprehensive Guide*, Parveen Ali and Michaela M. Rogers, eds. (Cham, Springer, 2023).

10 A/RES/48/104.

4.2 CAUSES, IMPACTS AND MEASUREMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Occurring in private or public spaces and spheres of human interaction, violence affects women and girls to different degrees and in different ways throughout their life. Population groups in vulnerable situations may experience multiple and intersecting forms of violence based on gender, age, disability, migration status, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, gender identity and other identifiers.¹¹ For example, adolescent girls may be especially vulnerable to technology-facilitated violence.¹² Older women and women with disabilities may encounter specific risks and additional forms of violence, such as the withholding of medicines and assistive devices and other aspects of care and financial abuse, perpetrated by caregivers or health care professionals. The isolation and dependency of some older women and women with disabilities, coupled with stigma and discrimination against them, makes it challenging for victims/survivors to escape, report the abuse and access services.¹³ In low and middle-income countries, women with disabilities are two to four times more likely to experience intimate partner violence than women without disabilities.¹⁴ Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women encounter higher rates of violence from both strangers and intimate partners compared to the general population.¹⁵

Rooted in gender inequality, violence against women and girls represents one of the fundamental social, economic and political means that perpetuate the subordinate position of women and girls in relation to men and boys. Gender-related factors, such as entrenched social norms about men's entitlement and privilege over women, unequal gendered power relations and socially prescribed gender roles, often result in the explicit or implicit acceptance and normalization of violence against women and girls.¹⁶

Violence thus becomes a way to exert power, manipulate individuals, leverage privileges, mask insecurity and dominate decision-making within relationships, families, institutions and society.¹⁷ Moreover, the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic (box 4.1), emerging and protracted crises and conflicts (see Chapter 6), climate change and environmental degradation (see Chapter 7) and other risk factors further intensify various forms and prevalence of violence against women and girls, highlighting the urgency of addressing violence in times of crisis.¹⁸

The impacts of violence extend far beyond immediate physical and emotional trauma for victims/survivors. Violence against women and girls profoundly affects their long-term health and well-being, constraining victims/survivors' educational and earning potential and impeding their ability to care for themselves and their families, including their children.¹⁹ For example, women with past-year experience of intimate partner violence may be at a higher risk of depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).²⁰ The prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents, particularly girls, is significantly influenced by the occurrence of sexual violence during mid-adolescence.²¹

The burden of violence also imposes an economic toll on the health, social services and justice sectors, and harms society at large by causing a considerable loss of women's productivity.²² Findings from a UN-Women costing study on violence against women and girls in Solomon Islands reveal that the annual productivity loss of women in the formal sector due to intimate partner violence is approximately 15.1 million United States dollars (\$), accounting for almost 1 per cent of the country's 2021 gross domestic product (GDP).²³ Another UNFPA study shows that the productivity loss of women due to intimate partner violence in Mongolia is estimated to be \$166.6–277.6 million, amounting to 1.5–2.4 per cent of 2017 GDP.²⁴

11 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, "General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19", CEDAW/C/GC/35 (Geneva, 2017).

12 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Making All Spaces Safe: Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence* (New York, 2021).

13 WHO, "WHO calls for greater attention to violence against women with disabilities and older women", news release, 27 March 2024. Available at <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-03-2024-who-calls-for-greater-attention-to-violence-against-women-with-disabilities-and-older-women> (accessed on 11 April 2024).

14 Kristin Dunkle and others, "Disability and violence against women and girls: Emerging evidence from the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Global Programme", brief (London, 2018).

15 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Report on the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health of persons, communities and populations affected by discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals", A/HRC/50/27 (New York, 2022).

16 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women "General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19", CEDAW/C/GC/35 (Geneva, 2017).

17 UNITE Working Group, *A Resource Book on Intimate Partners Violence for UN Staff in Asia* (Bangkok, 2019).

18 United Nations, "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/302 (New York, 2022).

19 WHO, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women* (Geneva, 2021).

20 Chelsea Spencer and others "Mental health factors and intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization: A meta-analysis," *Psychology of Violence*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 1–19 (2019) and Supa Pengpid and Karl Peltzer "Associations of physical partner violence and sexual violence victimization on health risk behaviours and mental health among university students from 25 countries," *BMC Public Health*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2020).

21 Fiona Mensah and Stephanie Brown, "The impact of sexual violence in gendered adolescent mental health pathways," *The Lancet Psychiatry*, vol. 9, no. 11, pp. 847–848 (October 2022).

22 UNFPA, *A Guide to Better Understanding and Using Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Illustrated with A Case Study on Partner Violence in the Pacific Region* (New York, 2023).

23 UN-Women, "Solomon Islands: Summary report: Costing the impact of intimate partner violence and the resources required to address it", summary report (New York, 2023).

24 UNFPA, "Economic costs of intimate partner violence in Mongolia", report (New York, 2020).

It is critical to recognize that cases of violence remain widely underreported by victims/survivors to the police, health systems or social services due to the fear of blame and severe repercussions. These repercussions can include expulsion from social groups, loss of work and income opportunities, and legal challenges and procedures that are difficult to navigate and retraumatizing. On the other hand, **estimates of the prevalence of violence against women and girls, often based on interviews through population-based surveys, are generally considered an underestimate of the true figures.** The strictest controls on privacy, confidentiality and safety cannot overcome the barriers associated with reaching the most severe cases. Women who have been killed, hospitalized, fled their homes to escape the violence, or are too afraid to speak to those conducting surveys are excluded from the surveys. Women in vulnerable situations, such as refugees, migrants, women with disabilities, older women, adolescents, and ethnic, sexual orientation and gender identity minorities, may be less likely to be included in prevalence surveys or to feel safe reporting experience of violence in the surveys. Furthermore, due to changes in methodologies, comparisons between prevalence rates over time and between countries, subregions and regions should be interpreted with caution. Where violence is less socially tolerated and justice and other victim/survivor-centred services are stronger, prevalence estimates tend to be higher. Despite advancements over the past decade, further efforts are needed to improve the availability, quality and comparability of data on violence against women and girls.

4.3 DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE: STATUS QUO AND TRENDS

Violence against women and girls is an intricate and multifaceted phenomenon, manifesting itself on a continuum of multiple, interrelated and recurring forms that range from intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, femicide, child marriage, trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, technology-facilitated violence to harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and virginity testing.

4.3.1 Intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and girls. It encompasses behaviours by a current or former intimate partner, within the context of marriage, cohabitation and any other formal or informal union, that inflict physical, sexual or psychological harm. Such violence often includes physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.²⁵ The latest WHO 2018 estimates indicate that, globally, 10 per cent of ever-married/partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months.²⁶ Women and girls of reproductive age (15–49 years) are more likely to have recent experiences such violence, with an estimated rate of 13 per cent. In addition, 26 per cent of women and girls aged 15 years and above and 27 per cent of women of reproductive age have encountered physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime.²⁷ Older women are frequently not included in intimate partner violence data, and they experience unique risks with a reported a shift from physical/sexual violence towards psychological violence, such as abandonment threats and other controlling behaviour, as partners age.²⁸

In Asia and the Pacific, the prevalence of reported physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence taking place in the past 12 months mirrors that at the global level, standing at 10.3 per cent for women aged 15 years and older and 12.8 per cent for women aged 15–49 years. However, significant disparities are observed among countries and territories, as well as subregions. The reported prevalence among the countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific with available data ranges from 1.7 per cent to 33.6 per cent for women and girls aged 15 years and above, and from 2.4 per cent to 34.7 per cent for women of reproductive age (figure 4.1).²⁹ Data disaggregated by SDG subregional grouping are available for the 15–49 years age group. Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) exhibits the highest past-12-month prevalence: 30 per cent in Melanesia, 22 per cent in Micronesia and 19 per cent in Polynesia.³⁰ Southern Asia also has a high estimated rate (19 per cent),

25 WHO, "Violence against women", web page, 9 March 2021. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

26 As psychological intimate partner violence is often conceptualized differently across cultures and contexts, further methodological work is required to ensure accurate measurement and comparability of its prevalence.

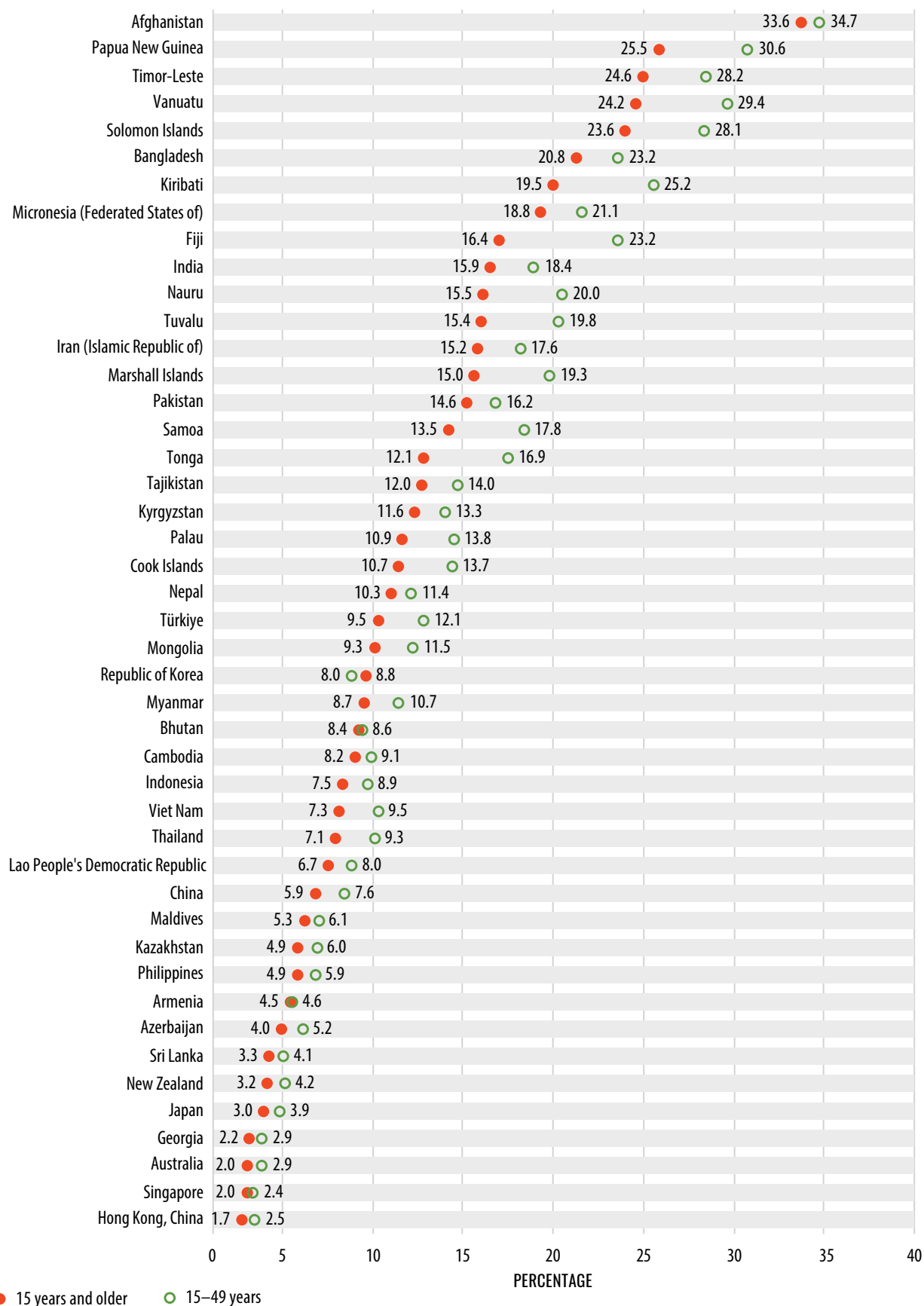
27 WHO, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women* (Geneva, 2021).

28 WHO, "WHO calls for greater attention to violence against women with disabilities and older women", news, 27 March 2024. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/27-03-2024-who-calls-for-greater-attention-to-violence-against-women-with-disabilities-and-older-women> (accessed on 2 August 2024) and UN-Women and WHO, "Violence against women 60 years and older: Data availability, methodological issues and recommendations for good practice", briefing note (New York, 2024).

29 ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicators by SDG: 5.2.1 – Violence against women (by intimate partner)", database. Available at <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 8 February 2024). The ESCAP data are sourced from the WHO 2018 estimates. It is important to note that given the sensitive nature of these surveys, varying methodology and more recent data being available in some countries, national-level surveys may have found higher or lower levels of reported intimate partner violence than what is reported in the WHO 2018 estimates.

30 Melanesia: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu; Micronesia: Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru and Palau; and Polynesia: Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu.

FIGURE 4.1 Percentage of ever-partnered women and girls subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age group, 2018



Source: ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicators by SDG: 5.2.1 – Violence against women (by intimate partner)", database. Available at <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 8 February 2024). The ESCAP data are sourced from the WHO 2018 estimates.

followed by Western Asia (13 per cent), Central Asia (9 per cent), South-Eastern Asia (9 per cent), Eastern Asia (7 per cent), and Australia and New Zealand (3 per cent).³¹

Regarding the lifetime prevalence in the Asia-Pacific region, available data disaggregated by SDG regional groupings suggest that the rate for women aged 15–49 years stands at 27 per cent in Asia and 30 per cent in Oceania, ranging between 11 per cent and 53 per cent in Asia-Pacific countries and territories. Substantial variations exist among subregions, with Melanesia recording the highest prevalence at 51 per cent, followed by Micronesia (41 per cent), Polynesia (39 per cent), Southern Asia (35 per cent), Western Asia (29 per cent), Australia and New Zealand (23 per cent), South-Eastern Asia (21 per cent), Eastern Asia (20 per cent) and Central Asia (18 per cent).³²

A recent ESCAP study found that in the 18 countries included in the analysis, women under 34 years of age with lower or secondary education living in poorer households on average experience much higher prevalence of intimate partner violence than others. Furthermore, having children under 5 years of age was associated with higher prevalence in half of the countries analysed.³³

4.3.2 Non-partner sexual violence

Non-partner sexual violence refers to being forced, coerced or threatened to perform any harmful or unwanted sexual act by non-partners, such as other family members, friends, acquaintances and strangers. It can manifest as rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching or non-contact forms of sexual violence.³⁴ According to the WHO 2018 estimates, approximately 6 per cent of women and girls from both age groups (15 years and older and 15–49 years) have experienced non-partner sexual violence at least once in their lifetime at the global level. **In the region, data disaggregated by SDG grouping for women of reproductive age indicate a lifetime prevalence of 4 per cent in Asia and 16 per cent in Oceania.** Subregional estimates vary from 2 per cent in Central Asia and Southern Asia, 4 per cent in South-Eastern Asia and Western Asia, 7 per cent in Eastern Asia, 10 per cent in Melanesia, 12 per cent in Micronesia and Polynesia to 19 per cent in Australia and New Zealand.³⁵

The WHO estimates reflect the result of interrelated factors, such as the perceived social stigma surrounding sexual violence, the quality of survey measures and the robustness of interviewer training. The varying subregional rates must be interpreted with caution, considering the diverse social and cultural contexts in Asia and the Pacific. It is also important to note that sexual harassment is not included in the WHO estimates of sexual violence prevalence, resulting in an underestimation of the true extent of sexual violence experienced by women and girls.

4.3.3 Femicide

Femicide, also known as gender-related killings of women and girls, denotes intentional killings driven by gender-related factors. Such violence mostly relates to homicides committed by intimate partners or other family members, following prior experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. In 2022, a staggering 88,900 women and girls were killed intentionally worldwide, with 48,800 falling victim to intimate partners or other family members. This translates to approximately 1.2 out of every 100,000 women and girls globally being killed by someone within their own family. **Asia recorded an estimated 18,400 killings of women and girls by their intimate partners or other family members, ranking second globally after Africa, while Oceania witnessed approximately 200 of such killings given its relatively small total population.** The female intimate partner/family-related homicide rate was 0.8 per 100,000 female population in Asia and 1.1 in Oceania; both figures are lower than the global estimate of 1.2.³⁶

While 80 per cent of homicides worldwide targeted men and boys in 2022, women and girls were disproportionately affected by homicidal violence at home. Globally, they represented about 53 per cent of all victims/survivors of domestic killings and 66 per cent of all victims/survivors of intimate partner killings. Female intimate partner/family-related homicides accounted for 55 per cent of all female homicides, compared to only 12 per cent among men. In Asia, the figure was 56 per cent for women and 18 per cent for men, while in Oceania, it stood at 60 per cent for women and 24 for men.³⁷ The data on the size and proportion of femicides by intimate partners or other family members clearly indicate that home is not a safe place for many women and girls.

31 WHO, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women* (Geneva, 2021).

32 Ibid.

33 ESCAP, *Inequality of Opportunity in Asia and the Pacific: Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Exploring Shared Circumstances Behind Higher Prevalence in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, 2023).

34 WHO, *Violence against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018: Global, Regional and National Prevalence Estimates for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women and Global and Regional Prevalence Estimates for Non-Partner Sexual Violence Against Women* (Geneva, 2021).

35 Ibid.

36 Country groupings follow the United Nations M49 standard. For details, please visit <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>. UNODC and UN-Women, *Gender-Related Killings of Women and Girls (Femicide/Feminicide): Global Estimates of Female Intimate Partner/Family-Related Homicides in 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

37 Ibid.

Female infanticide, which is linked to sex-selective abortions, is another form of femicide.³⁸ Sex selection has severe consequences for women's health and societal well-being, reinforcing gender biases and fostering gender-based violence. The preference for male children may lead to repeated abortions that harm women's mental and physical health, creates gender imbalances and exacerbates issues like trafficking in persons. Sex selection practices have led to a sex ratio at birth reaching as high as 114.6 (114.6 male birth per 100 female births) in countries in Asia and the Pacific, well above the standard biological level of 105. High sex ratios at birth are found in North and Central Asia, East and North-East Asia, South-East Asia, and South and South-West Asia.³⁹

As with other forms of violence against women and girls, measuring the prevalence of femicide is difficult because of varying definitions and lack of sex-disaggregated data. In addition, many forms may not be recognised, such as honour-related killings, women who commit suicide due to violence and women who die prematurely due to the impacts of living with violence. The Statistical Framework for Measuring the Gender-Related Killing of Women and Girls, developed by UN-Women and UNODC and adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2022, establishes a statistical definition and provides a list of variables to identify and quantify different forms of femicide.⁴⁰

4.3.4 Child marriage

Child marriage, any formal marriage or informal union between a child under the age of 18 and an adult or another child, is a human rights violation and linked to a multitude of negative outcomes.⁴¹ Girls are more likely to be married than boys and are at risk of early marriage due to factors like poverty, beliefs that marriage ensures protection and family honour, social norms, inadequate legislation, and religious and customary laws, resulting in their loss of childhood and denial of education, health, and security rights.⁴² Child marriage is linked to increased

prevalence of early pregnancy and its associated sexual and reproductive health complications, limited decision-making capacities and physical mobility, elevated vulnerability to intimate partner violence, heightened risk of depression, diminished educational attainment and restricted economic opportunities. Child marriage also has economic costs. Based on economic modelling and statistical calculations, a costing study in Pakistan estimates that between 2019-2020, the Pakistani economy lost \$ 0.8 billion or 0.42 per cent of the total GDP because of the overall incidence of child marriage in the country.⁴³

The latest UNICEF estimates suggest that 640 million girls and women were married in childhood worldwide, 290 million of them living in South Asia (45 per cent). East Asia and the Pacific is home to 95 million child brides (15 per cent), while 20 million reside in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (3 per cent).⁴⁴ **The practice of child marriage saw a decline globally from 23 per cent in 2012 to 19 per cent in 2022, primarily driven by South Asia.** In this subregion, the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18 dropped by nearly half, from 46 per cent in 2012 to 26 per cent in 2022. A significant 78 per cent of all child marriages averted worldwide from 1997 to 2022 occurred in South Asia. India led the subregion's overall progress in reducing child marriage. Countries such as Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan witnessed notable declines, with Maldives nearly eliminating the practice. Despite these achievements, many countries in South Asia still have alarmingly high rates of child marriage (figure 4.2). Moreover, compared to the progress made between 2012 and 2022, the pace of decline must be seven times faster to eradicate child marriage in South Asia by 2030.⁴⁵ In East Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the prevalence is low but stagnant, hovering around 10 per cent in the past decade. Accelerated efforts are required to meet the target of ending all child marriage by 2030.⁴⁶

38 UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2019* (Vienna, 2019).

39 UNFPA, *Preventing Son Preference and Undervaluing of Girls in Asia Pacific* (New York, 2020).

40 UN-Women and UNODC-KOSTAT Centre of Excellence for Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice in Asia and Pacific, "International Conference on Ending Gender-Based Killings of Women and Girls, 25–27 September 2023, Seoul, Korea", meeting report (Seoul, 2024).

41 UNICEF, "Child marriage: Child marriage threatens the lives, well-being and futures of girls around the world", web page. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage> (accessed on 12 February 2024). Note that "love marriage" or unions that are peer led, by consent, are also considered child marriages but imply the girl's agency and choice. This form of child marriage has not been given due attention in research. For more information see UNFPA, "Diversity of types of child marriage and early union in Asia Pacific", briefing note (Bangkok, 2021).

42 UN-Women, *Legislating and Enforcing the Minimum Age of Marriage: A Comparative Study of Experiences and Lessons Learned in Ending the Legalization of Child Marriage* (New York, 2023).

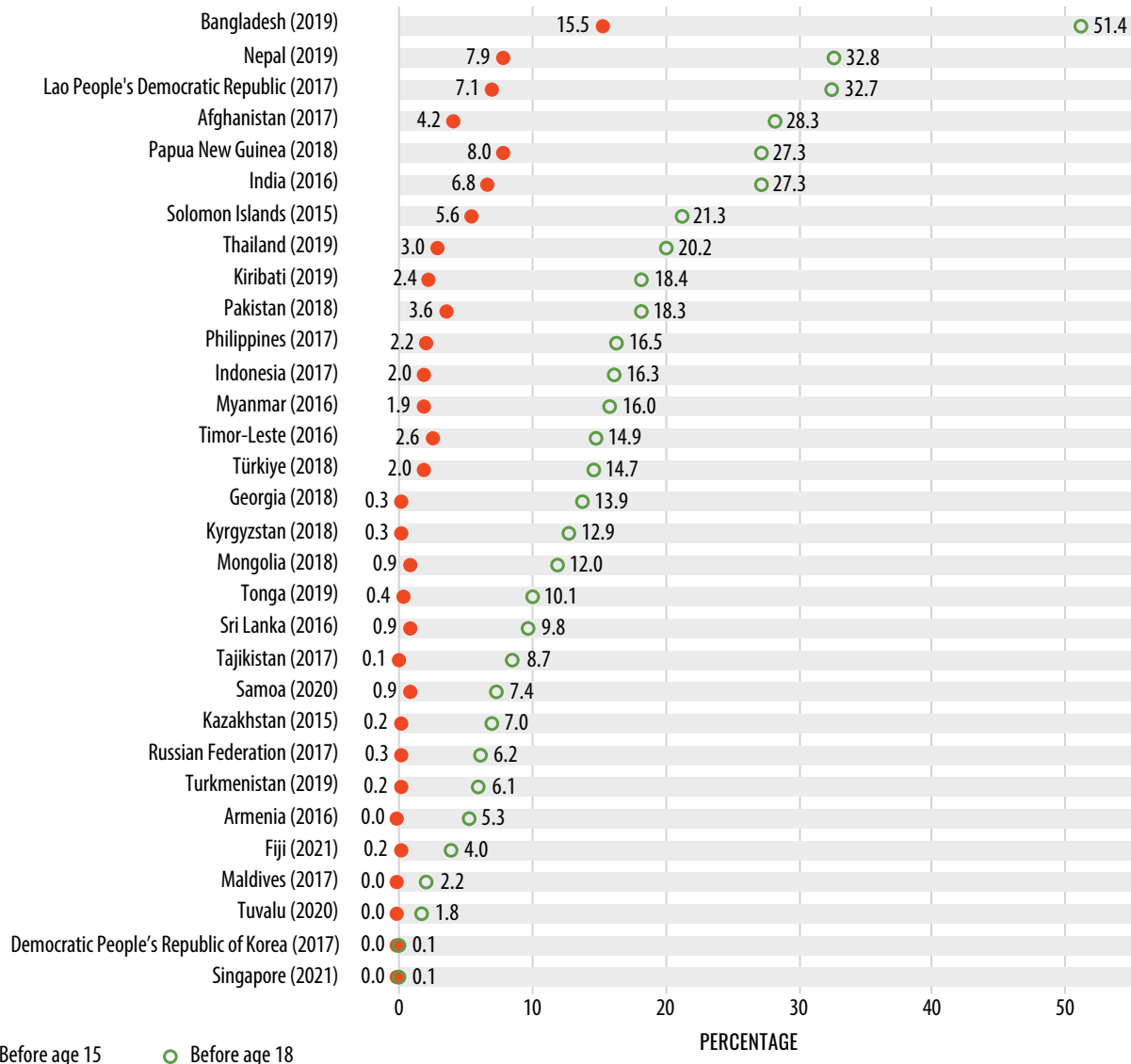
43 Pakistan, National Commission on the Status of Women and UN-Women Pakistan, *Costing Study on Child Marriage in Pakistan: A Country Level Report 2020-2021 Child Brides – the Cost We Bear* (Islamabad, 2021).

44 Please note that country grouping differs between ESCAP and UNICEF. See Annex 2. UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest Trends and Future Prospects, 2023 Update* (New York, 2023).

45 UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage in South Asia* (New York, 2023).

46 UNICEF, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest Trends and Future Prospects, 2023 Update* (New York, 2023).

FIGURE 4.2 Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 15 and 18, latest year available



Source: ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicators by SDG: 5.3.1 – Women married before age 15 and 18", database. Available at <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 12 February 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic also interrupted progress in eliminating child marriages. COVID-19 school closures disrupted education, increasing risks for girls such as dropping out, exposure to violence, and early pregnancy, while economic insecurity has pushed some families to cut education spending or consider child marriage as a survival strategy. Additionally, pandemic-related travel restrictions and social distancing have limited access to health care, protection services, and legal recourse, exacerbating vulnerabilities and potentially increasing child marriage rates.⁴⁷ Although the full impact of the pandemic has yet to be measured, it is estimated that up to 10 million girls globally were at risk of child marriage as a result of the pandemic.⁴⁸

4.3.5 Trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling

Trafficking in persons is "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit". It occurs in every region of the world, harming women and men of all ages and from all backgrounds.⁴⁹ In 2020, the number of victims/survivors of trafficking detected globally was 1.00 per 100,000 population, a 11 per cent decrease compared to 1.13 per 100,000 population in 2019. This change can be partially explained by factors that particularly affect low- and middle-income countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ UNICEF, *COVID-19: A Threat to Progress against Child Marriage* (New York, 2021).

⁴⁹ UNODC, "Human trafficking", web page. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html> (accessed on 13 February 2024).

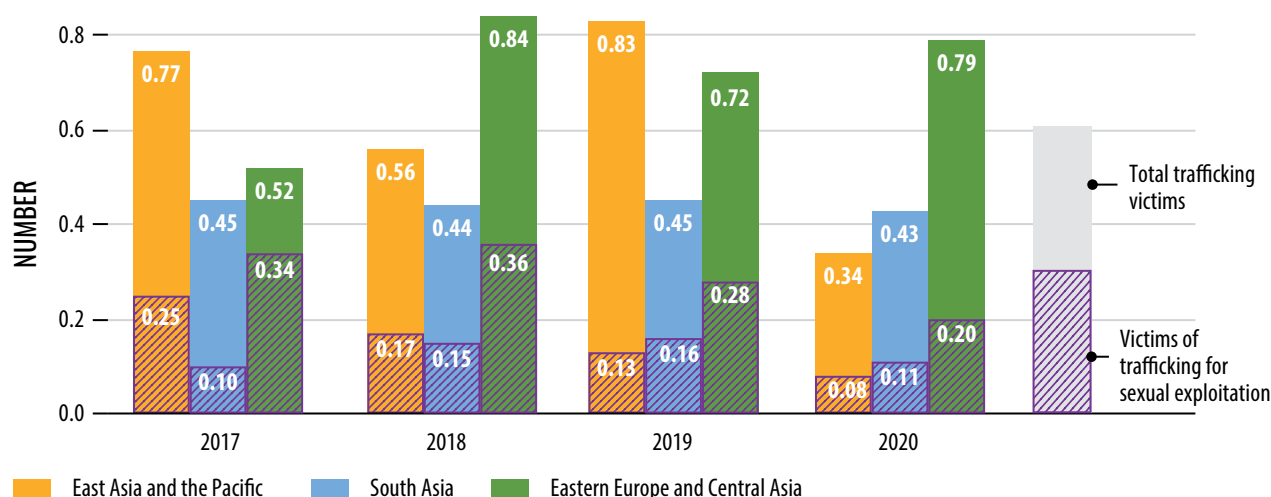
reduced institutional capacities to detect victims/survivors, diminished opportunities for traffickers due to lockdown measures, and some trafficking forms taking place in more hidden settings.⁵⁰

Trafficking in persons has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Economic insecurity, poverty, limited viable employment options, gender-based violence, as well as migration policies and pathways, are among the critical factors contributing to the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. Crises such as climate change, conflict and the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbate trafficking risks, especially considering the breakdown of socioeconomic structures, essential services and justice systems.⁵¹ Women and girls accounted for 42 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, of the total detected victims/survivors worldwide in 2020, compared to 23 per cent for men and 17 per cent for boys. Trafficking for sexual exploitation was one of the most common forms of exploitation (0.37 per 100,000 population; 38.7 per cent of all trafficking cases) and women and girls represented 91 per cent of the victims/survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation.⁵² In addition, the UNODC analysis of court cases revealed that female victims/survivors were three times more likely than males to experience physical or extreme violence from traffickers. Furthermore, children (girls and boys) are 1.7 times more likely to suffer physical or extreme violence than adults (women and men), and girls are 1.5 times more likely to suffer violence than women.⁵³

Women and girls were overrepresented among detected trafficking victims/survivors in East Asia and the Pacific (79 per cent of all victims/survivors), Central Asia (64 per cent) and South Asia (56 per cent), while men and boys comprised 66 per cent of the victims/survivors in Eastern Europe.⁵⁴ Regarding subregional trends, a sharp 59 per cent decrease in the number of detected trafficking victims/survivors was observed in East Asia and the Pacific, from 0.83 per 100,000 population in 2019 to 0.34 in 2020. The number was relatively stable in South Asia since 2017, around 0.45 victims/survivors within each 100,000 people in the broader population. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the COVID-19 pandemic had a limited impact on the overall increasing number of trafficking victims/survivors since 2017, which reached 0.79 per 100,000 population in 2020 (figure 4.3).⁵⁵

East Asia and the Pacific and Eastern Europe and Central Asia exhibited a steady decline in the number of victims/survivors of sexual exploitation, dropping to 0.08 and 0.20 per 100,000 population, respectively, in 2020. South Asia saw a return to the level in 2017, around 0.10 per 100,000 population, after peaking at 0.16 in 2019. In 2020, trafficking for sexual exploitation was notably prevalent in Central Asia, representing 76 per cent of all trafficking cases in 2020, compared to 38 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, 37 per cent in South Asia and 9 per cent in Eastern Europe. Conversely, forced labour was the most detected form of exploitation in Eastern Europe (87 per cent of all trafficking cases), South Asia

FIGURE 4.3 Numbers of total trafficking victims/survivors and of victims/survivors of trafficking for sexual exploitation detected per 100,000 population, 2017–2020



Source: UNODC, Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022 (Vienna, 2023).

50 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

51 United Nations, "Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/292 (New York, 2022).

52 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

53 United Nations, "Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/292 (New York, 2022).

54 UNODC Eastern Europe country grouping consists of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation are ESCAP member States. See Annex 2 for details.

55 Please note that country grouping differs between ESCAP and UNODC. See Annex 2. UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

(56 per cent) and East Asia and the Pacific (54 per cent), but only 15 per cent in Central Asia.⁵⁶ The complex landscape of trafficking in persons in Asia and the Pacific highlights the significance of understanding the gendered social, economic, political and cultural factors that underlie the vulnerability of women and men of all ages to such GBV in diverse contexts.

Migrant smuggling is also a concern for women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region. While sometimes linked, trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling are separate crimes. In contrast to trafficking in persons which can take place both domestically and internationally, migrant smuggling refers to “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”.⁵⁷ Smuggling need not include any form of force, coercion, deception or abuse of power. However, like trafficked persons, smuggled migrants are often victims/survivors of other crimes, ill treatment, violence and human rights violations.⁵⁸

Migrant smuggling is prevalent in the region,⁵⁹ driven by key trends such as the confluence of aspirations for migration in countries of origin, demand for low-wage labour in countries of destination, and limited or expensive legal channels for safe and regular labour immigration; the existence of substantial populations in situations of forced displacement and statelessness who are seeking international protection; and the prevalence of corruption among some public officials in countries of origin, transit and destination.⁶⁰ Smuggled migrants, especially women and girls, are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation during their journeys. A 2024 UNODC study on migrant smuggling in Southeast Asia indicated that, among the surveyed smuggled women, 24 per cent experienced physical violence, 13 per cent experienced non-physical violence such as harassment, and 11 per cent experienced sexual violence. Almost one in three surveyed women reported being afraid of sexual violence in general in the most dangerous location they had travelled through.⁶¹

4.3.6 Technology-facilitated violence

Technology-facilitated violence is defined by UN-Women as “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICTs or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.”⁶² It manifests itself in various forms, including but not limited to, online harassment, cyberstalking, technology-facilitated sexual abuse, doxing, hacking, hate speech, defamation and limiting the use of technology. Many types of offline violence are replicated or intensified in digital spaces and technology-facilitated violence can precede, follow or occur concurrently with offline violence.⁶³

Technology-facilitated violence against women and girls largely shares the root causes and drivers of offline violence, reflecting systematic structural gender inequality, entrenched social and cultural norms and patterns of harmful masculinities. The distinct features of digital spaces, such as the vast scale, rapid speed and ease of online communication, coupled with anonymity, pseudonymity and impunity, further create a conducive environment that breeds violence against women and girls. Measures to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated violence against women and girls largely depend on the self-regulation and voluntary actions of digital service providers and platforms, with limited implementation, sanctions, accountability and independent oversight.⁶⁴

In addition, technology-facilitated violence is constantly evolving, with new forms and patterns emerging alongside technological advancement and digital transformation. Such violence imposes severe impacts on the physical and mental health, well-being and safety of women and girls. It discourages their public participation and leadership, and exacerbates economic and political gender inequalities.⁶⁵ While women and girls in all their diversity are at risk of technology-facilitated violence, those holding a prominent digital presence, such as politicians, journalists, human rights defenders and women’s rights activists, as well as women with disabilities,

56 UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022* (Vienna, 2023).

57 UNODC, “Human trafficking and migrant smuggling”, web page. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/en/secondary/human-trafficking-and-migrant-smuggling.html> (accessed on 10 July 2024) and UNODC, “Migrant smuggling FAQs” web page. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/migrant-smuggling/faqs.html> (accessed on 10 July 2024).

58 The Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, “What is the difference between trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants?”, issue brief (Vienna, 2016).

59 ESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration* (United Nations publication, 2020).

60 UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, *Migrant Smuggling in Southeast Asia* (Vienna, 2024).

61 Ibid.

62 UN-Women and WHO, “Technology-facilitated violence against women: Taking stock of evidence and data collection”, research paper (New York, 2023).

63 For a detailed introduction to various forms of technology-facilitated violence, please see UNFPA, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: Making All Spaces Safe* (New York, 2021).

64 United Nations, “Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, Report of the Secretary-General”, A/77/302 (New York, 2022).

65 UN-Women, “Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology facilitated violence against women and girls (VAWG)”, policy brief (New York, 2022).

adolescent girls, women of colour and persons of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are particularly susceptible.⁶⁶

The lack of consensus on measurement methodologies for technology-facilitated violence presents a significant challenge in comprehending the extent of the issue and subregional differences in Asia and the Pacific. A study on the global evidence on online gender-based violence suggests that the prevalence ranges from 16 per cent to 58 per cent.⁶⁷ A study conducted in 2020 indicates that 38 per cent of women worldwide had personal experiences with online violence, 65 per cent reported knowing other women who had been targeted online, and 85 per cent witnessed online violence against other women. In Asia and the Pacific, the prevalence of online violence against women was estimated at 88 per cent.⁶⁸

Between 1 per cent and 20 per cent of children aged 12–17 experienced at least one form of clear online sexual exploitation and abuse within the year prior to being surveyed in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. In all six countries, a higher proportion of girls experienced online sexual exploitation in the past year, although the difference was less than 5 percentage points in all countries.⁶⁹ In the same six countries, it was also found that 7 out of 10 of adolescents were distressed by online experiences, including exposure to obscene and violent content, and horror (ghosts for example). Girls and youth with differing sexual orientation and gender identities face specific gender-based risks such as body-shaming and unwanted sexual advances, while boys are more likely to encounter cyberbullying, exposure to sexualized images of women or violent images, and scams.⁷⁰

In 2021, another study in 26 countries across the globe showed that 91 per cent of surveyed girls and young women were concerned about online misinformation and disinformation, with 46 per cent feeling sad, depressed, stressed worried

or anxious. Misinformation and disinformation hinder girls' activism, leading to approximately 25 per cent of survey respondents feeling less confident in expressing their views and 20 per cent discontinuing their participation in politics or current affairs.⁷¹ Despite these pioneering efforts at data collection regarding technology-facilitated gender-based violence, there is an urgent need to further understand the forms, impacts and dynamics of technology-facilitated violence at the national level and generate comparable data on its prevalence.⁷²

4.3.7 Other harmful practices

Female genital mutilation

Over 230 million women and girls worldwide have experienced female genital mutilation (FGM).⁷³ Although the overall prevalence of FGM has declined over the past three decades, approximately 80 million women and girls in the Asia-Pacific region are still affected, predominantly in some countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia.⁷⁴ In Australia, modelling based on census data estimates that 53,000 migrant girls and women have experienced FGM, mostly performed before migration.⁷⁵ Research on FGM in the region is limited and often focused on specific populations, with data collection hindered in countries where authorities have denied the existence of FGM.

Virginity testing

Virginity testing is a long-standing tradition that has been documented in at least 20 countries spanning all regions of the world. This practice, carried out by doctors, police officers or community leaders, is prevalent in some countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia, often under cultural or social pressures related to marriage eligibility or honour. Virginity testing has been condemned by United Nations agencies as unscientific, unethical, and a violation of human rights, leading to physical and psychological harm for women and girls subjected to it.⁷⁶

66 UN-Women, "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Expert guidance and substantive inputs to preparations for the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women", report (New York, 2023) and UNFPA, *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: Making All Spaces Safe* (New York, 2021).

67 Institute of Development Studies, "Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online gender-based violence (OGBV)", K4D Helpdesk Report (Brighton, 2021).

68 The Economist Intelligence Unit, "Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women", 1 March 2021. Available at <https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/> (accessed on 15 February 2024).

69 UNICEF Global Office of Research and Foresight – Innocenti, "Children's experiences of online sexual exploitation and abuse in 12 Countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and Southeast Asia", *Disrupting Harm Data Insight 1* (Florence, 2022).

70 UNICEF *Girls' Digital Literacy in the East Asia and Pacific Region: Spotlight on Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam* (Bangkok, 2023).

71 Plan International, *The Truth Gap: How Misinformation and Disinformation Online Affect the Lives, Learning and Leadership of Girls and Young Women* (Surrey, 2021).

72 University of Melbourne and UNFPA, "Measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A discussion paper", discussion paper (Melbourne, 2023).

73 UNICEF, "What is female genital mutilation? Everything you need to know about FGM and what UNICEF is doing to stop it", web page. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/protection/female-genital-mutilation> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

74 UNICEF, "Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Statistics - UNICEF Data", database. Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-statistics> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

75 Angela Dawson and others, "Addressing female genital mutilation in the Asia Pacific: The neglected sustainable development target", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 44, no. 1 (February 2020).

76 WHO, UNHCR and UN-Women, *Eliminating Virginity Testing-An Interagency Statement* (Geneva, 2018).

BOX 4.1 Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic



Violence against women and girls intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a UN-Women-led study conducted in 2021, globally, 45 per cent of surveyed women reported that they or a woman they know had experienced a form of violence against women since the pandemic's onset. One in four women reported that household conflicts had become more frequent, and three in ten women considered that violence against women had increased in their community.¹ This phenomenon known as the “shadow pandemic” was evident in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite limited survey data, the trend was clear. There was a higher volume of calls to domestic violence helplines and a significant increase in the number of domestic violence cases handled by shelters and women's organizations across the region. The incidence of technology-facilitated violence also appeared to have risen due to increased Internet usage amid the pandemic. Elevated exposure to perpetrators resulting from lockdown measures, triggering stressful environments for perpetrators and reduced support services contributed to a surge in violence against women and girls in the context of the pandemic.²

To address violence against women and girls during the pandemic, national responses and comprehensive measures proved necessary. For instance, **Uzbekistan** developed and implemented standard operating procedures to ensure coordinated responses by law enforcement, healthcare, and socio-psychological services. A presidential Resolution (2021) was released, outlining measures to enhance support services for violence victims/survivors. The measures included transforming the Republican Centre for the Rehabilitation and Adaptation of Victims of Violence and Prevention of Suicides, previously in an associative status, into a governmental legal entity under the Ministry for Support of Mahalla and Family, as well as creating new centres for rehabilitation and adaptation. Additionally, the government provided financial and technical support to centres and organizations to combat violence against women and girls, through the Fund for the Support of Women and the Family (981.6 million UZS) and the Public Fund under the Oliy Majlis (461 million UZS).³

Similarly, in **Solomon Islands**, the Gender-Based Violence in Emergency Committee implemented GBV-related activities during the pandemic. GBV health responses were considered essential and continued to operate during lockdowns. An emergency phone tree and an emergency referral pathway were developed by the Committee to ensure violence victims/survivors could access needed services. Furthermore, the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force's family violence unit remained on high alert, with police vehicles specifically allocated for services for violence victims/survivors. Community protection committee members also conducted various awareness programmes on violence against women and girls in emergencies.⁴

1 UN-Women, *Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19* (New York, 2021).

2 ESCAP, “The Covid-19 pandemic and violence against women in Asia and the Pacific”, policy paper (Bangkok, 2020).

3 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker”, database. Available at: <https://data.undp.org/insights/covid-19-global-gender-response-tracker> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

4 Ibid.

4.4 PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Eliminating violence against women and girls requires a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach with whole-of-society engagement along the prevention and response continuum. Efforts by Asia-Pacific Governments to address violence against women and girls include strengthening laws, policies and institutional mechanisms; investing in holistic prevention measures; providing multi-sectoral and victim/survivor-centred services for women and girls subjected to violence; and improving data collection and use on violence against women and girls.

4.4.1 Strengthening laws, policies and institutional mechanisms

Establishing robust legal frameworks and effective institutional mechanisms constitutes a crucial step to eradicate impunity and societal tolerance for violence against women and girls. Indeed, weak legal frameworks perpetuate violence against women by failing to effectively prevent, investigate and prosecute perpetrators. This lack of legal protection allows for impunity, emboldening perpetrators and discouraging survivors from seeking justice, leading to a cycle of violence and inequality. Laws and policies signal that GBV is a serious crime and contribute to a shift in social norms to promote adequate protection of victims/survivors' rights.⁷⁷

77 OECD, *Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What Is Holding Us Back?* (Paris, 2023).

Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have yet to enact laws that tackle different forms of violence against women and girls. According to the World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2.0, out of the 46 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with data, only 22 have legislation that addresses domestic violence, 19 have legislation on sexual harassment, 15 have legislation on child marriage, and 2 have legislation on femicide.⁷⁸ Data from the WHO Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Policy Portal reveal that, among the 51 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with relevant information, only 17 explicitly criminalize marital rape, reflecting broader challenges in achieving gender equality and ensuring the autonomy and agency of all individuals within marriage.⁷⁹

Alarming, the “marry your rapist” laws prevalent in some countries in the region allow rapists to evade punishment by marrying their victims. This deeply troubling legal provision not only fails to provide justice for victims/survivors but also perpetuates further harm by forcing them into marriage with the offenders. Efforts to abolish such laws are crucial to promote gender equality, protect human rights and ensure justice for victims/survivors of sexual violence. In 2021, there were still 20 countries and territories across the globe, including 5 in the Asia-Pacific region, that had some form of legislation allowing rapists to evade punishment by marrying their victims.⁸⁰

A few Asia-Pacific countries, such as **Australia**, **Fiji** and **Solomon Islands**, have formulated legislation and policies that comprehensively protect women and girls from various forms of violence, as measured by SDG indicator 5.1.1.⁸¹ In **Fiji**, eliminating violence against women and girls is codified in laws such as the Employment Relations Act 2007, Crimes Act 2009, Criminal Procedures Act 2009, Domestic Violence Act 2009 and Family Law Amendment Act 2012. In 2023, the Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against All Women and Girls 2023–2028 was launched. This costed and evidence-based action plan underscores a whole-of-government and whole-

of-society approach. The Government pledges to set up a national Coordination and Implementation Unit with dedicated human and financial resources.⁸²

Pioneering legislative efforts are also observed in other Asia-Pacific countries. For example, the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** took the initial step of ratifying a law in 2015 that focuses on preventing and combating violence against women and children. This law effectively criminalizes marital rape and establishes strict prohibitions against any form of direct or indirect discrimination towards women and girls.⁸³ More recently, the country further demonstrated its commitment by creating the Second National Plan of Action on Preventing and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Violence against Children (2021–2025), and then integrating it into the plans of several provinces, ministries and judiciary bodies.⁸⁴

In **Japan**, the parliament expanded legal protection against additional forms of GBV by passing revisions to the Sex Crime Penal Code and adopting the Act on Punishment of Acts/Offenses Relating to Non-Consensual Sexual Photography in 2023. “Acts such as photographing sexual appearances against their will or providing the record to a third party” are now considered sexual crimes. The country also strengthened the protection system for victims/survivors through the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims and the Act on Support for Women Facing Difficulties.⁸⁵

In **Papua New Guinea**, in response to widespread sorcery accusations leading to violence against women and girls, sorcery accusation-related violence was criminalized in 2022.⁸⁶ It has also set up institutional mechanisms to combat violence against women and girls. In 2022, a Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Gender-Based Violence was established, replacing the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence. This new committee is tasked with examining the role of the National Council of Women, holding public hearings,

78 World Bank, “Women, Business and the Law Data, women's safety”, database. Available at <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/safety> (accessed on 10 July 2024).

79 WHO, “Sexual and reproductive health and rights policy portal”, database. Available at <https://platform.who.int/data/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights/national-policies/srh/explicitly-criminalize-marital-rape> (accessed on 10 July 2024).

80 UNFPA, *My Body Is My Own: Claiming the Right to Autonomy and Self-determination* (New York, 2021).

81 Australia, Fiji and Solomon Islands achieved a full score (100 out of 100) in the assessment of legal frameworks on addressing violence against women in 2022. ESCAP SDG Gateway, “Indicators by SDG: 5.1.1 – Legal frameworks on gender equality”, database. Available at <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 16 February 2024).

82 Fiji, Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, *National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028* (Suva, 2023) and UN-Women, “Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028”, web page. Available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/fiji-national-action-plan-to-prevent-violence-against-all-women-and-girls-2023-2028> (accessed on 16 February 2024).

83 Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, “Legal ban on violence against children”, web page. Available at: <https://www.violenceagainstchildren.org/legal-ban> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

84 UNFPA, “UNFPA Lao PDR integrates national policies for gender equality and ending violence against women and children into provincial, ministerial and sectoral plans”, press release, 10 November 2021. Available at: <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/news/lao-pdr-integrates-national-policies-gender-equality-and-ending-violence-against-women-and> (accessed on 5 June 2024).

85 Japan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Tokyo, 2024).

86 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), *Violence Against Women in Elections in Papua New Guinea: An IFES Assessment* (Arlington, 2023).

reporting to the National Parliament and overseeing the Government's implementation of the National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence.⁸⁷

In response to the emerging challenges of technology-facilitated violence, **Australia** has established the world's first government agency dedicated to online safety, the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety). Exercising its regulatory power under the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015, eSafety has a team comprising policy analysts, investigators, lawyers, educators, technology experts, digital specialists and other professionals, addressing violence across all platforms such as private messaging apps, video gaming platforms and dating websites. eSafety operates with a holistic framework that includes three pillars: prevention through research, education programmes and awareness-raising; protection through regulatory schemes and investigations; and proactive and systemic change through tracking technology trends, supporting industries in improving user safety standards and strengthening cross-border impacts. It has designed online safety guidance specifically for women, children, youth, older persons, and parents and carers.⁸⁸

4.4.2 Investing in holistic prevention measures

Prevention, addressing the structural causes and other risk factors that interact with gender inequality to increase the likelihood of GBV, is critical to eliminate violence against women and girls. Effective prevention necessitates a holistic approach that implements a broad range of activities to facilitate change at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels.⁸⁹ There is growing evidence that awareness-raising campaigns alone are insufficient to prevent violence. In line with the WHO RESPECT framework, prevention measures encompass, for example, engaging women and men in strengthening relationship skills; promoting the economic and social empowerment of women

and girls; providing comprehensive services for victims/survivors; alleviating women's poverty; building safe schools, work environments and public spaces; preventing child and adolescent abuse; and transforming harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms and stereotypes, including through comprehensive sexuality education.⁹⁰

In **Cambodia**, the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2019–2023 identifies prevention as one of the four strategic areas, focusing on issues related to coordination and cooperation, education and youth, family and children, community and workplace, and culture and media.⁹¹ Among the National Action Plan's key achievements, there has been progress in the development and implementation of minimum services standards and guidelines, operating procedures, as well as training packages for prevention and response services. The country reconfirmed its commitment by planning the formulation of a new national action plan for 2024–2030, prioritizing the development and implementation of legal frameworks and policies to prevent different forms of violence against women and girls, as well as campaigns and digital platforms to provide prevention and response services to victims/survivors.⁹²

In **the Philippines**, the Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Children published the 2017-2022 Strategic Plan on Violence against Women and Children, recognizing prevention measures' primary role in countering violence.⁹³ Furthermore, the country focused on advocacy actions by launching information campaigns on cyber media. For instance, the Philippine Commission on Women holds the weekly radio segment "Tinig ng Kababaihan" (Women's Voices) to raise public awareness of government efforts to promote gender equality and women's human rights, addressing among other topics violence against women and girls and its prevention.⁹⁴

87 Papua New Guinea, Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Gender-Based Violence, "Parliament establishes new permanent committee on gender equality, women's empowerment and GBV", press release, 24 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.unitedforequalitypng.com/geve-parl-comm#:~:text=On%201%20December%202022%2C%20the%2011th%20Parliament%20established,the%20lives%20of%20women%20and%20girls%20across%20PNG> (accessed on 2 August 2024) and Papua New Guinea, Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Gender-Based Violence, "PNG parliamentarians to end GBV: Key activities", web page. Available at <https://www.unitedforequalitypng.com/geve-parl-comm> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

88 ESCAP, "Leveraging digital innovation for inclusive and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific", social development working paper (Bangkok, 2023); Council of Europe, "The digital dimension of violence against women as addressed by the seven mechanisms of the EDVAW Platform", thematic paper of the Platform of Independent Expert on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW) (Strasbourg, 2022); and eSafety Commissioner, "About us", web page. Available at <https://www.esafety.gov.au/about-us> (accessed on 16 February 2024).

89 UN-Women, Generation Equality and the Equality Institute, *Together for Prevention: Handbook on Multisectoral National Action Plans to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls* (New York, 2023).

90 WHO, *RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence against Women* (Geneva, 2019).

91 UN-Women, Generation Equality and the Equality Institute, *Together for Prevention: Handbook on Multisectoral National Action Plans to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls* (New York, 2023).

92 Cambodia, Ministry of Women's Affairs, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Phnom Penh, 2024).

93 Philippines, Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children, *Strategic Plan on Violence Against Women and Their Children 2017-2022*, (Manila, 2018).

94 Philippine, Commission on Women, "2023 Tinig ng Kababaihan", web page. Available at <https://pcw.gov.ph/2023-tinig-ng-kababaihan/> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

BOX 4.2 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women and its mid-term review



The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women (RPA on EVAW) 2016-2025 guides the implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Children, adopted in 2013. This plan translates global commitments into regional and national strategies to achieve the SDGs, particularly gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5). The Regional Plan of Action represents a joint commitment by ASEAN member States and is grounded in principles such as a human rights-based approach, multi-sectoral collaboration, evidence-based strategies, due diligence, and partnerships and collaboration. The plan addresses the challenges faced by ASEAN member States in combating violence against women and girls through concrete actions aimed at strengthening prevention and response mechanisms.

ASEAN and UN-Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific conducted a mid-term review of the Regional Plan of Action from 2019 to 2021. They found that progress included the completion of the ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls Data Collection and Use, published in 2018, and a regional media campaign to end violence against women and girls and combat trafficking in persons. Gender-sensitive guidelines for supporting women victims/survivors of trafficking were developed, and workshops for frontline personnel were held. Four ASEAN member States have national action plans on ending violence against women. Seven member States used national population-based surveys for violence prevalence data. Legal reforms were underway in many member States to improve protection for women victims/survivors and enhance their access to justice, while national programmes to prevent violence against women and girls were being developed and implemented across the region. Promising developments also include better protection for women migrant workers, with several ASEAN member States advancing their legal frameworks to combat violence against women and girls and trafficking.

Continued efforts are needed to achieve progress in eliminating violence against women and girls, such as refining the Regional Plan of Action indicators, developing standardized monitoring frameworks, and enhancing national action plans. Efforts should also focus on addressing violence against women and girls in vulnerable situations; improving data collection and analysis, aligning laws with international frameworks, and increasing technical capacities for effective violence prevention and response. The review encouraged ASEAN member States to build on their progress to fully implement the Regional Plan of Action in the next five years, with the Mid-Term Review providing a framework for accelerated action.¹

1 ASEAN and UN-Women, *Ending Violence against Women in ASEAN Member States Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (ASEAN RPA on EVAW 2016-2025) (Jakarta, 2021).

India has driven the overall progress in reducing child marriage in South Asia.⁹⁵ Effective efforts to eliminate child marriage included supporting girls' schooling through conditional cash or in-kind transfers, complemented by training in gender transformative life skills and access to sexual and reproductive health services.⁹⁶ There is growing evidence that interventions in the areas of income and economic strengthening, as well as education and life skills, have shown significant positive effects on preventing child marriage.⁹⁷ **Azerbaijan** has introduced targeted professional skills courses and employment support for women from groups at risk of trafficking in persons.⁹⁸ Additionally, the country approved a National Action Plan on the Prevention of Gender-biased Sex Selection for 2020-

2025, envisaging a study for the assessment of the phenomenon, as well as a revision of the existing reproductive health legislation.⁹⁹

Transforming harmful gender norms and stereotypes necessitates close partnership with the media industry and the engagement of men and boys. The media industry plays a vital role in forming social cognition of violence against women and girls. Media reporting may significantly contribute to the normalization of violence. On the other hand, it also holds the potential to inform on the underlying causes of violence against women and girls, advocate for positive social and gender norms and assist in risk mitigation by providing crucial information to victims/survivors and persons seeking to support them. Improvements in media

95 UNICEF, *A Profile of Child Marriage in South Asia* (New York, 2023).

96 ESCAP, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2023: Championing Sustainability Despite Adversities* (United Nations Publication, 2023).

97 Gillian Mann and Manahil Siddiqi, "Evidence synthesis on interventions to prevent child marriage and support girls' health and wellbeing", background paper for the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage Phase III Design Workshop (Johannesburg, 2023).

98 United Nations, "Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/292 (New York, 2022).

99 Azerbaijan, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Baku, 2024).

portrayal can also contribute to ending violence against women and girls through various strategies, such as increased coverage of relevant topics, factual highlighting of the seriousness and negative impacts on women and girls, and meaningful collaboration with psychologists and other experts to inform media coverage with evidence-based approaches.¹⁰⁰

The National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (2017-2021) of **Timor-Leste** emphasizes the media's role in promoting gender equality and zero tolerance towards GBV. It includes developing a gender-sensitive reporting code of conduct, mandatory annual training on human rights and gender-sensitive reporting and creating a media tool to monitor the portrayal of women and girls and reporting on GBV. The country approved a new national action plan for the period 2022–2032, where it reiterated the important role of media in violence prevention.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the Press Council of **Pakistan**, which includes members from the print media and civil society, has a code of ethics addressing content that incites hatred against women and girls and prevents the identification of sexual offense victims/survivors.¹⁰² The Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women of **China** explicitly protects women's rights to name, privacy, personal information and other personality rights. It requires media coverage of incidents involving women to be objective and have the consent of the women to include her portraits in advertisements, newspapers, electronic publications and other materials.¹⁰³

Men and boys can act as agents of change in violence prevention and response by challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate violence and inequality. They can promote healthy, respectful relationships by actively intervening when they witness or suspect instances of violence, and by serving as positive role models for their peers and younger generations. Engaging men and boys as allies in advocacy efforts and educational initiatives can foster collective action towards ending violence against women and girls and creating a safer, more equitable society for all. In 2020, the **Fiji Women's Crisis Centre** developed the Male Advocacy for Women's Human Rights and Against Violence Against Women programme, commonly known as the Male Advocacy

programme, which is utilized in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. This initiative aims to engage men in self-reflection on their behaviours regarding gender inequality and violence against women and girls and empower men to support violence prevention and response efforts.¹⁰⁴

4.4.3 Providing multi-sectoral and victim/survivor-centred services

The provision and coordination of health, social, police, justice and other essential services mitigate the consequences of violence on the well-being of women and girls, assist in their recovery and empowerment and prevent violence from reoccurring.¹⁰⁵ A victim/survivor-centred approach places the rights, wishes needs, safety, dignity and well-being of victims/survivors at the centre of all violence prevention and response efforts.¹⁰⁶ Service providers without the appropriate skills and sensitivities could profoundly affect victims/survivors of violence. Without proper training, service providers may inadvertently retraumatize victims/survivors, fail to recognize signs of abuse, or provide ineffective interventions, ultimately hindering the ability of victims/survivors to access assistance and recover from their experiences.

Some Governments have placed an increased emphasis on multi-sectoral and victim/survivor-centred services for women and girls subjected to violence. For example, in **Tajikistan**, frontline GBV health service providers have been trained in offering health and psychosocial services to violence victims/survivors, coordinating referrals with other service providers to meet comprehensive needs, and understanding national legislation and rights of victims/survivors.¹⁰⁷ In **Türkiye**, Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers offer psychosocial, legal, educational, vocational, health, and economic support, along with counselling and referral services to victims/survivors of violence. In 2023, the centres served 313,475 individuals, including 273,222 women, 28,352 men and 11,901 children.¹⁰⁸ In **Viet Nam**, members of local gender-based violence rapid response teams, law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges

100 UN-Women and UNICEF, *Mapping the nexus between media reporting of violence against girls*, report (New York, 2022).

101 Timor-Leste, Secretariat of State for Equality, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Dili, 2024).

102 UNESCO and UN-Women, *The Big Conversation: Handbook to Address Violence against Women in and through the Media* (Paris and New York, 2019).

103 China, Ministry of Justice, *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women*. Available at: http://en.moj.gov.cn/2023-12/15/c_948362.htm (accessed on 2 August 2024).

104 UN-Women, "Best practices for engaging men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls", press release, 7 December 2020. Available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2021/02/best-practices-for-engaging-men-and-boys-in-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

105 UN-Women, *How-To Guide: Developing and Implementing National Gender-Based Violence Multisector Service Delivery Protocols: Lessons from the Pacific* (Suva, 2022).

106 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), "IASC Definition and Principles of a victim/survivor centred approach", web page. Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-champion-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-and-sexual-harassment/iasc-definition-principles-victim-survivor-centered-approach-0> (accessed on 2 August 2023).

107 UNFPA, "UNFPA implementation of the Essential Services Package for women and girls subject to violence: A consultation report", report (New York, 2022).

108 Türkiye, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Ankara, 2024).

have been sensitized to gender-responsive delivery of essential services to violence victims/survivors. In addition, three one-stop service centres have been established in Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and Thanh Hoa to provide integrated essential services for GBV victims/survivors.¹⁰⁹ In the Islamic Republic of Iran, one-stop centres have been set up to provide medical, psychosocial and legal support for trafficking victims/survivors.¹¹⁰ In the Republic of Korea, the Digital Sex Crime Victim Support Center offers comprehensive support, including counselling, legal assistance and technological support for digital content deletion, to victims/survivors of digital sex crimes.¹¹¹

It is important for communication regarding these services to reach a broad audience, including victims/survivors and women and girls vulnerable to violence, empowering them to seek support from trained professionals and organizations, navigate resources effectively, and ultimately break the cycle of violence while promoting their recovery and rights. Improving the accessibility of such services to population groups in vulnerable situations, such as women with disabilities and women migrants, and continuing service provision during times of crisis are equally important.

Women's organizations play a critical role in violence prevention and response by providing essential services, such as shelters, counselling, legal assistance and hotlines, to support victims/survivors in rebuilding their lives, including in the context of conflicts and disasters. In addition, these organizations drive policy changes by advocating for comprehensive legislation and social norms that protect women and girls, ensuring that their voices are heard in both domestic and global policymaking. Furthermore, by empowering women and girls through education and community initiatives, women's organizations reduce the incidence of violence, transform gender norms and foster resilience, making them indispensable in the fight against violence against women and girls.¹¹² Armenia annually allocated up to AMD 125 million to support women's organizations combating GBV, funding activities such as training, awareness campaigns, hotline services, social and psychological support, legal assistance, counselling, financial empowerment services and provision of accommodation for victims/survivors.¹¹³

4.4.4 Improving data collection and use on violence against women and girls

Reliable, regular, comparable and disaggregated data are essential for policymaking and programming aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be utilized to understand issues at stake and inform evidence-based and culturally specific interventions, including raising awareness about violence against women and girls and advocating for change.¹¹⁴ The safety and privacy of the victims/survivors must be prioritized in data collection endeavours. The collection of administrative data is particularly challenging as many victims/survivors do not report violence cases because they do not know how to report and are afraid of repercussions. When victims/survivors do report, they find the staff are not trained to support them. Efforts to improve data collection need to be victim/survivor-centred. To this end, building the capacities of officers and increasing women's participation and leadership in the police and justice sectors are of crucial significance.¹¹⁵

In Indonesia, the National Commission on Violence against Women annually sends out a standard survey to around 700 to 1,000 government agencies and CSOs that provide essential services for women and girls experiencing violence. In addition to analysing the survey data, the Commission collects summary administrative data from at least 30 per cent of the 700–1,000 government agencies and CSOs and publishes an annual report on violence reporting and service provision.¹¹⁶ The New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey collects information about crime experiences, including interpersonal violence and violence by family members, on an annual basis starting from 2018. The Ministry of Justice publishes research reports, fact sheets, justice statistics data tables and other research outcomes to enhance the evidence base on family violence and sexual violence.¹¹⁷ In May 2021, Papua New Guinea launched Primero, an online and offline case and information management system to support social welfare workforce in the management of protection-related data and violence-related cases, while ensuring accurate data collection and analysis.¹¹⁸

109 United Nations Viet Nam, "2022 UN Country Annual Results Report, Viet Nam", report (Hanoi, 2023).

110 United Nations, "Trafficking in women and girls: crises as a risk multiplier, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/292 (New York, 2022).

111 United Nations, "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/302 (New York, 2022).

112 UN-Women, "How funding women's organizations prevents violence against women", news, 2023. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2023/11/why-funding-womens-organizations-prevents-violence-against-women> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

113 Armenia, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, *National Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (Erevan, 2024).

114 UNFPA, *A Guide to Better Understanding and Using Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Illustrated with A Case Study on Partner Violence in the Pacific Region* (New York, 2023).

115 UN-Women and WHO, *Improving the Collection and Use of Administrative Data on Violence against Women: Global Technical Guidance* (New York and Geneva, 2022).

116 UN-Women, *ASEAN Regional Guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls Data Collection and Use* (New York, 2018).

117 Government of New Zealand, Ministry of Justice, "Research and data", web page. Available at <https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/research-data/> (accessed on 19 February 2024).

118 United Nations Spotlight Initiative, "The EU - UN Spotlight Initiative supports launch of easy-to-use information management platform for social welfare workforce in Papua New Guinea", blog, 28 May 2021. Available at: <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/press/eu-un-spotlight-initiative-supports-launch-easy-use-information-management-platform-social> (accessed on 2 August 2024).



A group of young people unite at Angkor Wat to say no to violence against women during the Siem Reap Race, part of the 16 Days campaign in Cambodia. © Niels den Hollander

4.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevalence of violence against women and girls remains alarmingly high in the Asia-Pacific region. Despite progress in preventing and responding to GBV, challenges in eliminating all forms of violence often stem from gaps in legal and policy frameworks and poor implementation; deeply rooted harmful social norms, beliefs and behaviours; limited access to quality, coordinated and comprehensive services for victims/survivors; and lack of reliable, regular, comparable and disaggregated data and underutilization of existing data.¹¹⁹ Moreover, efforts to tackle GBV to date have primarily centred on responding to violence and providing services for victims/survivors, while systematic long-term prevention has received relatively less attention and investment.¹²⁰ In addition to addressing the abovementioned challenges, an evaluation approach should be undertaken to learn from past experiences and support evidence-driven investment in interventions that have been proven effective.

Importantly, adequate funding and resources for violence prevention and response are crucial for empowering women and girls and promoting gender equality. Current funding levels are insufficient, falling short of what is necessary to effectively address and mitigate the impacts of violence on women and girls. To improve investment, Governments will need to engage in gender-responsive budgeting, funding for women's organizations and greater investments in multi-sectoral and victim/survivor-centred services. Among OECD official development assistance in 2021-2022, less than 1 per cent was focused on ending violence against women and girls.¹²¹ International cooperation should also be strengthened to ensure financial resources are allocated to support initiatives on eliminating violence and protecting the rights of women and girls.

119 United Nations, "Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, Report of the Secretary-General", A/77/302 (New York, 2022).

120 UN-Women, "UN Women Asia-Pacific Regional Strategy on VAW Prevention 2020–2025", draft (Bangkok, 2023) and UN Women, "Partnering to end violence against women in the Asia Pacific region: UN Women-DFAT strategic partnership framework", brief (Bangkok, 2023).

121 OECD, *Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/development-finance-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment.htm> (accessed 29 May 2024).



Balochi dancers say no to violence against women and girls in Pakistan during 16 days of activism against GBV. © UN-Women/Henriette Bjoerge

Governments, in partnership with civil society organizations, private sector entities and other stakeholders, may wish to consider the following overarching recommendations on eliminating violence against women and girls:

- + Develop laws, policies and action plans that align with CEDAW, and general recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to prohibit all forms of violence, including in digital contexts and during times of crisis, hold perpetrators accountable and strengthen recourse and remedies for victims/survivors of violence.
- + Enhance cooperation with the technology sector, women's organizations and national human rights institutions to ensure that technology companies and intermediaries establish and enforce policies, codes of conduct for platform users and consistent standards for content moderation, while promoting gender-responsive design of products and services, to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated violence against women and girls.
- + Identify the roles and responsibilities of government agencies and other relevant stakeholders, allocate adequate funding and resources, and establish accountability mechanisms to monitor the implementation of laws, policies and programmes on eliminating violence against women and girls.
- + Monitor and evaluate interventions to address violence against women and girls, with active engagement of victims/survivors, to identify effective measures and inform evidence-based policymaking and programming in line with national and local contexts.
- + Invest in long-term prevention measures to address the root causes of violence and mitigate risk factors for perpetration, especially harmful social norms and gender stereotypes, at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels, with close involvement of men and boys.
- + Enhance comprehensive, coordinated intersectional and victim/survivor-centred services to meet the diverse needs of victims/survivors of violence across the health, social services, justice and policing sectors, including in the context of conflicts and disasters.
- + Strengthen disaggregated data collection, research and utilization to understand the extent, patterns, trends and impacts of various and intersecting forms of violence, especially technology-facilitated violence, with due consideration given to the safety and privacy of victims/survivors.
- + Engage and invest in women's organizations and women human rights defenders in violence prevention and response efforts, including through increasing their participation in decision-making and building the technical and financial capacities of these organizations.
- + Foster constructive dialogues and encourage coordinated actions among diverse stakeholders, including governments at all administrative levels, the media, cultural, religious and community leaders, the private sector and development partners, to effectively combat violence against women and girls.

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Gender equality is key to sustainable development and a prerequisite to achieving peaceful and just societies and a healthy planet. But what progress has been made toward upholding this human right and empowering women and girls in Asia and the Pacific? What challenges remain and how should these be addressed in the light of climate change, demographic shifts and digital transformation?

Charting New Paths for Gender Equality and Empowerment: Asia-Pacific Regional Report on Beijing+30 Review provides an in-depth analysis of the progress and gaps in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global framework for advancing the agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The report identifies opportunities and forward-looking strategies to accelerate progress in a rapidly changing region.

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