

BEIJING
+30



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

CHAPTER 5



ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
for Asia and the Pacific





*The shaded areas of the map indicate ESCAP members and associate members.**

The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the most inclusive intergovernmental platform in the Asia-Pacific region. The Commission promotes cooperation among its 53 member States and 9 associate members in pursuit of solutions to sustainable development challenges. ESCAP is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations.

The ESCAP secretariat supports inclusive, resilient and sustainable development in the region by generating action-oriented knowledge, and by providing technical assistance and capacity-building services in support of national development objectives, regional agreements and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.*

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

Disclaimer

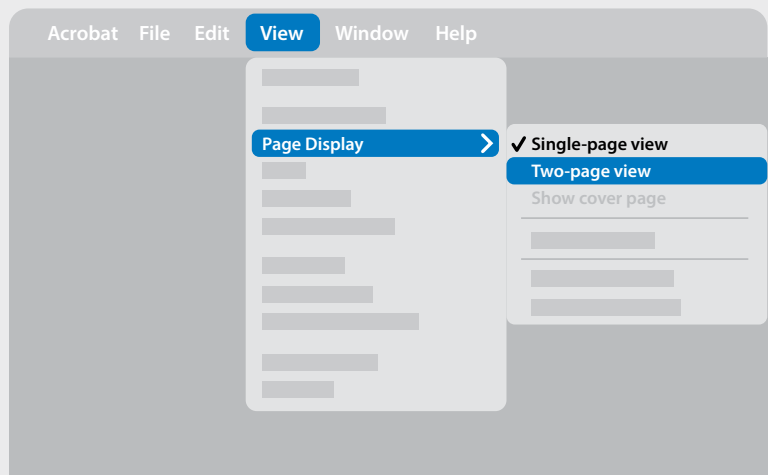
This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder, provided that the source is acknowledged. The ESCAP Publications Office would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source.

No use may be made of this publication for resale or any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior permission. Applications for such permission, with a statement of the purpose and extent of reproduction, should be addressed to the Secretary of the Publications Board, United Nations, New York.

WANT TO DISPLAY TWO PAGES SIDE-BY-SIDE?

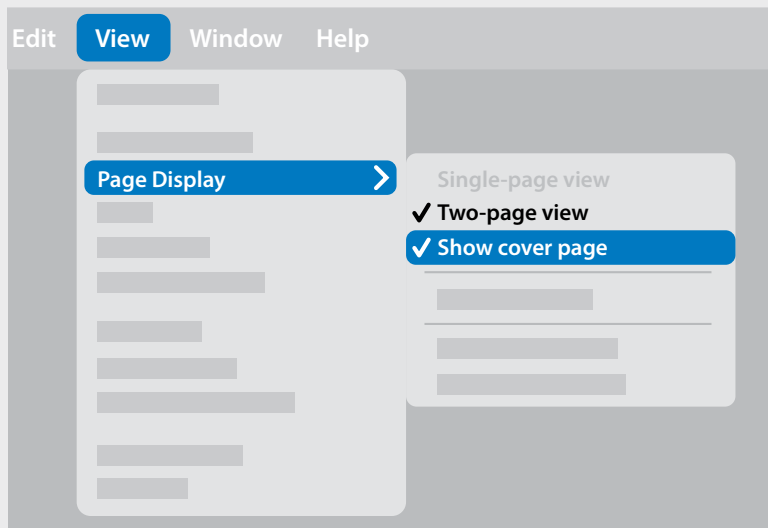
Step 1

In Acrobat, go to **View / Page Display** and change from "Single-page view" to "Two-page view"



Step 2

Return to the same menu at **View / Page Display** and check that "Show cover page" is on.





CHAPTER 5

Meaningful participation and gender-responsive governance



Tanzila Narbaeva, Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Chairperson of the Central Asia Women Leaders Caucus, and Matilda Dimovska, UNDP Resident Representative in Uzbekistan delivered welcoming speeches at the opening of the regional training camp for girls on leadership, mentoring and gender equality in Central Asia. © UNDP

KEY MESSAGES

Gender-responsive governance and the meaningful participation of women and girls from diverse backgrounds in public life are critical to change gender social norms and achieve gender equality.

Decision-making and leadership

Progress has been made towards increasing women's political representation and participation in Asia and the Pacific. However, women remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles across all branches and levels of government, as well as in the private sector.

When women reach political leadership and decision-making roles, gender stereotypes continue to confine them to functions and roles perceived as "feminine," such as those responsible for matters related to gender, women, children and family.

In the legislative branch,

- + Only around one in five parliamentary seats in the Asia-Pacific region is held by a woman in 2024.¹ Women's representation is the highest in **South-East Asia** (23.2 per cent) and the lowest in **South and South-West Asia** (17.2 per cent). The region is making slower progress towards increasing women's representation in parliaments compared to the rest of the world.
- + Women are heavily underrepresented in top parliamentary leadership positions. Five out of six speakers are male.² Women rarely chair parliamentary committees other than those explicitly dealing with gender equality.³
- + In Asia and the Pacific, 19 out of 49 countries with available data have electoral quotas in place.⁴

1 ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicator by theme: Seats held by women in national parliaments (% of seats) 2000 – 2024", database. Available at <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed 14 June 2024).

2 ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, "Indicator: Specialized bodies: March 2024", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/> (accessed 22 March 2024).

3 Ibid.

4 Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, Indicator: Electoral Quota for women", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/> (accessed 22 March 2024).

In the executive branch,

- + Among the 46 countries and territories with data, on average, seven out of eight government ministers were men in 2023.⁵
- + Women are overrepresented as ministers of gender equality, family and children affairs, but underrepresented in every other ministerial portfolio.
- + In local governments, women's representation is generally higher compared to the national level, yet none of the 39 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with available data have achieved gender parity.⁶

In the judiciary,

- + About 3 in 10 judges or magistrates in the region are women, with large variations across the 23 countries and territories with available data.⁷

Across the private and public sectors, **women remain underrepresented in managerial positions**, especially in middle and senior management.

- + Gender parity has been achieved in four Asia-Pacific countries. In 20 out of 49 Asia-Pacific countries and territories with data, the proportion of managerial positions held by women fell below the world average of 28 per cent.⁸
- + In 17 out of 41 countries and territories, women held less than 25 per cent of middle and senior management positions.⁹
- + Women govern only 16 per cent of central banks and are CEOs in 12 per cent of commercial banks around the world in 2023.¹⁰
- + The female to male ratio of business directors in 11 Asia-Pacific countries with data ranged from a low of 14.5 per cent to a high of 87.9 per cent in 2022. The gender gaps narrowed in the majority of these countries between 2014 and 2022.

Increased use of **affirmative measures** is needed, including temporary special measures such as electoral quotas and reserved seats, capacity building and peer-to-peer support for women in politics, community mobilization aimed to transform gender social norms and misconceptions about women's leadership capacity, and tackling gender-based violence and threats to women in politics.

Gender-responsive governance

National women's machineries serve as one of the key channels for prioritizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in a country's political and development agenda, protecting their rights across all sectors, and facilitating gender mainstreaming across the government. However, they are often marginalized within government systems.

- + In 24 Asia-Pacific countries and territories, the machinery is led at ministerial level and the leader has a seat in cabinet. In 5 countries and territories, the national machinery is led by the head of the executive branch of government or its head reports directly to the head of the executive.
- + National women's machineries often inadequately represent diverse groups of women and girls, especially those facing intersectional challenges such as women and girls with disabilities and indigenous women and girls.
- + Many national women's machineries in the region are underfunded and understaffed.

5 ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women, "Women in Politics 2023", infographic (Geneva and New York, 2023). Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

6 ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicator by SDG: 5.5.1 Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (%), most recent year", database. Available at: <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 29 May 2024).

7 ESCAP elaboration based on 23 ESCAP members and associate members in data UNODC, "Indicator professional judges or magistrate, by sex and most recent year", database. Available at: <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-cjs-personnel> (accessed on 11 May 2024).

8 ESCAP SDG Gateway, "Indicator by SDG: 5.5.2 - Proportion of women in managerial positions", database. Available at: <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 18 June 2024).

9 Ibid.

10 Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum, *Gender Balance Index 2024: Missed opportunities* (London, 2024).

Women's civil society organizations (CSOs) play a pivotal role in the development and implementation of the BPfA.

- + Shrinking civic spaces, coupled with a backlash against gender equality, hampers the meaningful engagement of CSOs.
- + Youth-led organizations need additional support and resources if they are to deliver gender-transformative action.

Integrating gender considerations into all stages of the budget cycle is a strategic political and technical exercise. It can support a fair distribution of resources, foster a sense of justice and strengthen government accountability.

- + Only one-third of countries in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia and 20 per cent of countries in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand)¹¹ have comprehensive systems to track **budget allocations for gender equality**.¹²
- + Gender analysis and gender impact assessment are yet to be fully integrated into public finance management systems in most countries in the region.¹³

Accelerated efforts are needed to address legislative and institutional barriers, capacity gaps, biases and harmful gender social norms that impede gender-equal, inclusive and participatory governance. Equally imperative is to close gender data gaps and the use this data to inform effective gender-responsive budgeting.

5.1 OVERVIEW

Meaningful participation of women and girls in political, economic and social life means that they can exercise their agency, leadership and experiences to influence all matters in the broader development and humanitarian contexts. This is one of the central issues of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Gender-responsive governance requires institutional mechanisms, planning and budgeting processes within the government to be set up in such a way that holds governments accountable for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. This means enabling meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in policy- and decision-making, providing avenues for engaging women's groups and civil society actors in participatory governance processes, and performing gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring the outcomes of such budgets. Gender-equal and inclusive representation in public life and gender-responsive governance are critical levers of change for gender social norms.

Increasingly, it is important to acknowledge and advocate for equal and inclusive decision-making, highlighting not only gender parity but also the inclusion of women and girls from diverse backgrounds. The intersectional approach has always been embedded in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and other international instruments such as the Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and various

treaties and United Nations resolutions that call for equal rights and meaningful participation of women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination due to the inextricable linkages between gender and other factors such as sexual orientation and gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, indigenous, rural and migrant status. Yet such considerations cannot be an afterthought. More deliberate actions and measures, such as special inclusive measures, financial allocations, accessibility and reasonable accommodation, are required to put inclusive representation into legislation, policies and practice. **The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** (BPfA) calls for strategic actions with regard to women in power and decision-making (critical area of concern G) and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women (critical area of concern H). These critical areas are aligned with the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). The **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** has adopted agreed conclusions at their recent sessions that provide important guidance on how to create an enabling environment for women's full and effective participation in decision-making: strengthening the voice, agency and leadership of all women and girls. The **agreed conclusions of the sixty-fifth session in 2021** urges Governments and all stakeholders to strengthen relevant normative, legal and regulatory

¹¹ See Annex 2 for regional groupings.

¹² UN-Women, "Strengthening public finance management systems for gender equality and women's empowerment: Promising practices and remaining gaps", technical brief (New York, 2023).

¹³ Ibid.

frameworks, prevent and eliminate violence against women in public life, strengthen gender-responsive institutional reforms, increase financing in support of women's participation in public life, leave no women and girls behind, and address root causes and barriers to women's full and equal participation.¹⁴

The agreed conclusions of the sixty-eighth session in 2024 further urges Governments and all stakeholders to integrate a gender perspective into financing for development commitments, including allocating adequate resources to promote the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in all decision-making bodies at all levels of government and across sectors, strengthen institutional capacities and resources to implement gender-responsive economic and social policies, and engage and finance women's organization and collectives.¹⁵ The **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women** is elaborating a new **General Recommendation (No.40)**, with the aim to adopt it at its 89th session in October 2024. This will provide guidance to States Parties on how to achieve equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems in both the public and private sectors. It will do so in the context of a global governance crisis induced by pandemics, climate change and protracted conflicts, and taking into consideration the critical impact digitalization and new technologies such as AI have on decision-making.¹⁶

Chapter 5 first reviews progress made and the current state of women's representation in all three branches of government – legislative, executive and judicial – as well as their representation in managerial positions in public and private sectors in the Asia-Pacific region. The chapter then discusses key institutions and actors, namely national women's machineries, national human rights institutions and women's civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as gender-responsive budgeting, that are the essential building blocks of gender-responsive governance to enable women's meaningful participation and ensure accountability for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

5.2 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP

Strengthening women's participation in decision-making and leadership is a prerequisite for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It is an important goal in itself and can also help support women's empowerment in other areas by influencing gender-responsive public policies and institutional practices. Women's participation has also been shown to carry numerous benefits, including diversifying policy agendas¹⁷ and better and more inclusive policy outcomes.¹⁸ Research on how well countries coped with the recent COVID-19 pandemic has found that women leaders at the national and subnational levels of government placed premiums on communicating clearly and acting early.¹⁹ Responding rapidly to contain the virus, and prioritizing policies to address the pandemic's social and economic impacts, especially its disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups, were central to effective responses and recoveries.

Despite increasing public awareness and spotlight on the strong performance of women leaders, there remains a pernicious perception about women's capability of decision making. The 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) reveals that nearly half of people worldwide believe that men make better political leaders than women do, and two out of five people believe that men make better business executives than women.²⁰ Furthermore, institutional barriers and social norms with regard to labour division between women and men continue to have significant effects on women's participation and leadership in public life. As a result, while notable progress has been made around the world and in Asia and the Pacific, most parliaments and decision-making bodies in the government remain male-dominated. When women reach leadership roles, they rarely lead ministerial portfolios or parliamentary committees other than those dealing explicitly with gender equality or women's empowerment.

14 United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, Agreed conclusions of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women", E/CN.6/2021/L.3 (New York, 2021).

15 United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective, Agreed conclusions of the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women", E/CN.6/2024/L.3 (New York, 2024).

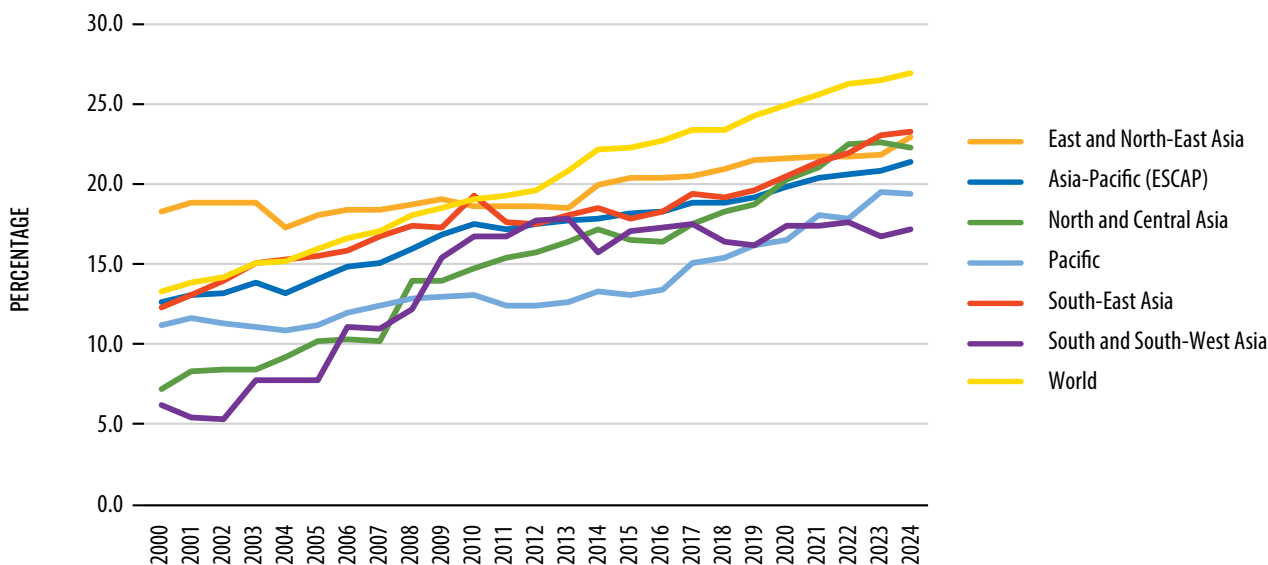
16 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Draft general recommendation No.40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems (18 July 2023 version)", draft document (Geneva, 2023). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/draft-general-recommendation-no-40-equal-and#:~:text=Draft%20general%20recommendation%20No%2040.%20on%20the%20equal,world%20of%20the%20potential%20of%20half%20its%20population> (accessed on 17 July 2024).

17 For example, studies have shown that, as the percentage of women in the parliamentary party increases, parties address a greater diversity of issues in their election campaigns. See Greene and O'Brien, "Diverse Parties, Diverse Agendas? Female Politicians and the Parliamentary Party's Role in Platform Formation", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 55, No.3 (August 2016).

18 UNDP, "Breaking Down Gender Biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality", 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (New York, 2023).

19 Jennifer M. Piscopo and Malliga Och, "Effective, Decisive, and Inclusive: Women's Leadership in COVID-19 Response and Recovery", UN-Women Working Paper (New York, 2021).

20 UNDP, "Breaking Down Gender Biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality", 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (New York, 2023).

FIGURE 5.1 Share of seats held by women in national parliaments, 2000–2024

Source: ESCAP SDG Gateway, “Indicator by theme: women in national parliaments”, database. Available at: <https://data.unescap.org/> (accessed on 14 June 2024).

5.2.1 Legislative branch

National parliaments are often the most important lawmaking bodies in a country and a fundamental arena for political debate and decision-making. Their composition affects the political, economic and social direction of societies: when parliaments are representative of the broader population, the interests and perspectives of different groups are more likely to be reflected in policies and laws, contributing to good governance.²¹

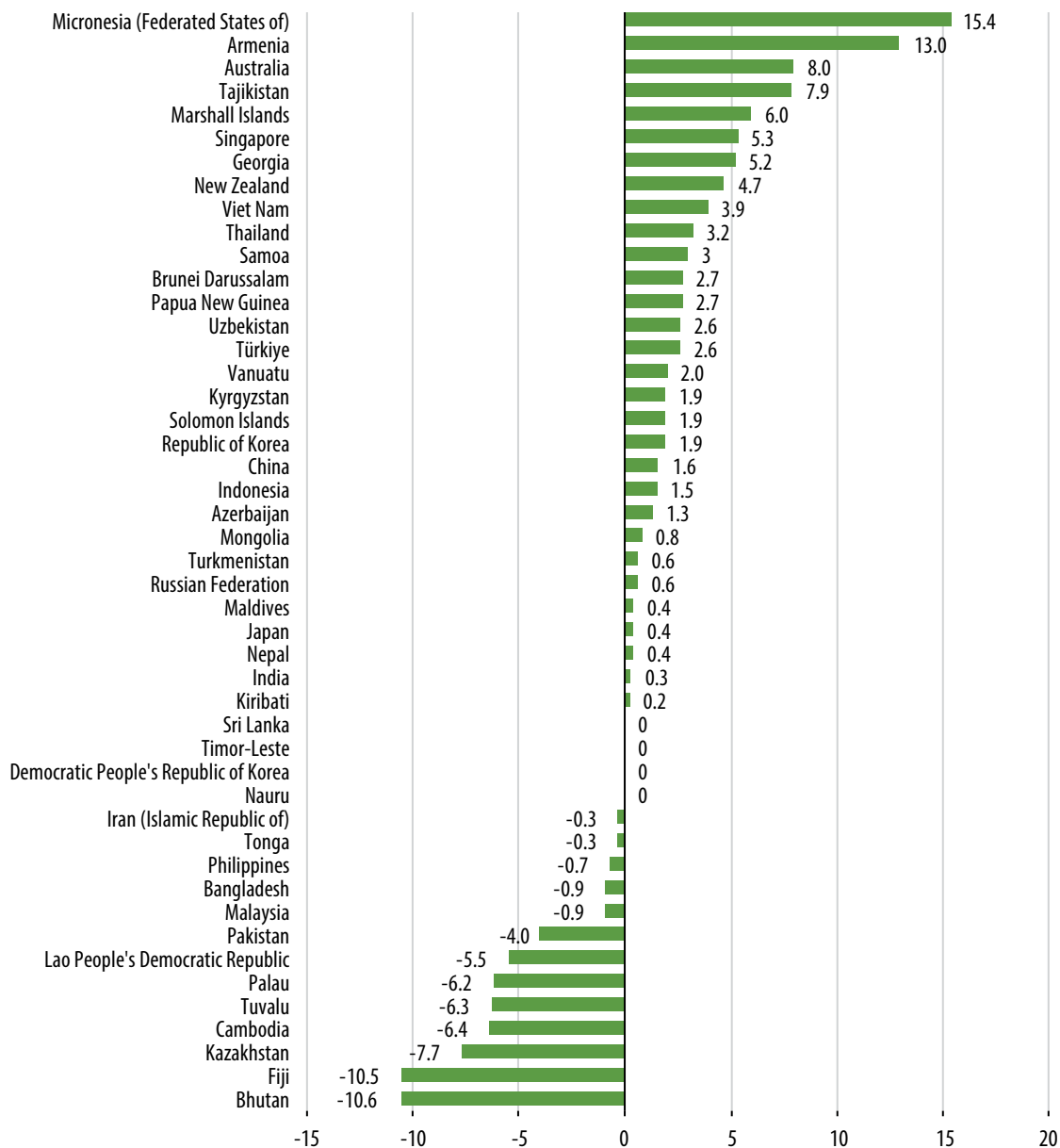
In Asia and the Pacific, progress has been made towards increasing the proportion of women parliamentarians over the past three decades, but the pace of progress remains slow. On average, 21.4 per cent of parliamentary seats in the Asia-Pacific region were held by women in 2024, which is a long way from parity and below the global average of 26.9 per cent. **The region as a whole is not increasing the proportion of women in parliaments as rapidly as the rest of the world.** At the subregional level, the average share of women parliamentarians ranged from 23.2 per cent in South-East Asia to 17.2 per cent in South and South-West Asia in 2024. North and Central Asia, the Pacific and South-East Asia have made commendable progress since 2015, while the progress has slowed down in East and North-East Asia. The South and South-West Asia subregion achieved significant progress prior to 2015, but progress has stagnated ever since. (Figure 5.1).

At the country level, vast variations exist in the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women, ranging from as high as 45.5 per cent to zero, as of 1 April 2024. Seven out of 47 countries in the Asia-Pacific region had a share of women parliamentarians above 30 per cent (Armenia, Australia, Nepal, New Zealand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam), with the high of **New Zealand** having 45.5 per cent of its parliamentary seats held by women. At the other end of the spectrum, in 12 countries in the region, mainly found in the Pacific and South and South-West Asia, women made up less than 10 per cent of the members of parliament.

Changes in women’s representation in parliaments since 2020 paint a mixed picture. Out of the 47 ESCAP members and associate members included in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline database, increases in women’s share of parliamentary seats were observed in 31 countries between 2020 and 2024. Among these countries, gains of over 5 percentage points were evident in Armenia (13.0 percentage points), Australia (8.0 percentage points), Georgia (5.2 percentage points), the Marshall Islands (6.0 percentage points), the Federated States of Micronesia (15.4 percentage points) and Tajikistan (7.9 percentage points). On the other hand, the share of parliamentary seats held by women declined in 12 countries, with declines over 10 percentage points being evident in two countries (Figure 5.2).

21 United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), “SDG indicator metadata: Indicator 5.5.1. Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments”, harmonized metadata template (formal version 1.1). Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-05-05-01a.pdf> (accessed 25 July 2024).

FIGURE 5.2 Change (percentage point difference) in the proportion of women parliamentarians (1 January 2020 and 1 April 2024)



Source: ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline database. "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments", database. Available at https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2024&date_month=04 (accessed on 29 May 2024). Change was calculated based on comparison of the percentages of women in lower or single houses of parliaments as of 1 January 2020 and as of 1 April 2024 (except for Indonesia and the Islamic Republic of Iran where the latest data available were as of 1 February 2024 by the date of access).

Women are also underrepresented in parliamentary leadership positions. As of March 2024, only 10 out of the 62 speakers of parliaments across the Asia-Pacific region were women (16.1 per cent),²² below the global average (24.2 per cent).²³ **Furthermore, women rarely chair parliamentary committees other than those explicitly dealing with gender equality issues** (Figure 5.3). Across the 46 Asia-Pacific countries with available data, the proportion of

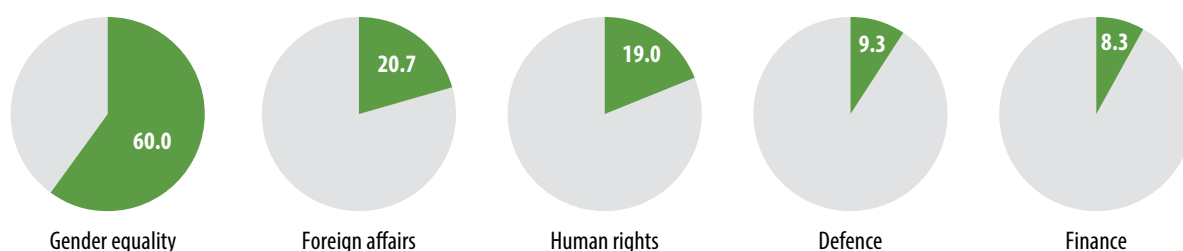
women committee chairs was 20.3 per cent (45 out of 221).²⁴ The lowest proportion of women committee chairs was observed in the committees on finance (8.3 per cent) and defence (9.3 per cent) (Figure 5.3). Interestingly, in the Pacific, the committees on finance (17.6 per cent) and defence (14.3 per cent) were the committees most likely to be chaired by women while no committee on human rights or gender equality was chaired by a woman.²⁵

22 ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, "Indicator: speakers, as of March 2024", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/speakers> (accessed on 22 March 2024). Data available for 49 ESCAP members, of which 3 members had vacant speaker positions.

23 Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, "Indicator: speakers, as of March 2024", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/speakers> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

24 Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, "Indicator: specialized bodies, as of March 2024", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/specialized-bodies/March> (accessed on 22 March 2024). Data available for 46 ESCAP members.

25 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in parliament 2023* (Geneva, 2024).

FIGURE 5.3 Share of women chairs in select parliamentary committees (%) (based on IPU data for 46 Asia-Pacific countries)

Source: ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline, "Indicator: specialized bodies", database. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/specialized-bodies/> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

Note: In cases where a committee covers more than one theme, such as foreign affairs and defence, the number of chairs have been counted in both categories.

BOX 5.1 The initiative of the Federated States of Micronesia towards women's inclusion in national decision-making



Most of the communities in the Federated States of Micronesia are matriarchal, with women managing economic resources and providing guidance to uphold the social status of extended families within the community.¹ However, this dynamic was not reflected in the national decision-making process; no parliamentary seat was held by a woman until 2021.²

Changes have taken place in recent years. In November 2021, the Federated States of Micronesia elected its first woman member of Parliament, the National Congress, when Perpetua S. Konman won the by-election. Following parliamentary elections in March 2023, Mrs. Konman was once again elected as a national senator, alongside another woman candidate, Dr. Merlin Abello-Alfonso, who became the second woman elected to the 13-member National Congress.³

These positive changes would not have been possible without a series of efforts made to increase women's representation in the national decision-making process. In 2018, the President of the Federated States of Micronesia, Peter Christian, endorsed the National Gender Policy,⁴ which has the explicit goal of increasing the representation of women in political decision-making. The policy includes evaluating special legislative measures, preparing women for elections through mock congresses, striving for gender balance in government bodies and strengthening awareness campaigns.⁵

During the 23rd Micronesian Islands Forum in 2019, a National Gender Equality Committee was established to promote gender equality efforts in cooperation with neighbouring countries.⁶ In the same spirit, the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia reiterated its commitment to increasing women's political participation and representation in its Beijing+25 national review report.⁷ More recently, a national Gender Equality Framework was developed through the 25th Micronesian Islands Forum held in February 2023 to ensure the continuity of efforts to promote gender equality and change mentalities about women in politics.⁸

The introduction of women parliamentarians in the Federated States of Micronesia represents an initial step that could, if accompanied by sustained measures to increase women's representation, support progress towards gender parity in national decision-making processes in the country.

1 Policy Forum, "The election of Micronesia's first female senator", web page. Available at <https://www.policyforum.net/the-election-of-micronesias-first-female-senator/> (accessed on 18 June 2024).

2 IPU Parline Database. Micronesia (Federated States of). <https://data.ipu.org/node/111/elections> (accessed 18 June 2024).

3 Ibid. There are currently 13 members in the National Congress.

4 UN-Women. (2022). Gender equality brief for Federated States of Micronesia. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/12/gender-equality-brief-for-federated-states-of-micronesia>.

5 Federated States of Micronesia, "National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21", A/HRC/WG.6/37/FSM/1 (Geneva, 2021).

6 Pacific Community (2023). Micronesian leaders make gender equality a priority. <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/media-release/2023/02/micronesian-leaders-make-gender-equality-a-priority>.

7 UN-Women. (2022). Gender equality brief for Federated States of Micronesia. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/12/gender-equality-brief-for-federated-states-of-micronesia>.

8 Pacific Community (2023). Micronesian leaders make gender equality a priority. <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/media-release/2023/02/micronesian-leaders-make-gender-equality-a-priority>.

When designed and implemented in full spirit, the use of quotas is an effective means of increasing the proportion of women in parliament. In Asia and the Pacific, 19 out of 49 countries with available data have electoral quotas in place (for lower or unicameral chambers). Out of the 10 countries with the highest women's parliamentary representation in the region, 8 have an electoral quota for women. In contrast, almost none of the countries²⁶ with women's representation among parliamentarians below 10 per cent have any form of electoral quota in place.²⁷ Where both legislated and voluntary quotas exist and are used, and where there is a requirement to place women candidates at the top of candidate lists, quota systems are more likely to translate into high levels of women's representation.

Some countries in the region have introduced recent reforms regarding electoral quotas. For instance, **Mongolia** has set targets through constitutional and legal reforms to increase the electoral quota for women among candidates from the current 20 per cent to 30 per cent in 2024 and to 40 per cent in 2028.²⁸ **India** passed a landmark bill in 2023 to reserve one third of all seats for women in the lower chamber of the parliament, in the Delhi Legislative Assembly and in state legislative assemblies.²⁹ Furthermore, the type of electoral system appears to affect the level of women's representation in parliaments. Systems based on proportional representation³⁰ make it easier for women to get elected in comparison to electoral systems based on majority or plurality.³¹

Moreover, electoral quotas would only be effective in women's political participation if they were coupled with targeted capacity building for women in politics, policies and resource allocation within political parties to nominate, promote and support women candidates, and gender-responsive voter education to transform misconceptions about women's leadership capacity.

In addition to affirmative actions through the quota and electoral systems, addressing violence against women in politics is equally important to promote women's political participation. Political violence against women and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity is often aimed at silencing them and preventing them from entering and staying in politics and leadership roles. It can take many forms, from misogynistic comments to hate speech, sexual harassment and even attacks and murders. Increasingly, digital spaces are used for such violence. In 2023, cases of violence against women election candidates were reported in different parts of the world, including several Asia-Pacific countries.³² Addressing this issue requires a broad range of measures, including putting in place or strengthening existing legislation to encourage and enable reporting of violence and hold perpetrators to account. It also requires institutional reforms to make the codes of conduct of parliaments and political parties more responsive to gendered concerns, enhanced public and workplace awareness of zero tolerance for gender-based violence, and the active involvement of men.³³ There is also the need to build peer-to-peer support networks among women politicians. One such initiative is the Women's Leadership Network of Mongolia that has brought together over 2,000 members across political affiliation.³⁴

5.2.2 Executive branch and local government

Globally, in May 2024, 28 countries had a woman Head of State³⁵ and/or Head of Government. Women were Heads of State in 15 countries and Heads of Government in 16 countries.³⁶ In the Asia-Pacific region, India has a woman Head of State, Bangladesh and Samoa each has a woman Head of Government, while the Marshall Islands has a woman as Head of State and Government.³⁷

26 The Solomon Islands have a candidate quota target of 10 per cent for women (UN-Women, "United Nations Gender Quota Portal," database, available at: <https://genderquota.org/quota-analysis> (accessed 21 August 2024)).

27 Parline database: Electoral Quota for women. https://data.ipu.org/compare?field=chamber%3A%3Afield_is_electoral_quota_women&structure=any__lower_chamber#map. (Accessed 22 March 2024).

28 UNDP (2023). Momentum is Here: Mongolia's Journey Towards Gender Equality in Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/momentum-here-mongolias-journey-towards-gender-equality-decision-making> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

29 Carnegie, "India's New Gender Quota Law Is a Win for Women—Mostly. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace," web page. Available at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/09/26/india-s-new-gender-quota-law-is-win-for-women-mostly-pub-90644> (accessed on 16 August 2024).

30 Electoral systems with proportional representation seek to create a representative body that reflects the overall distribution of public support for each political party. Majority or plurality systems, on the other hand, provide the representation of a whole constituency to a single candidate. See Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Proportional representation," web page. Available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/proportional-representation> (accessed on 2 August 2024).

31 IPU, "Women in parliament 2023" (Geneva, 2024). Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023>.

32 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2024). Women in parliament 2023. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023>.

33 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2022). Violence against women parliamentarians: Causes, effects, solutions. <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2022-11/violence-against-women-parliamentarians-causes-effects-solutions-0>.

34 UNDP, "Redefining Leadership: Beyond Gender Stereotypes" (2024), blog, available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/redefining-leadership-beyond-gender-stereotypes> (accessed 23 August 2024).

35 Excluding countries with monarchy-based systems.

36 UN-Women "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation." https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#_edn3.

37 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women (2023). "Women in Politics 2023," infographic (Geneva and New York, 2023). Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023> (accessed on 22 March 2024). Since 2023, Nepal and Singapore have a male Head of State and New Zealand a male Head of Government. As of January 2024, the Marshall Islands has a woman president, serving as both Head of State and Government.

BOX 5.2 Affirmative measures to empower women in politics in Mongolia



Women currently take up 18.1 per cent of seats in Mongolia's unicameral parliament, the State Great Hural.¹ According to UNDP's 2023 Gender Social Norms Index report, about 74 per cent of the population hold biases against women being political leaders.² Acknowledging the multifaceted challenges for women's participation in politics, the Government of Mongolia has recently undertaken a series of affirmative measures including legislative and policy reforms, networking and capacity building for women in politics and public awareness raising programmes.

A recent amendment to the Law on Parliament Elections in 2023 increased the quota for women among political party candidates from 20 per cent to 30 per cent in the 2024 parliamentary election and to 40 per cent for the following election in 2028. The amended Law on Political Parties institutionalizes state funding for political parties with women candidates and candidates with disabilities that exceed the required gender and disability quotas.³ The amendment opened the door to special measures, such as zippered candidate lists that alternate between men and women on the lists and nomination fee waivers.⁴ Moreover, a constitutional reform in 2023 enlarged the legislative branch from 76 to 126 parliamentary seats, 38 per cent of which will be chosen by proportional representation, increasing women's electoral chances.⁵

Commitment and institutional reforms by political parties are equally important. In April 2023, 10 Mongolian political parties signed a pledge to support the legal reform to increase the candidacy quota for women, and commit to a series of internal actions, including financial allocations, to ensure gender parity in candidate nominations and political appointments. These political parties pledged to ensure at least 40 per cent representation of women at all decision-making levels within the party and to include the representation of diverse groups, to improve gender-responsiveness of party policies, bylaws, regulations and initiatives. All parties committed to implementing policies and programmes to address gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as harmful stereotypes and attitudes.⁶

Support to women's participation and leadership in politics has further gained spotlight through high-level peer-to-peer exchange between Mongolia women politicians and their international peers,^{7, 8} advocacy and peer-to-peer support provided by the nationwide Women's Leadership Network (WLN), and community-based awareness-raising to change gender stereotypical norms, in addition to provide peer-to-peer support.⁹

1 IPU Parline Database. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/node/113/data-on-women?chamber_id=13468 (accessed on 22 March 2024).

2 UNDP (2023). Momentum is Here: Mongolia's Journey Towards Gender Equality in Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/momentum-here-mongolias-journey-towards-gender-equality-decision-making> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

3 UNDP (2023). Momentum is Here: Mongolia's Journey Towards Gender Equality in Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/momentum-here-mongolias-journey-towards-gender-equality-decision-making> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

4 UN Mongolia (2023). Annual results report 2023. https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/d3201a16-e4a3-433e-9269-bfe2e3b167d6_UN%20Mongolia%20Annual%20Results%20Report%202023%20Final%20to%20Upload.pdf.

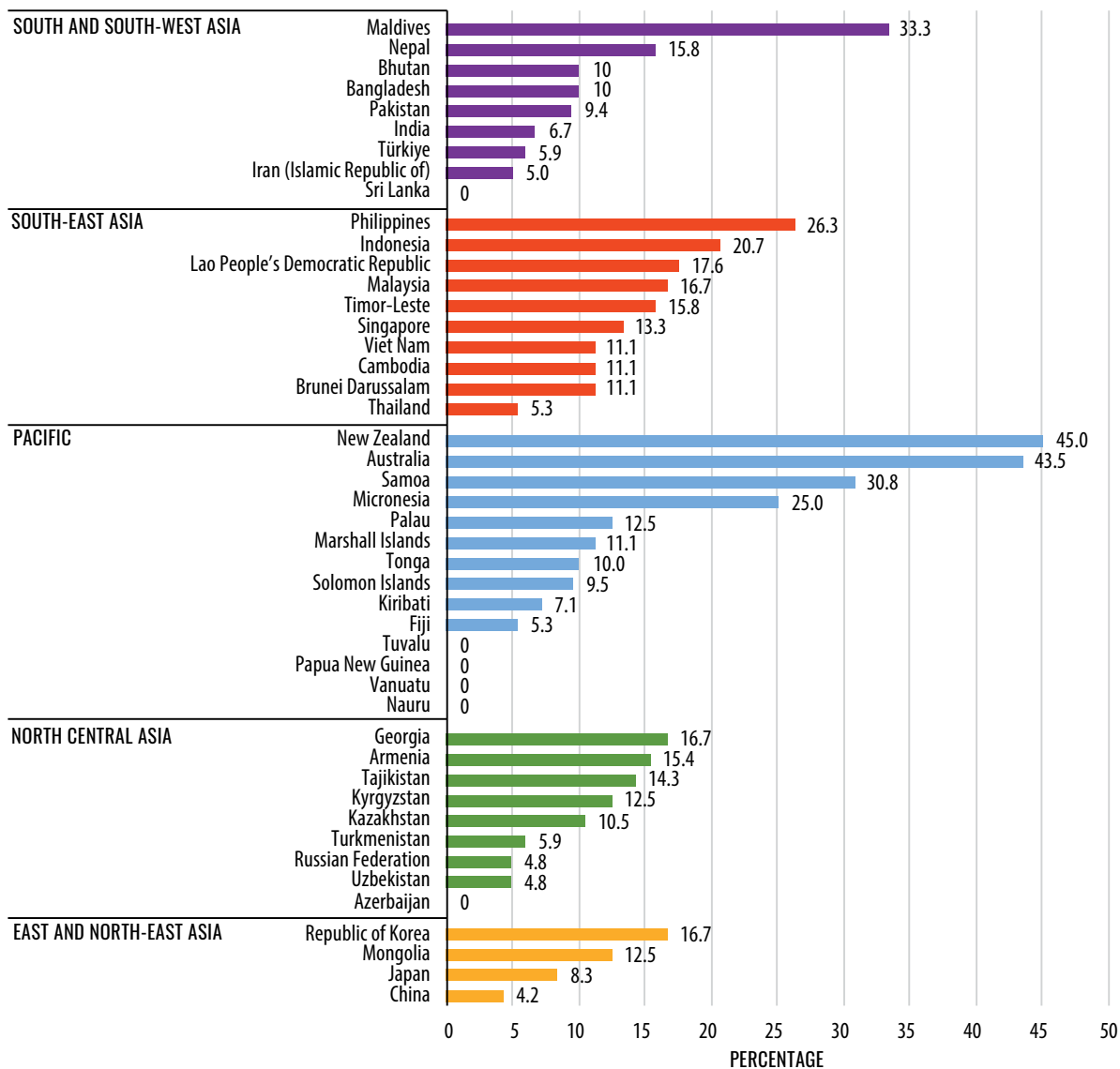
5 Bolor Lkhaajav, "Mongolia's Constitutional Reform Enlarges Parliament, Advances a Mixed Electoral System." *The Diplomat*, 14 August 2023. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/mongolias-constitutional-reform-enlarges-parliament-advances-a-mixed-electoral-system/> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

6 UNDP (2023). Mongolian Political Parties Join Pledge for Equal Representation in Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/press-releases/mongolian-political-parties-join-pledge-equal-representation-decision-making> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

7 B. Battsetseg, "Women's leadership brings a positive impact on all spheres of life", *Montsame*, 27 June 2023. Available at <https://www.montsame.mn/en/read/322105> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

8 Bolor Lkhaajav, "Mongolia's Constitutional Reform Enlarges Parliament, Advances a Mixed Electoral System." *The Diplomat*, 2 June 2023. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/mongolia-hosts-icapp-womens-wing-with-emphasis-on-gender-equality/> (accessed 22 March 2022).

9 UNDP (2023). Momentum is Here: Mongolia's Journey Towards Gender Equality in Decision-Making. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/mongolia/stories/momentum-here-mongolias-journey-towards-gender-equality-decision-making> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

FIGURE 5.4 Percentage of women cabinet ministers, 2023

Source: ESCAP elaboration based on IPU and UN-Women (2023). Women in Politics 2023. The data source shows the share of women ministers as of 1 January 2023. In the case of the Maldives, as of November 2023, 3 out of 22 cabinet members were women (Maldives, President's Office, "The President submits 22 Cabinet Ministers' names to Parliament for approval," press release, 20 March 2023. Available at <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/29106>; Maldives, President's Office, "The Cabinet" web page. <https://presidency.gov.mv/Government/Cabinet/16> (accessed 21 August 2024).

Men remain dominant at the executive levels of government in Asia and the Pacific. Across the 46 countries in Asia and the Pacific with available data, the average proportion of ministerial positions occupied by women was 12.5 per cent in 2023, significantly lower than the global average of 22.8 per cent.³⁸ While there has been a marginal increase from 11.1 per cent in 2020, the pace of change remains slow and inadequate overall for the region.³⁹

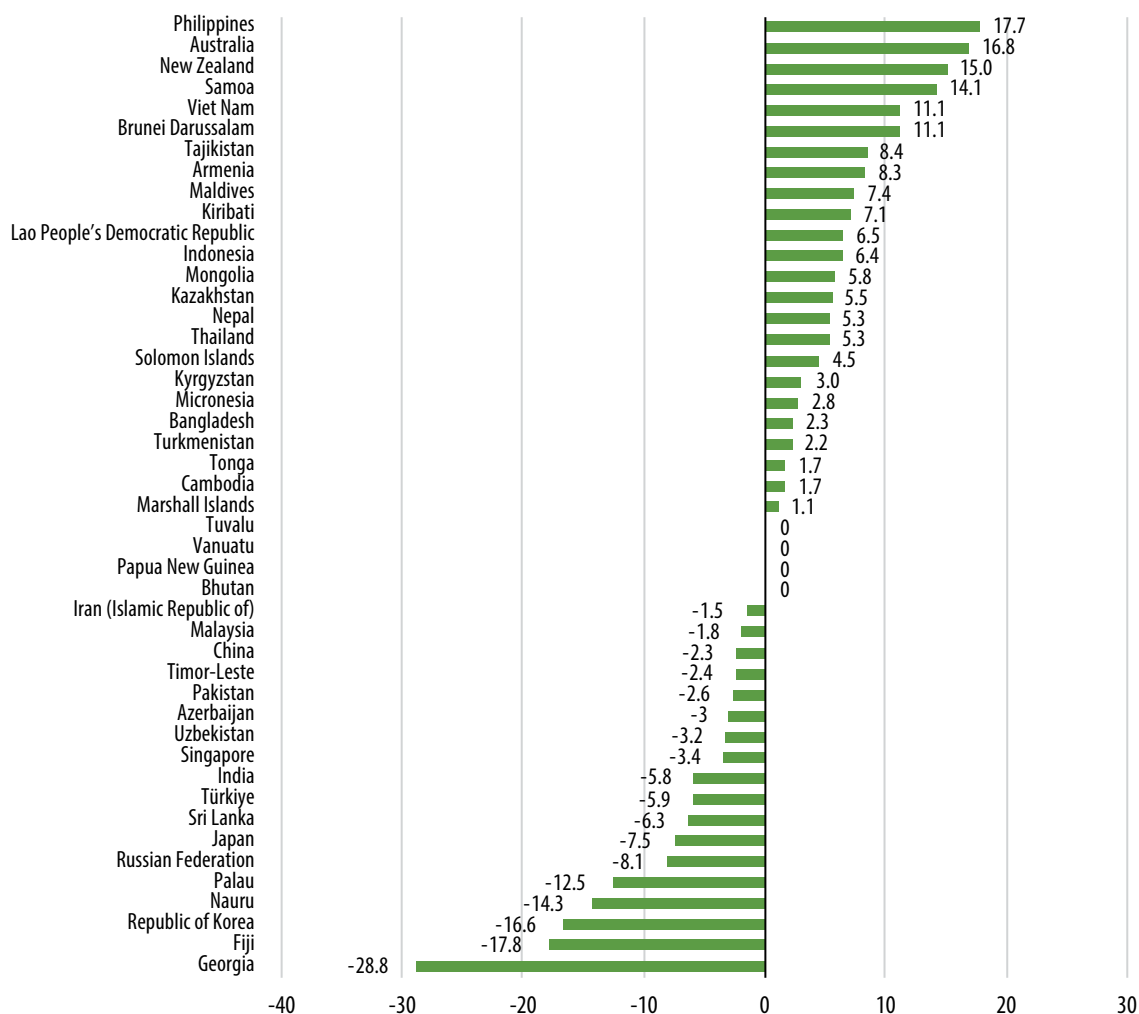
At the country level, in 2023 only five Asia-Pacific countries had more than 25 per cent of government ministers who were women (**Australia, Maldives, New Zealand, the Philippines and Samoa**). Among

these countries, Australia (43.5 per cent) and New Zealand (45 per cent) reported women holding more than 40 per cent of ministerial positions. Yet in nearly half of the countries with available data (22 out of 46 countries), women comprised 10 per cent or less of ministers. **Among these countries, six reported having no women minister in their executives** (Figure 5.4). Since 2020, the largest gains in the proportion of women-held ministerial positions were seen in Australia, Brunei Darussalam, New Zealand, the Philippines, Samoa and Viet Nam, where the proportion of women ministers increased by more than 10 percentage points. Declines of over 10 percentage points took place in five Asia-Pacific countries between 2020 and 2023 (Figure 5.5).

38 ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women (2023). "Women in Politics 2023", infographic (Geneva and New York, 2023). Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

39 ESCAP elaboration based on Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women (2023). "Women in Politics 2023", infographic (Geneva and New York, 2023). Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023> (accessed on 22 March 2024).

FIGURE 5.5 Change (percentage point difference) in the share of women ministers between 2020 and 2023



Source: ESCAP elaboration (percentage point difference between 2020 and 2023) based on IPU and UN-Women (2023) Women in Politics 2023, and IPU and UN-Women (2020) Women in Politics 2020.

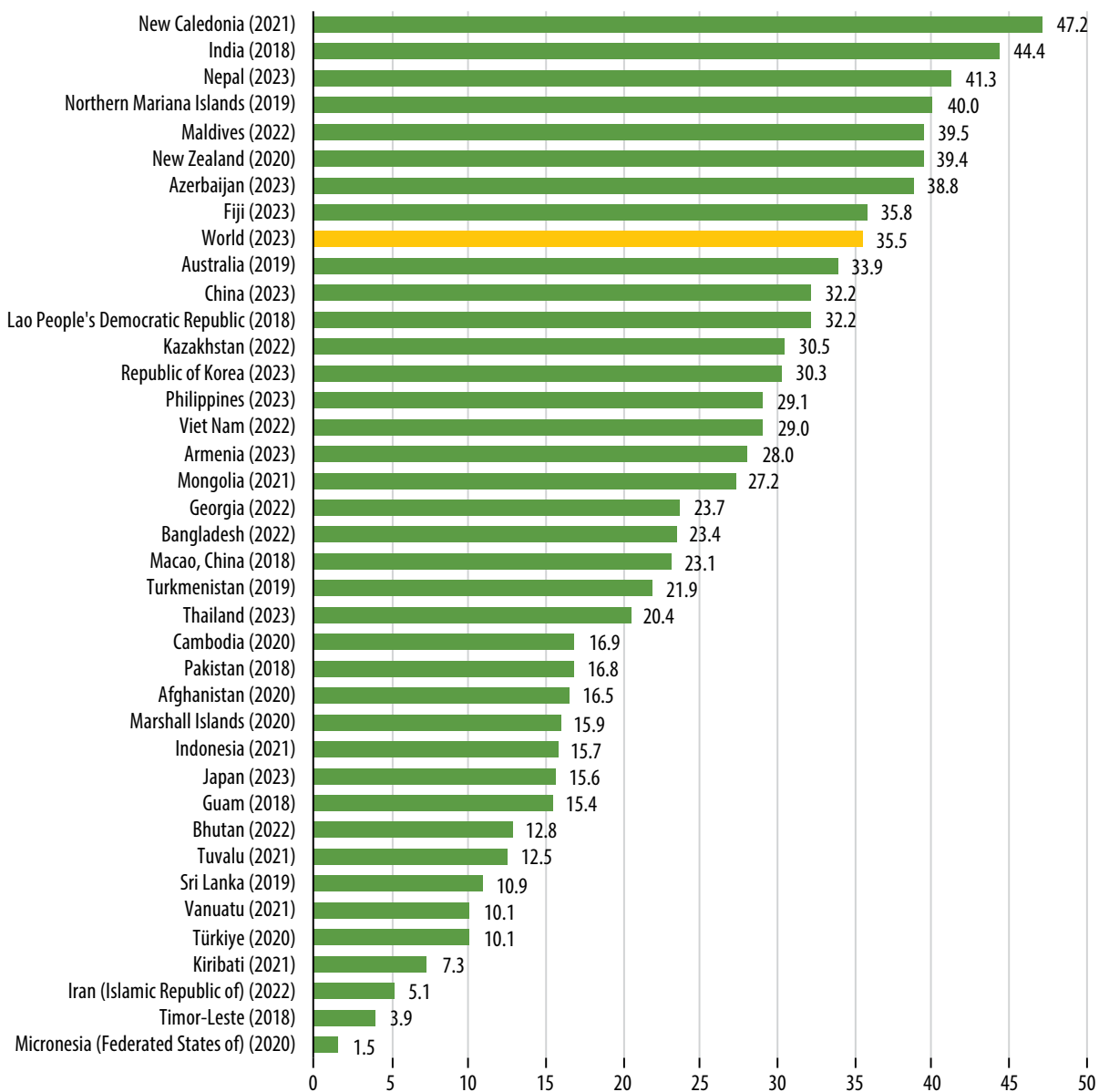
Recent analysis for the ASEAN countries has shown that, when women do hold ministerial positions, it tends to be the ministry leading the gender equality or women’s empowerment portfolio and rarely other portfolios, such as finance or defence.⁴⁰ This is also the case at the global level, where women are overrepresented in leading ministries of gender equality and family and children affairs, but underrepresented in every other portfolio.⁴¹

Women’s equal representation in local government is essential to ensure that the needs of all community members are taken into account in local-level policies. Such representation can serve as a gateway to national-level political participation.⁴²

Women’s participation is generally higher at the local level compared to the national level, although local deliberative bodies also remain dominated by men. **While parity at the local level has not been achieved in any of the 29 Asia-Pacific countries or territories with available data, women held over 40 per cent of elected local seats in India, Nepal and New Caledonia.** An additional five countries or territories (Azerbaijan, Fiji, Maldives, New Zealand and Northern Mariana Islands) reported representation of women above the 2023 global average of 35.5 per cent. In contrast, over half (21 out of 38) of Asia-Pacific countries and territories with available data reported women holding less than 25 per cent of seats in local deliberative bodies (Figure 5.6).

40 UN-Women and Women Count (2022). Women’s Leadership in the ASEAN Region: Data Snapshot. Available at https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ap-stats-01-221005_BLS22456-ASEAN-V03-s.pdf.
 41 Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN-Women (2023). “Women in Politics 2023”, infographic (Geneva and New York, 2023). Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2023-03/women-in-politics-2023> (accessed on 22 March 2024).
 42 UN-Women (2021). Snapshot of Women’s Leadership in Asia and the Pacific, web page. Available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/in-focus/csw/snapshot-of-womens-leadership-in-asia-and-the-pacific#> (accessed on 16 August 2024); UN-Women and Women Count (2022). Women’s Leadership in the ASEAN Region: Data Snapshot. Available at https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/ap-stats-01-221005_BLS22456-ASEAN-V03-s.pdf.

FIGURE 5.6 Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (%), most recent year



Source: ESCAP elaboration based on ESCAP SDG Gateway. "SDG Indicator 5.5.1: Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (percentage)." Available at: <https://dataexplorer.unescap.org> (accessed on 29 May 2024).

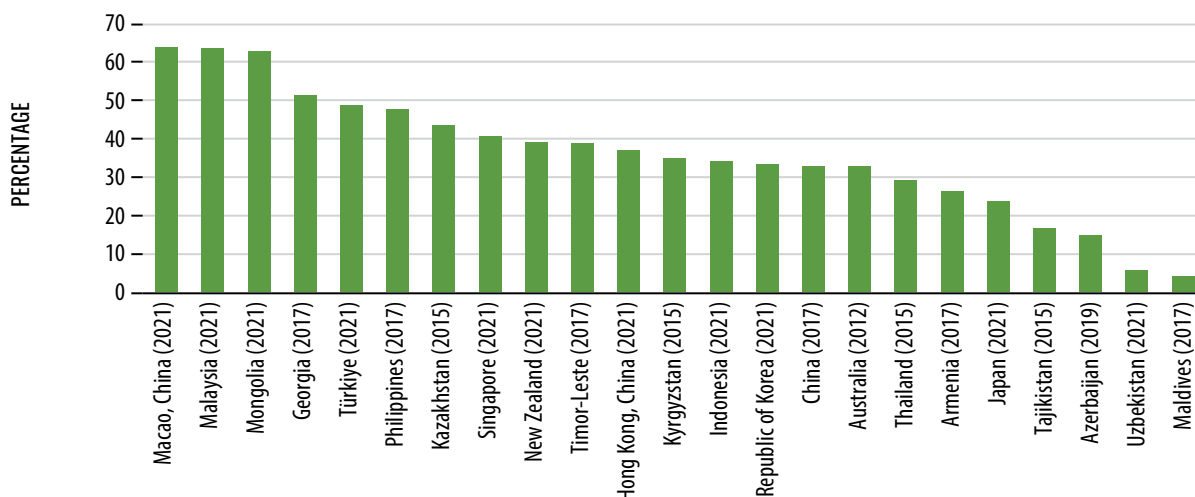
5.2.3 Judiciary branch

Upholding justice and promoting equality is a primary function of judiciaries, which should ideally reflect the composition of the communities they serve. When judiciaries reflect the demographic composition of society, public confidence in judiciaries increases. This leads to more equitable outcomes by ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences that strengthen the knowledge base for decision-making.⁴³ Strengthening women's representation in judiciaries is instrumental to advance gender equality and

can contribute towards building public trust in justice institutions. While quotas around the world have improved the representation of women in legislatures, similar measures have to a large extent been overlooked in the justice sector. For the 23 ESCAP members and associate members with available data, on average women comprised 34.1 per cent⁴⁴ of all judges or magistrates. Large variations exist across countries and territories. The share of women judges and magistrates ranged from 64 per cent to 6 per cent among the ESCAP members and associate members with data available for 2021 (Figure 5.7).

43 UNDP, *Gender and Judicial Excellence* (Bangkok, 2022). Available at: <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/judicial-integrity/publications/gender-and-judicial-excellence>.

44 Figure based on the number of female and male judges/magistrates in the most recent year of data availability (aggregated for all 23 countries with available UNODC data). Available at: <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-cjs-personnel> (accessed on 11 May 2024).

FIGURE 5.7 Share of women among judges and magistrates, latest year

Source: ESCAP elaboration based on UNODC data (headcounts) on the numbers of women judges and total judges and magistrates. Available at: <https://data.unodc.un.org/dp-cjs-personnel> (accessed 11 May 2024).

Similarly, a diverse and inclusive judicial system is found to help judges understand the differences arising from disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnic background, and culture. This understanding enables them to better meet the justice needs of different groups. It also helps to inspire and maintain public confidence in the judiciary.⁴⁵ However, there is rarely any data to account for the representation of groups of diverse backgrounds in the judiciary in the Asia-Pacific region.

Women's representation in the justice sector is important for the quality of justice for women and other groups in vulnerable situations. Large segments of the world's population find themselves with inadequate access to justice, especially women, children and persons with disabilities.⁴⁶ Barriers to accessing justice can stem from an array of complex causes. These range from the exclusion of groups in vulnerable situations (such as stateless persons) from legal protection; outdated and overly complex justice systems; as well as barriers for justice seekers in relation to legal literacy, accessibility of justice services and limited resources (including time and financial resources).⁴⁷ Women can face unique social and institutional barriers to accessing justice, including biases in justice institutions, social stigma, and a lack of gender-sensitive procedures (see

more discussion in [Chapter 6](#)).⁴⁸ Women judges can play an important role in breaking down many of the barriers women face in accessing justice. For instance, women judges can establish trust and demonstrate sensitivity to gender-specific justice needs, such as when dealing with cases that involve sexual and gender-based violence.⁴⁹ The general underrepresentation of women in the justice sector means that gender perspectives are less likely to be considered in the application of the law and the administration of justice. This perpetuates biases and discriminatory practices in various forms against women, while undermining women's access to justice.⁵⁰

While a broader range of systematic reforms are required to close the existing gaps in access to justice, addressing legal and social barriers to enable women to become justice professionals and excel in decision-making roles should be central to strategies aiming to ensure justice for all. A diversity lens is urgently needed in judiciary appointments to ensure inclusive representation. It is equally important to ensure an equal, supportive and non-discriminatory working environment for women judges, and to address sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and violent attacks against women judges within and outside the judiciary.

45 UNODC, "Strengthening Judicial Integrity through Inclusiveness and Diversity: A Canadian Perspective" (article). Available at: https://www.unodc.org/dohadecaration/en/news/2021/12/strengthening-judicial-integrity-through-inclusiveness-and-diversity_-a-canadian-perspective.html.

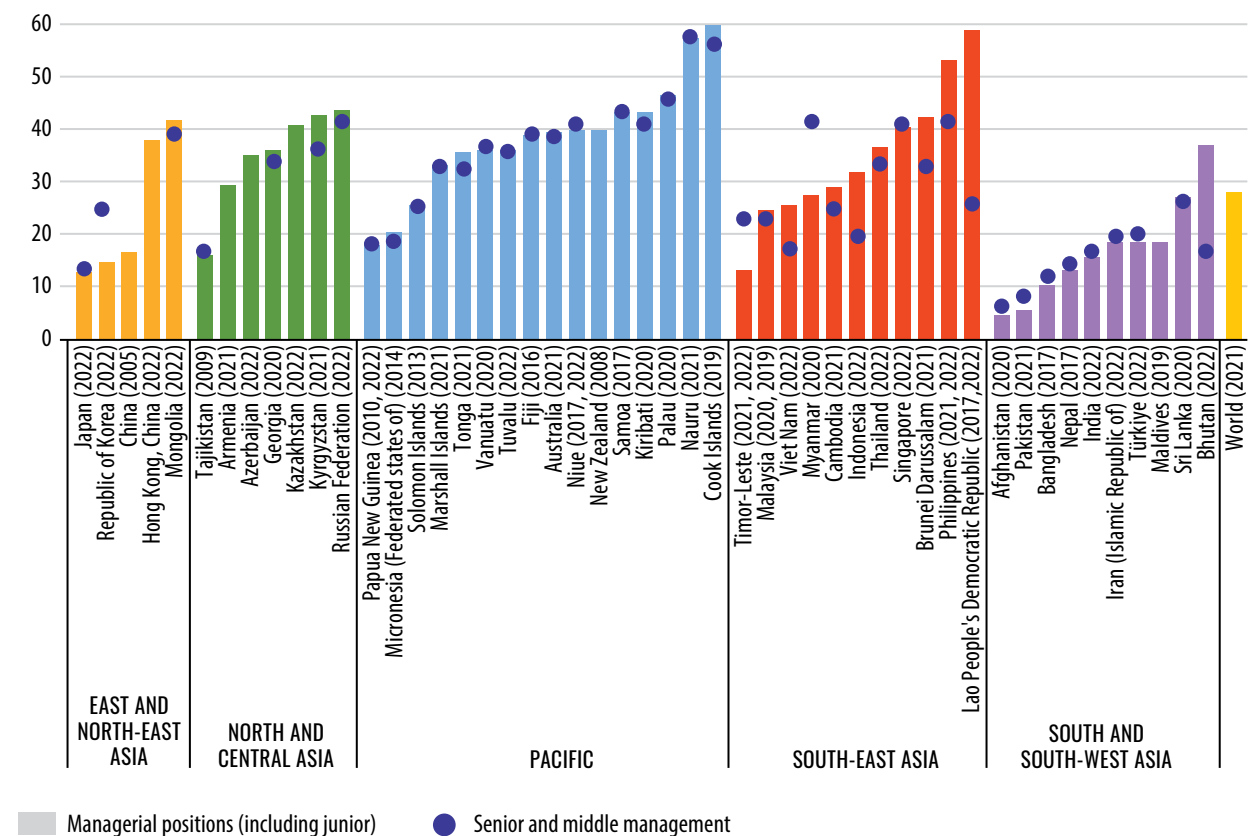
46 Peter Chapman and others, "Grasping the Justice Gap: Opportunities and Challenges for People-Centered Justice Data". Washington, D.C.: World Justice Project; New York: Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies; Paris: OECD, 2021. Available at <https://www.justice.sdg16.plus/>, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/>, and <https://www.oecd.org/>.

47 UN-Women, "Justice on Life Support," web page, available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/womens-access-to-justice/blogpost-series/blog-01-JUSTICE-ON-LIFE-SUPPORT> (accessed 16 August 2024).

48 UN-Women, "Women's Access to Justice," web page, available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/womens-access-to-justice> (accessed on 16 August 2024).

49 International Development Law Organization (IDLO), *Women Delivering Justice: Contributions, Barriers and Pathways* (Rome, 2018).

50 OHCHR (2021), A/76/142: Participation of women in the administration of justice - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Diego García-Sayán. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a76142-participation-women-administration-justice-report-special>; Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers (2011). Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n11/449/71/pdf/n1144971.pdf?token=6Ejug6mMAjCrFC68sj&fe=true>.

FIGURE 5.8 Proportion of women in managerial positions, including senior and middle management, most recent year

Source: ESCAP SDG Gateway. Indicators by SDG: 5.5.2 - Proportion of women in managerial positions. <https://dataexplorer.unescap.org/>. (Accessed 18 June 2024).

Note: When two different years are indicated on the horizontal axis in this figure, the first year refers to the year of observation for the share of women in managerial positions and the second to senior and middle management.

5.2.4 Women in managerial positions

Women's representation in managerial roles provides insight into women's power in decision-making in general, beyond the public sector. While data disaggregated by sector are not available, SDG indicator 5.5.2 monitors the proportion of managerial positions held by women in government, large enterprises and institutions.⁵¹

Across 49 ESCAP members and associate members with available data, only four (Cook Islands, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Nauru and the Philippines) reported that women held at least half of managerial positions. In 20 ESCAP members and associate members, the proportion of women was below the world average (28.2 per cent). Among the 41 members and associate members that had data on women's representation in senior and middle management positions, only four Pacific countries and territories were close to gender parity. Women

held 57.7 per cent of senior and middle management positions in Nauru, 56 per cent in the Cook Islands, 45.5 per cent in Palau and 43 per cent in Samoa. In 17 members and associate members, women represented less than 25 per cent of senior and middle managers (Figure 5.8). Among the 30 members and associate members with at least two data points available since 2015, an increasing trend in the share of senior and middle management positions held by women was observed in 21 members and associate members.⁵²

While the data available for SDG indicator 5.5.2 do not differentiate between public and private sectors, a 2020 ILO analysis of data from Group of 20 (G20) countries shows that the share of women in managerial positions tends to be lower in the private sector than in the public sector.⁵³ Data on business directors in the World Bank Entrepreneurship Database show that in 2022, the female-to-male ratio of business directors in the 11 Asia-Pacific countries

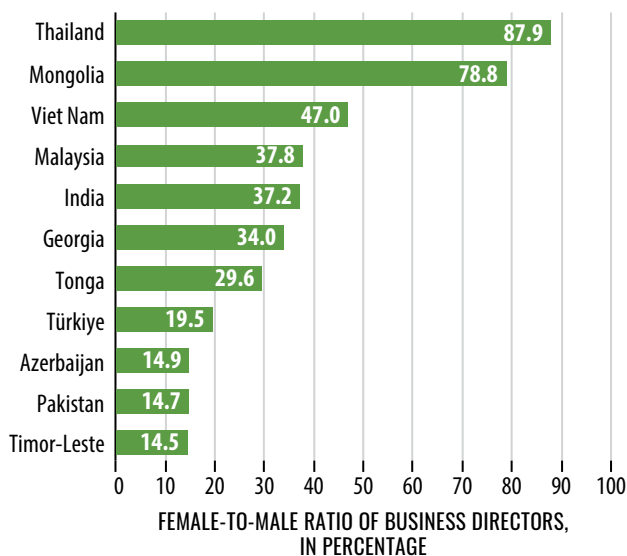
51 UNSD, SDG indicator metadata: 5.5.2: Proportion of women in managerial positions. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-05-05-02.pdf> (accessed on 02 August 2024).

52 ESCAP Data Explorer. Indicators by SDG: 5.5.2 - Proportion of women in managerial positions. <https://dataexplorer.unescap.org/> (accessed 18 June 2024).

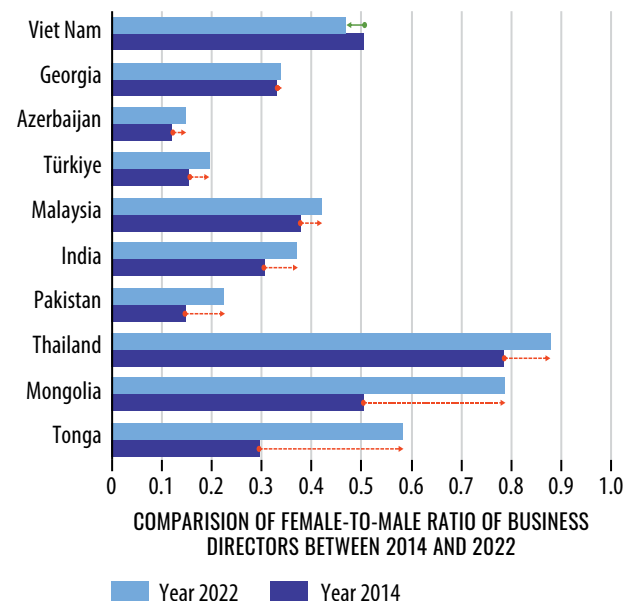
53 ILO (2020). Women in managerial and leadership positions in the G20: Data availability and preliminary findings. Stock-taking report prepared for the EMPOWER alliance under the 2020 Saudi Arabian Presidency of the G20. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---ddg_p/documents/publication/wcms_762098.pdf.

FIGURE 5.9 Gender gap in the number of business directors in Asia-Pacific countries

(A) GENDER GAP IN THE NUMBER OF BUSINESS DIRECTORS BY COUNTRY IN 2022



(B) CHANGE IN GENDER GAP IN BUSINESS DIRECTORS BY COUNTRY, 2014 AND 2022



Source: ESCAP elaboration based on sex disaggregated data on business directors from World Bank Entrepreneurship Database, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/entrepreneurship/gender/business-directors> (accessed on 25 July 2024). Comparison between 2014 and 2022 are only available for ten countries.

with data ranged from a low of 14.5 per cent to a high of 87.9 per cent. Gender gaps have nevertheless narrowed in the majority of these countries between 2014 and 2022 (Figure 5.9). The Gender Balance Index 2024 generated by the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF) that covers 335 financial institutions worldwide found that while the number of women governors of central banks increased to 29 (16 per cent) from 23 (15 per cent) in 2023, the share of female CEOs in commercial banks fell to 12 per cent from 16 per cent in 2023.⁵⁴ In the context of large companies, only four countries (**India, Nepal, Pakistan and Republic of Korea**) in the Asia-Pacific region legally prescribe a gender quota for corporate boards.⁵⁵ There is significant room and a range of opportunities for the private sector to foster gender parity in managerial positions by cultivating a gender-equal and inclusive business culture that embraces and proactively pursues a gender-balanced representation in management, including senior leadership and boards of directors. In addition, gender-responsive policies and compliance are needed to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in all their diversity, equal pay for equal work, as well as equal sharing of parental leave. There is also a need for companies in the region to ensure gender

diversity in their operations from top to bottom, offer and encourage uptake of flexible working arrangements, challenge conscious and unconscious biases in recruitment processes, and ensure that women have access to capacity-development and networking opportunities.⁵⁶

Much progress is still required before the region can achieve gender parity in decision-making in the public and private sectors. Disaggregated data and statistics are extremely scarce to track the status of the representation of women and girls from diverse backgrounds, impeding the implementation of an intersectional approach to boost equal and inclusive representation of women. It is important to recognize the important role of affirmative measures to help overcome the systematic and intersectional disadvantages women face in politics and to put women at the table of decision-making. Legislative advocacy is needed to support and reinforce implementation of temporary special measures. But temporary special measures must have benchmarks and targets, with a roadmap of transitioning to systematically institutionalized gender parity and inclusive representation.

54 Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (2024). Gender Balance Index 2024: Missed opportunities. Available at: <https://www.omfif.org/gbi2024/>.
 55 World Bank, "Women, Business and the Law 2.0 Data for 2024: Legal frameworks". Available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl-data> (accessed on 27 March 2024).
 56 Lola Woetzel and others, "The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in Asia Pacific", report, McKinsey Global Institute (New York, 2018). Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/gender%20equality/the%20power%20of%20parity%20advancing%20womens%20equality%20in%20asia%20pacific/mgi-the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-asia-pacific-full-report.pdf>.

BOX 5.3 Increasing women's representation in corporate leadership in Malaysia



Malaysia's stock exchange, Bursa Malaysia, led the 2023 ranking of gender balance in corporate boards among 17 Asian stock exchanges conducted by the United Nations Sustainable Stock Exchange (SSE) initiative. In June 2023, 30.6 per cent of the board seats of the top 100 publicly listed companies in Malaysia were held by women.¹ In comparison, women held 16.6 per cent of board seats in 2016.² This development is the result of deliberate actions undertaken by the Government of Malaysia to increase women's representation in corporate leadership.

Recognizing the benefits of strengthening women's representation in corporate leadership, the Malaysian Cabinet approved a policy in 2011 which set the target that 30 per cent of decision-making positions among publicly listed companies should be held by women. To implement the policy, the Government of Malaysia established the Women Directors Registry, a platform listing qualified, experienced and aspiring women directors, making it easier for companies to identify women candidates for their boards.³ The Prime Minister launched the Malaysian Chapter of the 30 per cent Club in 2015, a campaign calling for women to comprise at least 30 per cent of board members of companies listed in Bursa Malaysia. Non-listed companies were encouraged to work towards this goal.⁴ This target was later more broadly promoted, as the Securities Commission in 2021 revised the Code on Corporate Governance and recommended all listed companies to meet this threshold.⁵

Furthermore, in the 2022 revision of the Malaysian Code for Institutional Investors, the Institutional Investors' Council of Malaysia clearly laid out the expectation that for companies to receive investments, women must represent at least 30 per cent of their board members by 2025. Despite these efforts, according to the United Nations SSE 2023 report, four among the top 100 publicly listed companies in Malaysia still had all-male boards. Therefore, in 2023, Bursa Malaysia put forward a new requirement for all publicly listed companies to have at least one-woman board member.⁶

- 1 New Straits Times, "Women hold 30.6% of board seats in top 100 PLCs, says 30% Club Malaysia", news article, 13 July 2023. Available at: <https://www.nst.com.my/business/2023/07/930560/women-hold-306pct-board-seats-top-100-plcs-says-30-club-malaysia> (accessed on 05 August 2024).
- 2 Securities Commission of Malaysia. (n.d.). "Positive progress made on gender diversity", press release, 21 January 2018. Available at: <https://www.sc.com.my/resources/media/media-release/positive-progress-made-on-gender-diversity> (accessed on 05 August 2024).
- 3 Malaysia Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. (n.d.), "Women Directors Programme", report (Kuala Lumpur, 2012). Available at: <https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Dokumen/Dasar/Women-Directors-Programme.pdf>.
- 4 30% Club, "Malaysia chapter", web page. Available at <https://30percentclub.org/chapters/malaysia/> (accessed on 16 August 2024).
- 5 Bursa Malaysia, "SC updates the Malaysian Code on Corporate Governance to promote board leadership and oversight of sustainability", web page. Available at <https://bursasustain.bursamalaysia.com/droplet-details/corporate-governance/sc-updates-the-malaysian-code-on-corporate-governance-to-promote-board-leadership-and-oversight-of-sustainability> (accessed on 16 August 2024).
- 6 Bursa Malaysia, "Bursa Malaysia applauds progressive PLCs for embracing board gender diversity and censures PLCs with all-male boards", web page. Available at https://www.bursamalaysia.com/bm/about_bursa/media_centre/bursa-malaysia-applauds-progressive-plcs-for-embracing-board-gender-diversity-and-censures-plcs-with-all-male-boards (accessed on 16 August 2021).

5.3 GENDER-RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE

Good governance is conditioned on transparency, participatory processes, responsiveness to the needs of the people, accountability and the rule of law. Gender-responsive governance can enable governments at all levels to be more responsive and accountable and enhances the quality of public services that benefit not only women and girls but the society as a whole. It contributes to transforming gender social norms if intentional investment is made to promote non-discriminatory laws and equitable, gender-responsive public policies and services, such as parental leave policies which promote the sharing of unpaid care responsibilities between parents.

Institutions such as national women's machineries and national human rights institutions ensure that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls remain a high priority on a country's political and development agenda. They support the translation of commitments made in treaties and global or regional frameworks into national and subnational legislation, policies and practices. They help make women and girls' participation integral to decision-making at all levels. Women's civil society organizations (CSOs) and their participation in governance processes is also key. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) makes governments more accountable and ensures laws and policies are implemented to deliver outcomes for women and girls of diverse backgrounds.

5.3.1 National women's machineries

National women's machineries, or national machineries for gender equality, typically serve as the central coordinating unit for gender equality and the empowerment of women within national governments. They are mandated to promote the integration of gender equality measures across national legal frameworks, policies and programmes, coordinate national implementation of actions to achieve international commitments on women's human rights and gender equality, including the BPfA and the CEDAW, facilitate gender-responsive budgeting, and coordinate gender mainstreaming and capacity building within the government.

Among Asia-Pacific countries, the mandates of national women's machineries exist could be defined as broad as ensuring gender equality for all (Georgia, Japan and Palau) or more specifically about promoting the well-being and rights of women and girls (China, Marshal Islands and Pakistan). In some countries, the same national machineries are responsible for affairs related to families, women and children at the same time (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Republic of Korea).

There is a common misperception that a national women's machinery is equivalent to the "ministry for women's affairs" or a statutory "commission on the status of women," as opposed to a central policy coordinating unit. Such misperceptions overlook the fact that gender equality and the empowerment of women represent a cross-sectoral matter and result in inadequate investments to comprehensively address gender-related issues. The central role of national women's machineries is to advocate for consistent legislative actions across sectors and policy responses as part of a whole-of government and whole-of-society approach towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Across Asia and the Pacific, national women's machineries are diverse. Their location in government systems varies, as does their effectiveness. In 24 countries (60 per cent of survey respondents), such as Australia, Cambodia, India, Kazakhstan, Tonga and Türkiye, the machinery is led at ministerial level and its head has a seat at the cabinet table. In five countries (the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore and Tuvalu), the national machinery is led by the head of the executive branch of the government or someone who reports directly to this head. In other cases, the national machinery is housed within a sectoral ministry (Brunei Darussalam, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Palau, Russian Federation and Timor-Leste) and its head is below ministerial level. In these cases, it can take the forms of advisory or consultative commissions, committees or working groups; ombudsman and advocates' offices; interdepartmental bodies or taskforces; and

BOX 5.4 National women's machineries in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

A national machinery for the advancement of women is the central policy coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas. The necessary conditions for an effective functioning of such national machineries include:

- A** *Location at the highest possible level in the Government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet minister;*
- B** *Institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from the grassroots upwards;*
- C** *Sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity;*
- D** *Opportunity to influence development of all government policies.*

Source: Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 201. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> (accessed on 05 May 2024).

decentralized mechanisms within the executive branch at provincial or local level (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Federated States of Micronesia).

The location of national machineries in government and the level of their leadership determines their political influence and decision-making power. Where the head of a national women's machinery is appointed at the highest level or directly reports to the head of the government, the machinery can promote gender equality by influencing the political agenda and policy making. However, in many countries, national women's machineries remain marginalized within government systems. Moreover, national women's machineries are often inadequately financed and understaffed. Among countries that responded to the survey, 18 countries (45 per cent) reported not having adequate financial resources or staff to fulfil the national women's machinery's mandate. In 17 (43 per cent) of the responding countries, the budget of the national women's machinery increased over the past five years, whereas 15 countries (38 per cent) reported the budget had remained stable. In 7 countries (18 per cent), the budget of the national women's machinery had declined.

Where national women's machineries exist, they usually do not sufficiently represent the perspectives of all women and girls, particularly those from the most vulnerable groups. For instance, the involvement of persons with disabilities in national women's machineries remains minimal. According to government responses to a recent ESCAP survey⁵⁷ on the final review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, 10 participating countries and territories reported that they had members in their national women's machineries who represented the cause of women and girls with disabilities; and seven of them claimed that disability inclusion was one of the aims of their national machineries. However, only four countries and territories reported having members with disabilities, and they represented less than 5 per cent of the membership of their respective national machineries, except for Fiji. Similarly, women with disabilities are also underrepresented in national machineries on disability matters. Among 23 countries and territories which reported on their national machineries on disability for the same ESCAP survey,⁵⁸ only 12 reported having women with disabilities in their memberships, representing 1.7 per cent to 27.3 per cent of their members. While men with disabilities were also underrepresented, they generally held more seats than women with disabilities in machineries on disability matters in these countries and territories. The underrepresentation of groups in vulnerable situations — women with disabilities, women migrants and indigenous women and girls — in national women's machineries impacts the machineries' agenda-setting and capacity to account for the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against diverse groups of women and girls.

The existence of a national women's machinery should not replace the shared responsibility across all government ministries and agencies for achieving gender equality. While legal frameworks and national policies increasingly recognize the importance of addressing gender inequalities, the implementation of these commitments often falls short. It is essential to ensure that these commitments are well translated into sectoral policies and interventions across different levels of the government, with concrete objectives, benchmarks and targets, as well as adequate resource

allocation. To achieve this, gender mainstreaming across the government and governance processes is crucial.

In a number of Asia-Pacific countries such as **Cambodia, China, Japan** and **Mongolia**, inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms have been set up to facilitate gender mainstreaming and monitor the implementation of policies and programmes related to gender equality and women across line ministries and across departments in the subnational governments. In **Indonesia**, gender focal points are designated at the national and subnational level in the executive, legislative and/or judicial branches of the government to facilitate gender mainstreaming across all development sectors. Where gender equality and the empowerment of women are highlighted in national agenda settings, governments often have conducted or even institutionalized gender budgeting and gender audits, as well as regular consultations with women's CSOs, which play an instrumental role in mainstreaming gender perspectives in policies and programmes across sectors, as exemplified by **Australia** and **New Zealand**. National women's machineries and the other aforementioned mechanisms play critical coordinating and/or technical assistance roles in these processes.

In addition, **national human rights institutions** are another important type of institutional mechanism for the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment. They are independent, state-mandated bodies responsible for promoting and protecting all types of human rights at the national level, and act as a bridge between the government and civil society.⁵⁹ At least 25 out of 40 countries that responded to the Beijing+30 global survey indicated that their national human rights institutions had specific mandates to address violations of women's rights and promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming in national legislation and policies. In **Indonesia**, the successful collaboration between the National Commission on Violence against Women and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection resulted in the Sexual Violence Crime Bill (RUU TPKS) enacted by the Indonesian Parliament in 2022.⁶⁰

57 ESCAP, Make the Right Real: Indicators database. Incheon Strategy Goal 2: Promote participation in political processes and in decision making. Indicator 2.3: Representation in national machinery for gender equality and women's empowerment. Available at: <https://www.maketherightreal.net/data/goal-2> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

58 ESCAP, Make the Right Real: Indicators database. Incheon Strategy Goal 2: Promote participation in political processes and in decision making. Indicator 2.2: Representation in national coordination mechanisms on disability. Available at: <https://www.maketherightreal.net/data/goal-2> (accessed on 28 February 2024).

59 European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), "About National Human Rights Institutions", web page. Available at [https://ennhri.org/about-nhris/#:~:text=National%20Human%20Rights%20Institutions%20\(NHRIs,economic%2C%20social%20and%20cultural%20rights](https://ennhri.org/about-nhris/#:~:text=National%20Human%20Rights%20Institutions%20(NHRIs,economic%2C%20social%20and%20cultural%20rights) (accessed on 16 August 2024).

60 UN-Women, "The United Nations in Indonesia welcomes the Indonesian Parliament's approval of the Sexual Violence Crime Bill (RUU TPKS) into law on 12 April 2022", press release, 12 April 2022. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2022/04/the-indonesian-parliaments-approval-of-the-sexual-violence-crime-bill> (accessed on 23 September 2024).

5.3.2 Civil society engagement for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Civil society actors, including women’s civil society organizations (CSOs) and women human rights defenders, have always played an important role in the advancement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. Over the decades, movements for women’s rights have brought about significant societal change towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Civil society actors played a critical role in making the BPfA the most comprehensive agenda to date on gender equality and women’s empowerment.⁶¹ The inclusive and participatory practices of the Commission on the Status of Women and the implementation of the BPfA have provided a concrete basis for women’s CSOs to mobilize and advocate for gender equality and women’s empowerment.⁶² The major contributions made by civil society to the advocacy and implementation of the commitments made in the BPfA were acknowledged in the Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review.⁶³ Civil society actors have been particularly active and instrumental in actions to raise public awareness, deliver services and ensure that women’s rights and gender equality perspectives are represented in debates and dialogues around all critical areas of concern, as well as emerging issues such as climate change and digitalization. For example, in the context of climate change, the CEDAW Committee has acknowledged the important role of CSOs in advocating for women’s inclusion in climate resilience and adaptation strategies and has emphasized the necessity of involving civil society actors in creating gender-responsive policies and practices to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women.⁶⁴

Enabling civil society to play its part in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls requires an open and inclusive civic space. Governments play a fundamental role in shaping the policy and regulatory environments and institutional mechanisms that enable civil society actors to actively participate and contribute to the advancement

of gender equality and women’s empowerment.⁶⁵ However, in Asia and the Pacific and across the world, CSOs have expressed concern that the civic space is shrinking, while they also face increasingly significant resource constraints. In addition, CSOs have noted a pushback against gender equality and women’s empowerment, especially in areas such as sexual health and reproductive rights, and the women, peace and security agenda.⁶⁶ **Digitalization could be leveraged to provide a safe space for the expression and participation needed to inform such agendas. Yet this requires mechanisms to protect privacy and confidentiality and prevent gender-based violence in digital spaces.** Barriers to participation faced by groups in vulnerable situations must be dismantled. In some countries such as China and the Republic of Korea, digital platforms are used to collect public opinions on draft legislations and policy proposals, including to develop laws to combat gender-based violence.⁶⁷

Young people are standing at the forefront of pushing for transformative change across economic, social, and environmental issues. Nonetheless, **youth-led organizations need additional support and resources to drive forward gender-transformative actions.**⁶⁸ To expand the reach and impact, social movements, especially those led by youth, have increasingly taken advantage of digital spaces and platforms to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. For example, noticeable efforts have been made to conduct online advocacy and awareness-raising activities on topics including gender-based violence and harassment, environmental protection, and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights across the region.⁶⁹ In **India**, women and youth parliamentarians are encouraged to actively engage in decision making, policy discussions and other business of the parliament. Youth volunteers have also been engaged in large-scale community outreach programmes in districts vulnerable to gender-based violence and other human rights violations.⁷⁰ In the **Philippines**, women and youth-focused CSOs, as well as adolescents and youth, have been active in developing age-appropriate content and programmes that address sexual and reproductive health and rights, family planning,

61 UN-Women, “Five big wins ushered in by the landmark Beijing Platform for Action”, web page. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/3/compilation-five-wins-ushered-in-by-beijing-platform-for-action> (accessed on 16 August 2024).

62 CSOs participating in the Beijing+25 Review, *Asia-Pacific Civil Society Declaration on Beijing +25* (Bangkok, 2019). Available at: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/B25-AP-CSO-Declaration.pdf> (accessed on 16 July 2024).

63 ESCAP and UN-Women, *Asia-Pacific Declaration on Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Beijing+25 Review* (United Nations publication, 2020).

64 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General recommendation No.37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate, CEDAW/C/GC/37 (New York, 2018).

65 OHCHR, “Protecting and promoting civic space”, United Nations guidance note (Geneva, 2020). https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf.

66 CSOs participating in the Beijing+25 Review, *Asia-Pacific Civil Society Declaration on Beijing +25* (Bangkok, 2019). Available at: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/B25-AP-CSO-Declaration.pdf> (accessed on 16 July 2024).

67 National reports of the Beijing+30 review submitted by China and the Republic of Korea. Available at <https://www.asiapacificgender.org/node/244>.

68 United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 3: Meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and decision-making processes* (New York, 2023). Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4009368?v=pdf> (accessed on 07 July 2024).

69 Oxfam, “Power at our fingertips: feminists in Asia stake their claim to digital space”, blog, 16 March 2023. Available at: <https://views-voices.oxfam.org.uk/2023/03/feminists-asia-digital-space/> (accessed on 07 July 2024).

70 India, Ministry of Women and Child Development, *National report of the Beijing+30 review* (2024).

maternal health, HIV/AIDs, and gender-based violence. The National Youth Commission has been a member on the Inter-agency Committee on Gender, Children, and Youth Statistics since 2013.⁷¹

The success of national women's machineries depends largely on civil society support, especially from women's civil society actors in their various forms, such as networks of women in political leadership and decision-making positions, women voters, women's professional associations (e.g., in the media sector) and other women's groups. It is often through these civil society actors and their advocates that diverse groups of women and girls can articulate their concerns and interests and become heard and seen by policymakers and the general public. Close partnerships and consultations between national women's machineries and these civil society actors are essential to ensure national strategies, policies and programmes are initiated, designed, financed and implemented to address the real and current concerns of diverse groups of women and girls.

Where CSOs representing different groups of women and girls are included in the decision-making body of a national women's machinery, they are more likely to have a voice and influence gender-responsive and inclusive policymaking. There exist various examples of productive collaborations between national women's machineries and women's CSOs and groups in the Asia-Pacific region. For instance, in **Malaysia**, the partnership between the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the Asia Foundation on the care agenda contributed to the development of the national Care Industry Action Plan (to be released in 2024).⁷² In the **Philippines**, the Philippine Commission on Women and local governments collaborated with Oxfam Philippines and academia to conduct the National Household Care Survey, providing additional evidence on the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women. This collaboration contributed to placing the need to address care-related issues on the policy agenda.⁷³

5.3.3 Public financing for gender equality and women's empowerment

Public budget decisions and the underpinning public finance management systems have gender-differentiated implications on the socioeconomic outcomes of the population. **It is thus imperative to**

integrate gender considerations into all stages of the budget cycle. These must shape the process from the planning and design of policies aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, to the allocation and tracking of resources to facilitate policy implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of policy efficiency and effectiveness.⁷⁴ Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) emerges as a strategic political and technical exercise to support a fair distribution of resources, foster a sense of justice and strengthen government accountability.⁷⁵

Data from 105 countries and territories in the period between 2018 and 2021 show that only 26 per cent of the reporting governments had comprehensive systems to track gender equality allocations in the budget, as measured by three criteria assessing the main characteristics of a fiscal system. These criteria cover policy framework and adequate resources for gender equality; gender analysis in public finance management system; and transparent gender budget data. Some 62 per cent of countries in Central Asia and Southern Asia fully met the requirements of having a comprehensive system to track budget allocations for gender equality, followed by 33 per cent in Eastern Asia and South-Eastern Asia, and 20 per cent in Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).⁷⁶

Regarding **policy framework and adequacy of resources for gender equality** (criterion 1), 92 per cent of the 105 reporting governments had policies and/or programmes in place to advance gender equality, but only 53 per cent indicated sufficient resource allocation for gender-responsive policies and 75 per cent reported budget execution mechanisms. Governments cited insufficient gender impact assessments to inform budget decisions, fiscal deficits, and gaps in systems to track resources from budget allocation to expenditure as critical barriers to adequate budget allocation.

Gender analysis has yet to be fully integrated into public finance management systems in most countries (criterion 2). While 57 per cent of governments used sex-disaggregated data to inform budget decisions and 54 per cent issued gender-responsive budget instructions, fewer governments conducted ex-ante gender impact assessment of proposed policies (42 per cent) and ex-post assessment (39 per cent), produced a gender budget statement (38 per cent), tagged or classified gender spending (26 per cent),

71 Philippines, Commission on Women, *National report of the Beijing+30 review* (2024).

72 The Asia Foundation, "The Asia Foundation named as key contributor to Malaysia's care industry action Plan", press release, 23 May 2024. Available at: <https://asiafoundation.org/2024/05/23/the-asia-foundation-named-as-key-contributor-to-malysias-care-industry-action-plan/> (accessed on 07 July 2024).

73 ESCAP, "Valuing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work. Country Case Study: Philippines", report (Bangkok, 2022). Available at: <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/22030-SDD-Unpaid-Care-Domestic-Work-Philippines-v1-3.pdf> (accessed on 07 July 2024).

74 Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability Program, *Global Report on Public Financial Management* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

75 UN-Women, "What is gender-responsive budgeting", web page. Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2023/11/what-is-gender-responsive-budgeting> (accessed on 11 April 2024).

76 UN-Women, "Strengthening public finance management systems for gender equality and women's empowerment: Promising practices and remaining gaps", technical brief (New York, 2023). See Annex 2 for country groupings according to the UN SDG definition.

and audited the budget to assess gender impacts (23 per cent). International organizations and countries have developed various tools for gender analysis. Yet, adapting and applying these tools to enable gender-responsive budgetary exercises remains a common challenge. Budget and audit institutions need to be engaged to help ensure gender budget allocations are spent in a responsible and accountable manner. In the **Philippines**, for example, the Commission on Audit is required to conduct audit observations on government agencies, including the implementation of the gender and development budget policy.⁷⁷ In **Georgia**, the parliament has introduced gender impact assessments as part of the lawmaking cycle and is seeking to gradually expand the legal reform to make gender impact assessment mandatory for all laws, as well as for all policies produced by the legislative and executive branches of government.⁷⁸

When it comes to **transparency** for accountability (criterion 3), 63 per cent of governments made gender budget allocation information publicly available, and 59 per cent ensured the accessibility and timeliness of such information.⁷⁹ Gender-responsive budgeting can contribute to keeping

citizens informed about efforts made by national and subnational governments to support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Without transparent gender budget allocation information, the effect on public engagement is minimized.

Adequate financing is a prerequisite for the implementation of gender-responsive laws and policies across sectors. The limited progress in developing comprehensive systems to track and make gender equality allocations significantly impedes the mobilization of domestic public resources, which continue to be the primary source of financing for public goods and services and for inequality reduction through redistribution.⁸⁰ Substantial enhancements are needed to integrate gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting into public finance management systems. The global debt crises pose a threat to public financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, as countries undertake austerity measures and divert resources away from gender-focused programmes. It has become increasingly urgent to explore and combine diversified financing means to sustain and advance the gender equality agenda (see more discussion in [Chapter 8](#)).

BOX 5.5 Gender-responsive budgeting in India and the Philippines



The adoption of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) in Asia-Pacific countries, such as India and the Philippines, demonstrates their strong commitment to ensuring the efficient allocation of resources based on the identified needs of women and girls. These countries acknowledge the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the public financial management system in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

In 2005–2006, the Ministry of Finance in India introduced and institutionalized GRB. Since then, a Gender Budget Statement has been presented by the Indian Government during each year's budget session in parliament.¹ In addition to this, the Ministry of Women and Child Development adopted the mission statement "Budgeting for Gender Equity" and developed a strategic framework. The framework includes several key components, such as the establishment of Gender Budget Cells across ministries and departments, the provision of GRB training for both government and non-government stakeholders, and above all the production of an annual Gender Budget Statement. The formulation of the Gender Budget Statement involves multiple actors, including the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Ministry of Finance, the Planning Department at the national level and the Planning Commissions at the state level.² As a key element of India's annual Union Budget, the gender budget consists of two parts: Part A encompasses schemes that allocate funds exclusively for women, while Part B – representing the dominant share in the

1 Vajiram & Ravi – Institute for IAS Examination (2023). Gender Budgeting in India, web page. Available at <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-daily-current-affairs/mains-articles/gender-budgeting-in-india/> (accessed on 16 August 2024).

2 ESCAP, "Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and Good Practices", technical paper (Bangkok, 2017). Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_Gender-Responsive_Budgeting.pdf.

77 Commission on Audit – Gender and Development, the Philippines, website. Available at: <https://web.coa.gov.ph/gad/index.php/about-us/> (accessed on 8 August 2024).

78 Georgia, *National report of the Beijing+30 review* (2024). Available at <https://www.asiapacificgender.org/node/244>.

79 UN-Women, "Strengthening public finance management systems for gender equality and women's empowerment: Promising practices and remaining gaps", technical brief (New York, 2023).

80 United Nations, "Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective, Report of the Secretary-General", E/CN.6/2024/3 (New York, 2024).

BOX 5.5 Gender-responsive budgeting in India and the Philippines (continued)



budget – comprises schemes that allocate a minimum of 30 per cent of funds towards women.³ In the fiscal year 2024–25, forty-three ministries and departments⁴ participated in GRB, with the gender budget rising from 5 per cent of the total annual budget in the previous fiscal year (2023–24) to 6.5 per cent, due to increased allocations from seven ministries and departments.^{5, 6}

In 1995, the Philippine Commission for Women developed a Gender and Development budget policy that provides guidelines for integrating a gender perspective into the budgeting process. The policy requires all national government agencies and local government units to allocate at least 5 per cent of their budgets to gender-responsive programmes and activities.⁷ To support the implementation of GRB, the Philippine Commission for Women also provides technical support and capacity-building assistance to agencies through training, workshops, advisory services and written guidelines. In addition to the Commission, several oversight agencies are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the Gender and Development budget policy, including the Department of Budget and Management, the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the National Economic and Development Authority, and the Commission on Audit. A unique aspect of GRB in the Philippines is the inclusion of gender audits as part of the regular audit processes, accompanied by strict measures to address non-compliance with the policy.⁸ The Commission on Human Rights, which acts as the Gender Ombud, has issued official guidelines to identify violations or non-compliance and the corresponding penalties, such as disallowing spending from the allocated budget.⁹ The Philippines has also taken steps to promote GRB at the sub-national level, including through the provision of technical assistance in conducting gender analysis of the socioeconomic situations of local government units and integrating sex-disaggregated data into local planning and budgeting.¹⁰

Despite the important steps taken by India and the Philippines to ensure that budget allocations align with the commitment to gender equality, both countries face challenges. India, for instance, struggles with the limited effectiveness of its GRB due to the exclusion of key programmes that benefit women and the lack of sex-disaggregated data.¹¹ Therefore, it is advisable that the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Finance continue to make concerted efforts to address gaps in the design and use of the Gender Budget Statement; establish stronger monitoring mechanisms to enhance the quality of GRB efforts at the sectoral level; integrate GRB considerations during the budget prioritization phase; and encourage subnational governments to adopt GRB practices, with the ultimate goal of ensuring the participation of the most vulnerable groups of women in planning and budgeting processes.¹² The Philippines faces obstacles in GRB implementation, such as uneven capacities among Gender and Development focal points, inadequate tracking of expenditures and underutilization of the Gender and Development budget by key agencies and local leaders.¹³ A way forward should be to continue developing the capacities of focal points and government officials, as well as cultivating champions and potential successors.¹⁴

3 Kasliwal, R. (2023). The Status of Gender Budgeting in India. Centre for Policy Research. <https://accountabilityindia.in/blog/gender-budgeting-in-india/>.

4 On a total of 58 Union ministries and 93 departments of the central Government.

5 Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation, Department of Rural Development.

6 Press Information Bureau Delhi, "Gender Budget increases by 38.6% in FY 2024–25", press release, 2 February 2024. Available at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseSelfFramePage.aspx?PRID=2001975> (accessed on 20 August 2024).

7 Philippines, Commission on Women, "Gender and Development Budget," Web Page. Available at: <https://pcw.gov.ph/gad-budget-report/> (accessed 21 August 2024).

8 ESCAP, "Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and Good Practices", technical paper (Bangkok, 2017). Available at : https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_Gender-Responsive_Budgeting.pdf.

9 UN-Women, *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Status Report* (Bangkok, 2016).

10 ESCAP, "Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and Good Practices", technical paper (Bangkok, 2017). Available at : https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_Gender-Responsive_Budgeting.pdf.

11 Kasliwal, R. (2023). The Status of Gender Budgeting in India. Centre for Policy Research. <https://accountabilityindia.in/blog/gender-budgeting-in-india/>.

12 UN-Women, *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Status Report* (Bangkok, 2016).

13 ESCAP, "Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and Good Practices", technical paper (Bangkok, 2017). Available at : https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/SDD_Gender-Responsive_Budgeting.pdf.

14 Frede Moreno (2023), "Gender-responsive budgeting in the Philippines: Comparative review of best practices and challenges", paper. Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4506528 and UN-Women, *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the Asia-Pacific Region: A Status Report* (Bangkok, 2016).



Woman in STEM: Honey Sta. Ana pursuing a career as a robotic process automation developer after receiving an ILO scholarship for women in web development. © ILO

5.4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While notable progress has been made in women's participation in decision-making and leadership, the Asia-Pacific region is still far from reaching gender parity and equality across all levels and sectors. Overall, institutional mechanisms and instruments to enable gender-responsive governance remain weak. Incorporating diversity and inclusion lenses into gender-equal participation and gender-responsive governance is a particular challenge. The following actions are recommended for governments and civil society actors in the region:

- + Expand affirmative legal measures and policies, including temporary special measures such as gender quotas, to increase women's representation in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government system. Such temporary special measures must have benchmarks and targets with a roadmap for transitioning to institutionalized mechanisms that enable gender parity and inclusive representation.
- + Create requirements, incentives and dedicated budgets for political parties, public institutions and private sector entities to pursue gender parity in election candidacy, management and leadership positions.
- + Support capacity-building programmes and peer-to-peer networks to empower women leaders and professionals.
- + Conduct long-term voter education and public education to address myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about women's leadership capacity and boost public awareness of and confidence in positive performance of women leaders.
- + Put in place and implement policies and measures to address economic and social barriers to women's political and public participation, including but not limited to disproportionate unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, and gender-based violence against women in politics.
- + Transform organizational cultures and practices in public and private institutions to be more gender-responsive and inclusive through a revision of internal policies and processes, and awareness-raising and training of personnel, especially those in management positions.
- + Strengthen the ability of national women's machineries to represent and address the interest of women and girls, in particular groups in vulnerable situations, and guide gender mainstreaming throughout the government, equipping them with increased level of political influence, decision-making power, as well as budgetary and staffing support.
- + Empower women's CSOs, especially those representing youth and vulnerable groups, to participate and influence decision-making processes, by providing an enabling policy and regulatory environment for civic participation, funding support, capacity development and institutionalized consultative mechanisms through national women's machineries and national human rights institutions.
- + Prioritize the development of a comprehensive, transparent and accountable system to make and track public budget allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment, especially through the integration of gender analysis and gender-responsive budgeting requirements into public finance management systems.
- + Collect, generate and publicize disaggregated data and statistics about gender-equal and inclusive representation and participation, as well as gender-responsive budgets, to drive reforms and foster public perspectives of meaningful participation and gender-responsive governance.

United Nations publication
Sales No. E.24.II.F.12
Copyright © United Nations 2024
All rights reserved.
PRINT ISBN: 9789210032629
PDF ISBN: 9789211067033

United Nations
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)
Social Development Division
United Nations Building,
Rajadamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Email: escap-sdd@un.org
Website: www.unescap.org



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.

ISBN: 978-92-1-003262-9



9 789210 032629