

**BEIJING**  
**+30**



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

**CHAPTER 6**



**ESCAP**  
Economic and Social Commission  
for Asia and the Pacific





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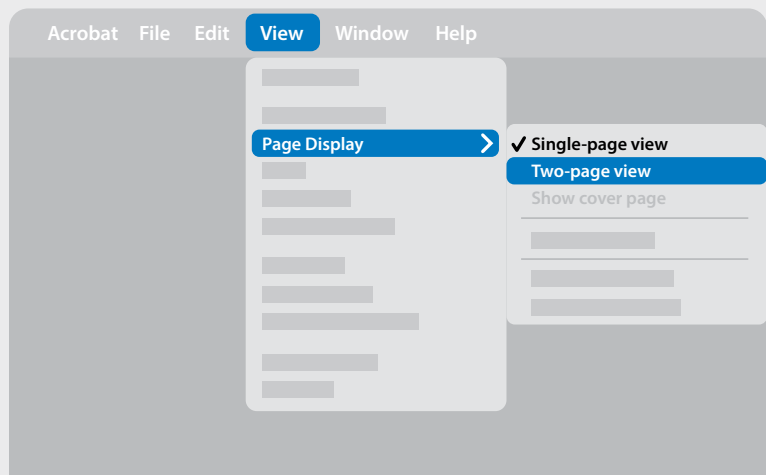
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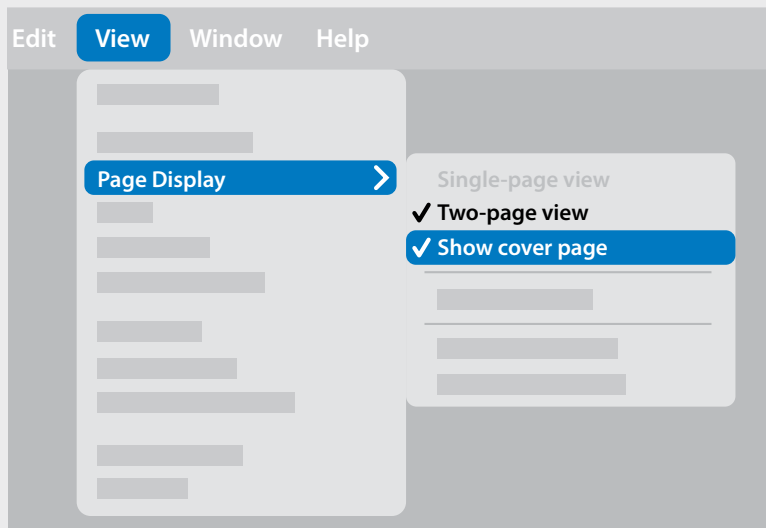
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## CHAPTER 6

### Peaceful and just societies



A female officer checks the body temperature of a taxi driver in Bangkok, Thailand, showing the diversity of roles and responsibilities undertaken by women in law enforcement in the ASEAN region, as well as their engagement with the communities they serve. ©UN-Women and UNODC/Ploy Phutpheng

## KEY MESSAGES

Peaceful and just societies cannot be achieved without addressing the dire situations of women and girls' human rights in conflict and emergency settings and empowering women and girls to exercise their agency and leadership.

**A growing share of the population in Asia and the Pacific and globally are being affected by conflicts and other emergencies such as climate-induced weather hazards and disasters, many of them are women and girls who tend to suffer more acute poverty, food insecurity and elevated risks of violence in these fragile settings.**

- + Approximately 300 million people worldwide, including over 50 million in Asia and the Pacific, are expected to need humanitarian assistance in 2024 alone.<sup>1</sup>
- + The number of people forcibly displaced or stateless is estimated to surpass 130 million by the end of 2024 and 12 per cent of them reside in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>2</sup>
- + The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries exceeded 600 million globally in 2022, a 50 per cent rise since 2017.<sup>3</sup>

**The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, covering participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery, requires localization based on national and subnational contexts and stronger implementation. Deliberate consideration must be given to design and planning to fully respond to the needs of the diverse population groups affected, the challenges of intersectionality, and emerging peace and security risks. These risks include violent extremism and terrorism, climate-induced security risks and cybersecurity risks.**

- + As of May 2024, 16 Asia-Pacific countries adopted national action plans on WPS. Their implementation often encounters obstacles, such as insufficient political will, inadequate financial support and restricted engagement of civil society actors.
- + Countries have increasingly considered intersectionality and emerging security risks in their WPS action plans. Human security must remain at the center of any intervention and over-securitization must be avoided.

<sup>1</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024* (Geneva and New York, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Global Appeal 2024: UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency* (Geneva, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023* (New York, 2023).

**Women's effective participation in peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and law enforcement efforts is essential to achieve peaceful and inclusive societies. However, women's role as peace agents and leaders continues to be underrecognized and inadequately supported.**

- + Women's participation is found to increase the likelihood of a peace agreement to last at least two years by 20 per cent, and by 35 per cent the likelihood of it to last 15 years.<sup>4</sup> Yet only 1 out of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022 globally was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women's group.<sup>5</sup>
- + Only among personnel deployed from 15 Asia-Pacific countries do women account for at least 21 per cent of all military observers and staff officers deployed, in line with the 2024 target set by the United Nations Department of Peace Operations.<sup>6</sup>
- + Women and girls' roles and contributions to building local peace infrastructure in the region are rarely documented, and their actions at the grassroots level are often undermined by limited funding.
- + In 2019, women accounted for between 6 per cent and 20 per cent of police officers in ASEAN countries. Even smaller shares of female officers occupied managerial positions in law enforcement,<sup>7</sup> despite a positive trend of more and more female officers being in the pipeline for such positions.

**In conflict-affected areas, sexual and gender-based violence is not only a by-product of fragility but a deliberate tactic for destabilization and repression.**

- + In 2022 alone, the United Nations verified nearly 2,500 reported cases of conflict-related sexual violence globally, with many more cases going unreported or remaining unverifiable.<sup>8</sup>
- + Widespread attacks — from harassment, threats, disinformation, and hate speech to killings — against women, girls, women human rights defenders and civil society organizations working in the field of human rights have become an increasing concern in the Asia-Pacific region, especially in conflict-affected areas.

**Access to justice for women and girls remains constrained by inadequate legal protection across all areas of law, as well as by economic, social and cultural barriers faced by women and girls. This challenge is compounded by the absence of gender-responsive institutions, infrastructure and procedures in the formal and informal justice systems.**

- + Legal gaps for the protection of women's rights are the largest in **South Asia**, and **East Asia and the Pacific**, only second to the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>9</sup>
- + Only 9 per cent of the legal reforms undertaken by the world's economies between 2022 and 2023 to improve legal protection of women took place in East Asia and the Pacific, and none in South Asia.
- + Justice systems in the region are generally underrepresented by women (see Chapter 5 for key data points) and continue to be affected by systematically internalized gender stereotypes and discrimination.
- + Transitional justice mechanisms put in place in the region are found ineffective due to insufficient political will, lack of holistic investigation of human rights violation in all respects and limited participation of women and civil society groups.

Despite entrenched gaps and challenges, various countries in the region have made concrete efforts, in collaboration with international and regional organizations and civil society actors, to localize the WPS agenda; support women's meaningful participation and leadership in peace and security; build institutional, economic and social resilience to protect women and girls, especially those most vulnerable, from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence; and make justice systems gender responsive and inclusive. A stock-take of these efforts must inform further actions.

4 UN-Women. *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice and Securing the Peace: A global study on the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325. Fact sheet on key Messages, findings and recommendations.* (New York, 2015).

5 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

6 United Nations Department of Peace Operations (UNDP), "Operational effect and women peacekeepers: Addressing the gender imbalance", data, March 2024. Available at: [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07\\_gender\\_statistics\\_72\\_march\\_2024.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_72_march_2024.pdf) (accessed on 05 April).

7 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), UN-WOMEN and Interpol, *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region* (Bangkok, 2020).

8 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

9 World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

## 6.1 OVERVIEW

Peaceful and just societies provide safety and security to all, especially women and girls as well as other groups who are often disproportionately affected by security threats due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, disability and indigenous identities. They provide the critical foundation for just, inclusive and sustainable development. The participation and leadership of women and girls is indispensable to building peaceful and just societies. However, this is not possible without strong institutional mechanisms to enable women and girls' agency and their leadership, address the widespread sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and emergency settings, and enhance the access to justice for all women and girls.

**The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)** calls for strategic actions with regard to women and armed conflict (critical area of concern E), violence against women (critical women area of concern D) and access to justice (critical area of concern I). Relevant actions recommended concern several other critical areas defined such as education and training, health, women's human rights and the girl child. The **United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)** and nine other relevant resolutions provide a foundational framework for the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. **General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations (2013)** adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women provides authoritative guidance to States Parties and non-State actors on the legislative, policy and other measures to ensure full compliance with State obligations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women with regard to projecting, respecting and fulfilling women's human rights in a broad thematic scope in situations of armed conflict and political crises.

The commitments made by Member States to the WPS agenda are further aligned with the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). While these international treaties and instruments remain relevant, the world nowadays faces not only traditional peace and security threats such as armed conflict and communal violence, but also emerging peace and security risks associated with climate change, digitalization and new technologies. Furthermore, peace and security are increasingly challenged by intensified geopolitical tensions, pushbacks on gender equality and restricted

civic spaces. These challenges underline the urgency of rethinking peace and security and upgrading solutions.

Chapter 6 reviews the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, including its localization, women's meaningful participation in peace and security, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, and access to justice in Asia and the Pacific, in the evolving peace and security contexts. The first section provides an overview of the localization and implementation of the WPS agenda in the changing contexts. The second section discusses the participation and leadership of women in peace processes and law enforcement. The third section focuses on addressing sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in conflict-related settings. The last section discusses access to justice for women and girls.

## 6.2 THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN THE NEW CONTEXTS

Today, global peace and security is at a crisis level. **A growing share of the global population is living under overlapping and intersecting threats – both traditional and emerging threats – to peace and security.** In his policy brief on *A New Agenda for Peace*, the United Nations Secretary-General reflects on peace and security threats in the world today, including the changing conflict landscape; persistent violence outside of conflict environments; the potential weaponization of new technologies; rising inequalities within and between countries; shrinking civic space; and the climate emergency.<sup>10</sup> In 2024, nearly 300 million people around the world, including 50.8 million in Asia and the Pacific, are expected to be in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup> Much of the increase in humanitarian crises has been driven by the widespread new and resurging armed conflicts across the globe, in combination with the ongoing global food and energy crises escalated by armed conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. These crises are exacerbated by the global climate emergency, infectious disease outbreaks and economic hardship.<sup>12</sup> Asia and the Pacific faces no fewer challenges, with frequent humanitarian crises due to disproportionate climate-induced emergencies, economic insecurity and instability. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of people forcibly displaced or stateless<sup>13</sup> will continue to grow and reach 130.8 million by the end of 2024, including an estimate of 15.6 million,

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A new agenda for peace* (New York, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024* (Geneva and New York, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> These include refugees, internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, refugee and IDP returnees, stateless persons and others of concerns.

or 12 per cent, in Asia and the Pacific. Complex situations in Afghanistan and Myanmar continue to be the two major causes of forced displacement and statelessness in the region while the increase in climate-induced weather hazards and disasters contribute considerable numbers of internal displacements.<sup>14</sup>

### 6.2.1 Association between gender and peace and security

**These negative trends undermine gender equality and the global peace agenda.** Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by both traditional and emerging security threats. The number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries<sup>15</sup> rose by 50 per cent since 2017 and reached 614 million in 2022.<sup>16</sup> They face acute poverty, high levels of food insecurity and an elevated risk of violence compared to those living in non-fragile settings. Progress made in women's rights and gender equality could experience rapid overturn by conflicts. In Afghanistan, since 2021, a patchwork of decrees codifying gender-based discrimination and inconsistently enforced policies and practices have sabotaged women's and girls' rights, in a return to the oppression of the 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Only one out of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022 globally was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women's group or organization. The share of inter-State and intra-State peace agreements reached between 2020 and 2022 that included provisions referring to women, girls and gender ranged from 21 to 33 per cent.<sup>18</sup> The United Nations Secretary-General points out that "the unconditional defense of women's rights" must be one of "the most visible and identifiable markers of the work of the United Nations on peace and security".<sup>19</sup> This call is particularly critical in the context of increasing backlash on gender equality and women's rights, including the rise of misogyny, and threats to multilateralism.

**Gender equality remains one of the most significant predictors for peace and security.** Research has found that the higher the prevalence of violence against women, the more likely a country may be to not comply with international norms and treaties and the less likely it is to operate peacefully in the international system.<sup>20</sup> The larger the gender gaps are for experiences and opportunities between women and men, the more likely a country is to be involved in inter- or intrastate conflict and to use violent responses.<sup>21</sup> The more gender-equal a state is, the more likely it is to be stable and peaceful and able to resolve conflicts without violence (Figure 6.1).<sup>22</sup> These findings suggest a pathway to peace and security through systematically enhancing gender equality, with a strong focus on measures to address gender-based violence and ensure women's participation in political, social and economic life.

Despite the disproportionate impact peace and security threats have on women and girls and their strong association with gender, **women and girls' role as active agents of peace and their contributions have not been fully recognized.** A growing body of evidence suggests that women's leadership roles in peace processes help shift the dynamics of community buy-in and result in peace agreements with more satisfactory and sustainable outcomes.<sup>23</sup> For instance, a UN-Women global study found that women's participation increases the likelihood of a peace agreement to last for at least two years by 20 per cent, and by 35 per cent the likelihood of it to last 15 years.<sup>24</sup> This is because women tend to pay attention to issues beyond ceasefire and military action, negotiating institutional reforms, social and economic recovery plans and transitional justice plans that contribute to the durability of peace processes.<sup>25</sup> However, despite increasing participation of women and women's groups in peace negotiations, actors involved in mediation and conflict resolutions remain resistant to including women. In 15 out of 16 peace dialogues examined by the aforementioned UN-Women global

14 UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2024* (Geneva, 2024).

15 These include: (a) countries featuring in relation to items of which the Security Council is currently seized, and which were considered by the Council at a formal meeting during the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022; (b) countries with peacekeeping or special political missions in 2022; and (c) countries that received programmatic funds from the Peacebuilding Fund in 2022.

16 UN-Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (New York, 2023).

17 UNHCR, "Situation of women and girls in Afghanistan - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls", A/HRC/53/21 (Geneva, 2023).

18 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

19 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General", S/2020/946 (New York, 2020).

20 Valerie M. Hudson and others, *Sex and World Peace* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2014).

21 World Bank, "The Role of Gender in the Prevention of Violent Conflict," Background paper for the United Nations-World Bank Flagship Study, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC, 2017).

22 Ibid.

23 O'Reilly, M., A. Ó Súilleabháin, and T. Paffenholz, *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes* (New York, International Peace Institute, 2015); Stone, L., "Study of 156 Peace Agreements, Controlling for Other Variables, Quantitative Analysis of Women's Participation in Peace Processes," in *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes*, by M. O'Reilly, A. Ó Súilleabháin, and T. Paffenholz, annex I (New York, International Peace Institute, 2015); UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York, 2015); World Bank, "Preventing Violence through Inclusion: From Building Political Momentum to Sustaining Peace," Background paper for the United Nations-World Bank Flagship Study, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (Washington, DC, 2017).

24 UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, and Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, Fact Sheet on Key Messages, Findings, and Recommendations (New York, 2015).

25 Council on Foreign Relations, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Why It Matters", web page. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/why-it-matters> (accessed 16 July 2024).

**FIGURE 6.1 The role of gender equality in state stability**

Source: Crespo Sancho, "The Role of Gender in the Prevention of Violent Conflict", background paper for the United Nations-World Bank Flagship Study, Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict, World Bank (Washington, DC, 2017).

study, decision-making was done by a small group of male leaders. Where women are able to participate, their official participation is often perfunctory. Giving women and women's groups observer status as a substitute for direct and effective participation is a good example of an all-too-common tokenistic approach.<sup>26</sup>

### 6.2.2 Localization of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Asia and the Pacific

Women, Peace and Security (WPS) first made it on to the United Nations Security Council's agenda in 2000, with the adoption of the Security Council Resolution 1325. Resolution 1325 recognizes that women experience and are affected by conflict differently from men, and therefore, their participation and gender considerations have to be placed at the centre of all peacemaking, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. It outlines the foundational framework for the WPS agenda consisting of four pillars: participation; protection; prevention; relief and recovery. Since then, as of May 2024, a further nine resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council to promote gender equality and strengthen women's participation, protection and rights in the full conflict cycle, from conflict prevention to post-conflict reconstruction. Together, these ten

resolutions provide guidance to international, regional and national actions with regard to WPS. Increasingly, it is recognized that more priority should be given to women's full and meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making, acknowledging their contributions to peacemaking and peace building processes, rather than merely treating them as victims and survivors who need protection. The 2023 policy brief by the United Nations Secretary-General on a New Agenda for Peace<sup>27</sup> explicitly calls for Member States to transform gendered power dynamics in peace and security for a collective global security system.

**Localization is crucial for operationalizing the women, peace and security agenda.** At the national level, as of May 2024, 16 countries in Asia and the Pacific have adopted national action plans in relation to WPS.<sup>28</sup> Four of these national action plans have expired. In several countries such as **Armenia, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal and the Philippines**, more than one generation of national action plans have been adopted.<sup>29</sup> The priorities and actions identified within these national and regional action plans in the WPS framework commonly integrate the four pillars of the WPS Agenda: participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery. Some countries like **Thailand** choose to integrate WPS in their existing

26 UN-Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, and Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, Fact Sheet on Key Messages, Findings, and Recommendations (New York, 2015).

27 United Nations, *Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A new agenda for peace* (New York, 2023).

28 These 16 countries and territories include Afghanistan, Armenia (active), Australia (active), Bangladesh (active), Indonesia (active), Japan (active), Kazakhstan (active), Kyrgyzstan (active), Nepal (active), New Zealand, the Philippines (active), Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka (active), Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste (active) and Viet Nam (active). See WILPF, "1325 National Action Plans (NAPs): WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security", web page, available at <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/> (accessed 23 August 2024); UN-Women, "The Second National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (FY 2022/2023-2024/2025)", (Bangkok, 2023), available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/11/the-second-national-action-plan-fy-2022-2023-2024-2025>; UN-Women, "National Action Plans", web page, available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/peace-and-security/national-action-plans> (accessed on 23 August 2024); and UN-Women, "Women, Peace, and Security in Bangladesh: In Brief", (Dhaka, 2023). Available at: [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/bd-IN-BRIEF\\_WOMEN-PEACE-AND-SECURITY-s.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/bd-IN-BRIEF_WOMEN-PEACE-AND-SECURITY-s.pdf).

29 Several other countries, such as Thailand, are in the process of drafting their national action plans. See ASEAN Secretariat, "ASEAN Launches Guidelines for Member Countries to Adapt Women, Peace, and Security Policy", web page, available at: <https://wps.asean.org/stories/asean-launches-guidelines-for-member-countries-to-adapt-women-peace-and-security-policy/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

laws and policies, national development plans, or national security and defense strategies.<sup>30</sup> Both approaches for localizing the WPS agenda at the national or subnational level have their advantages and disadvantages. Integrating the WPS agenda into other relevant frameworks may be considered more feasible in some contexts in the light of cost and time considerations. Developing a designated action plan for WPS, though sometimes considered expansive and time-consuming, provides an opportunity to create a participatory and consultative process that engages more stakeholders involved in the WPS agenda.

At the subnational level, the **Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in the Philippines** launched the third generation of its subnational action plan (2023-2028) to promote the WPS agenda locally. This groundbreaking initiative has the aim of enhancing the meaningful participation and leadership of women in the Bangsamoro in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and governance. It contributes towards the broader peace and development agenda in the region. This subnational action plan has been updated to align with the Philippines's national action plan for WPS. Emerging threats and issues that are most relevant to the local contexts in Bangsamoro have been identified, such as cybersecurity, climate security and mental health and psychosocial support to women and girls in emergency settings. Starting from November 2023, the technical team led by the Bangsamoro Women Commission embarked on a series of actions to support the roll-out and further localization of the subnational action plan in all BARMM provinces.<sup>31</sup> **The Autonomous Region of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea** has adopted the Gender Equality, Women Empowerment and Peace and Security Policy for 2023-2027.<sup>32</sup> The policy plays an important role in gender equality and women's empowerment in Bougainville's post-conflict context. Before the latest edition released in 2024, there were two previous iterations of this policy, the first of which was adopted and endorsed in 2013 and the second in 2016.<sup>33</sup>

**Solutions that involve cross-border collaboration have gained increasing importance as the landscape of conflicts and peace and security threats evolves.** Conflicts and security threats could spill over borders. The humanitarian crisis which forced millions of Rohingya refugees into the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh is one such example. In 2017, armed attacks, mass violence and serious human rights violations forced thousands of Rohingya people to flee their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State. The majority of them arrived in the Cox' Bazar region of Bangladesh. Today, nearly one million Rohingya refugees reside in Cox's Bazar,<sup>34</sup> making it the world's largest refugee camp. Despite immediate humanitarian assistance from the Government of Bangladesh and the local communities, the needs remain immense. Resolving this protracted crisis requires not only continued humanitarian support from Bangladesh and the international community but sustainable solutions in Myanmar that could enable Rohingya refugees to eventually and voluntarily return to Myanmar in a safe and dignified manner.<sup>35</sup>

Cross-border collaboration is crucial even for managing and preventing security risks from escalating. At the subregional level, **Pacific Island countries** adopted a Pacific Regional Action Plan (2012–2015).<sup>36</sup> The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** has adopted in late 2022 a Regional Plan of Action.<sup>37</sup> Implementation of the Regional Plan of Action is overseen by the ASEAN Advisory Group on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>38</sup> A toolkit has been developed to guide the regional action plan's localization in ASEAN member countries.<sup>39</sup> The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action highlights actions to address emerging peace and security challenges in the ASEAN region, including climate change, cybersecurity, pandemics and extremism. Crucially, it highlights the need to strengthen cross-border legislative cooperation and coordination to support the implementation of WPS initiatives, and to develop institutional capacity for WPS through regional training programs, expertise sharing, and exchange of good practices.<sup>40</sup>

30 UN-Women, *Country Brief: Women, Peace and Security in Thailand* (Bangkok, 2023).

31 UNDP Philippines, "Bangsamoro Women unveil Renewed Regional Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security", web page. Available at <https://www.undp.org/philippines/press-releases/bangsamoro-women-unveil-renewed-regional-action-plan-women-peace-and-security> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

32 Autonomous Region of Bougainville, "Gender Equality, Women Empowerment and Peace and Security Policy", web page. Available at <https://abg.gov.pg/index.php?news/read/ministerial-statement-by-abg-minister-for-community-development-hon-morris-opeti> (accessed on 16 July 2024); UN-Women, "UN-Women's Operational Response at the Regional Level: Asia and the Pacific", Background Note: Briefing to the Executive Board, Annual Session 2024 (New York, 2024).

33 Autonomous Region of Bougainville, *Policy for Women's Empowerment, Gender Equality, Peace and Security* (Bougainville, 2016). Available at: <https://www.wpsnaps.org/app/uploads/2019/09/Bougainville-Gender-Equality-Peace-and-Security-policy-2016.pdf> (accessed on 05 August 2024).

34 UNHCR Bangladesh, "Operational Update, March 2024" (Bangladesh, 2024).

35 IOM, "IOM Appeals for USD 138 Million to Support Rohingya Refugees and Local Communities in Cox's Bazar", blog, 30 March 2022. Available at: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-appeals-usd-128-million-support-rohingya-refugees-and-local-communities-coxs-bazar> (Accessed 31 July 2024).

36 The action plan has expired, with no subsequent editions.

37 ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2022). Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/32-ASEAN-Regional-Plan-of-Action-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2024).

38 ASEAN, "ASEAN Launches Guidelines for Member Countries to Adapt Women, Peace, and Security Policy", web page. Available at: <https://wps.asean.org/stories/asean-launches-guidelines-for-member-countries-to-adapt-women-peace-and-security-policy/> (accessed 31 July 2024).

39 ASEAN Secretariat, *Localization Toolkit and Guidelines for the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2023).

40 ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2022). Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/32-ASEAN-Regional-Plan-of-Action-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2024).

The design of NAPs on WPS requires increased focus on intersectionality especially in the face of evolving and emerging security threats. **WPS is not a niche agenda for women. It is an agenda for gender equality, social justice and peace.** The WPS agenda is predicated on the understanding that for peace and security policies and practices to be effective and sustainable, they need to identify and respond to the differentiated needs and experiences of women and men, including those from groups in vulnerable situations, and to enable their meaningful participation. Women and men with disabilities,<sup>41</sup> persons belonging to ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples, older persons, children and youth are often especially exposed to risks of violence, abuse, neglect and marginalization during conflicts and crises. They are equally often excluded from decision-making and actions at all stages of the conflict cycle. Increasingly, it is recognized that persons of sexual minorities and non-binary gender identities face distinct vulnerabilities during conflict, which should also be reflected in the WPS agenda.<sup>42</sup> Systems and structures set up to respond to emergencies often do not incorporate accessibility considerations and necessary adaptations that support these aforementioned groups, for whom seeking assistance could further exacerbate their vulnerability.<sup>43</sup>

**Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste** have incorporated intersectional perspectives in their latest NAPs on WPS to account for the differentiated situations of diverse groups, ensuring their participation and representation in peacebuilding efforts and the protection of their rights. Accounts are given for age (Armenia, Japan and Sri Lanka), race (Australia, Armenia and Sri Lanka), ethnicity (Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Japan and Sri Lanka), religion (Australia, Bangladesh, Japan and Sri Lanka), socioeconomic status (Armenia, Japan and Sri Lanka), geographic location (Japan, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste), disability (Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste), indigenous status (the Philippines), and ex-combatant status (Nepal and the Philippines). **Armenia, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste** have accounted for sexual

orientation and gender identities in their respective national action plans (NAPs). In the **Philippines'** NAP 2023-2033, explicit recognition was given to persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), particularly for those directly and indirectly involved in the full process of conflict prevention and transformation, and peacebuilding.<sup>44</sup> Engaging individuals and communities from these groups, affected yet often marginalized, in the design of NAPs on WPS needs to be accorded more importance. Deliberate consultation mechanisms are required to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the NAPs in responding to their distinct concerns and needs.

**Countries in the region have paid increased attention to emerging security threats in the localized WPS agenda.** Asia and the Pacific is a region with a highly complex range of security challenges related to armed conflict, communal conflicts, violent extremism and terrorism, transnational crimes, cyber insecurity, climate change, natural disasters, migration and displacement, as well as public health pandemics.<sup>45</sup> It has become increasingly essential for the WPS agenda to respond to emerging security issues such as violent extremism and terrorism, climate crisis, and cybersecurity. The impact of such issues on women's participation, security needs, rights and gender equality, is far reaching.

**Addressing these often-overlapping security threats requires a strong gender and intersectional lens and consolidated actions.** For instance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) suggests that at least 40 per cent of all intrastate conflicts that occurred in the last six decades have a link to natural resources.<sup>46</sup> Increasingly, climate change and environmental degradation fuel local tensions and conflicts centring on access, use or control of critical natural resources, as they cause increased scarcity in natural resources. But environmental factors are rarely the sole cause of violent conflict. Peace in these environmentally vulnerable contexts cannot be achieved without addressing local power dynamics, including those related to gender, religious beliefs and ethnicity. Pervasive gender inequalities often expose women and girls disproportionately to economic, political and environmental shocks associated with

41 United Nations, "Protection of Persons with Disabilities in Armed Conflict, Report of the Secretary-General", S/RES/2475 (New York, 2019).

42 United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *A Global Handbook: Parliaments as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (Oslo, 2019).

43 United Nations, "Women, Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

44 Philippines, Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2033* (Manila, 2023).

45 ASEAN Secretariat, *ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2022). Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/32-ASEAN-Regional-Plan-of-Action-on-Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2024).

46 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Conflict and Natural Resources," web page. Available at: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/conflict-and-natural-resources#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Environment%20Programme%20%28UNEP%29%20suggests%20that,a%20conflict%20relapse%20in%20the%20first%20five%20years> (accessed on 13 July 2024).

climate and environmental crisis and conflicts, due to their association with natural resources related roles in the community. Yet, they often remain marginalized in local governance mechanisms, peacebuilding and conflict prevention processes, and environment and climate adaptation actions. Consolidated actions to address the gender-climate-security nexus provide significant opportunities to empower women and girls politically and economically and their meaningful participation and contribution to peace. **Armenia, Australia and the Philippines** have directly addressed public health emergencies (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic) as well as climate change, and climate- and human-induced disasters. **Japan and Bangladesh** highlighted in their latest NAPs on WPS actions to address climate change as a threat and sexual and gender-based violence in disaster-affected areas and situations. Implementation of these NAPs needs to be monitored closely to understand their effectiveness in addressing the intersecting challenges of gender inequalities, climate crisis and conflicts.

Moreover, **Armenia, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam** have considered and aim to respond to cybersecurity threats and online hate speech targeting women activists and politicians. There has been particular focus on misinformation and fake news spreading (Indonesia, Timor-Leste, and Sri Lanka); hate speech and harassment based on gender, ethno-religious identity and political affiliations (Japan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka); and gender-based cybercrimes, including girls and women trafficking and recruiting (Timor-Leste). **Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines** have taken into account terrorism and violent extremism.<sup>47</sup> The **Maldives'** National Action Plan on Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (2020-2024) emphasizes women's roles in radicalization and deradicalization processes. The National Counter Terrorism Center in the Maldives conducted capacity-building programs in 19 atolls to enhance community engagement and early intervention, delivery training on identifying social vulnerabilities.<sup>48</sup> **While incorporating these security risks into the WPS agenda is encouraging, the design and implementation of respective actions to address these security risks requires careful consideration. A balance is required to avoid over-securitization and to prioritize human security<sup>49</sup> and to ensure that individuals and communities remain at the heart of responses.**

### 6.2.3 Implementation challenges for the WPS agenda in Asia-Pacific countries

**The implementation of the WPS agenda continues to face critical gaps in the actual political will and funding.** Out of the twelve active national action plans developed by Asia-Pacific countries, only one (**Kazakhstan**) includes a partial cost plan which outlines the expected costs of certain activities and specifies that activities will either not require funding or will remain within the allocated funding limits. **Nepal and Timor-Leste** have foreseen in their respective action plans the preparation of detailed implementation plans and budget proposals. All twelve countries have identified in their respective national action plans potential financing resources to support implementation, typically originating from the State or regional budget, as well as funding from the international community. This includes funding from regional and international organizations, such as the United Nations agencies and the European Union. In some cases, funding is expected to be sourced from nongovernmental and civil society organizations, as well as the private sector. **Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste** have outlined a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework in their NAPs on WPS. Accounting for these aspects can influence the political will which determines the financial support for implementation.

**Even in countries where there is a designated financing mechanism for the implementation of WPS, the utilization of the budget is far from ideal.** The **Philippines** has contributed some good practices in the implementation of the NAPs on WPS. Since 2009, the Government has supported the implementation of its NAPs at both national and local levels with 5 per cent of the budget dedicated to Gender and Development (GAD) mandated by the Philippines' Magna Carta of Women. Particularly successful programmes have increased access to improved education and health services in conflict-affected areas in Mindanao.<sup>50</sup> Despite these positive practices, the actual GAD budget for the implementation of the NAP on WPS was found to be underutilized. More efforts are needed to consistently localize the NAP on WPS into local GAD plans and budgets in other regions with less intensive conflict-related contexts than in Mindanao and across all branches of the government.<sup>51</sup>

47 Based on ESCAP review of active national action plans on women, peace and security from Asia-Pacific countries as of May 2024.

48 Maldives, Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Comprehensive National-Level Review on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +30 Review)* (Malé, 2024).

49 Gretchen Baldwin and Taylor Hynes, "The Securitization of Gender: A Primer", The Global Observatory, web page. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/the-securitization-of-gender-a-primer/> (accessed on 31 July 2024). Securitization refers to the process of political issues, identities, and other factors being framed as "security threats", thereby justifying the use of securitized or militarized approach and means to address those threats. The call to avoid over-securitization emphasizes the need to give more priority to development and resilience building, with women's rights and gender equality at the core of prevention and response.

50 ASEAN Secretariat, USAID and UN-Women, *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2021).

51 Philippines, *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2033* (Manila, 2023).

## BOX 6.1 Emerging security issues in the Women, Peace and Security agenda



### Violent extremism and terrorism

Asia and the Pacific has long faced challenges related to violent extremism. Women can play various roles in relation to violent extremism and terrorism. They can be, sometimes simultaneously, the victims/survivors of sexual or gender-based violence and terrorist acts, and the perpetrators and active members of violent extremist groups. Gender stereotypes in responses to violent extremism and terrorism often frame women and girls as victims and men and boys (on the basis of gender and its intersection with other factors including ethnicity, age and region) as perpetrators, or at least as security threats. This is unjust and risks leading to increased harassment, discrimination and criminalization.<sup>1</sup>

It is nonetheless increasingly urgent to understand and address the violent misogyny, which the UN Secretary-General identified as the “troubling commonality” that runs through terrorist attacks, extremist ideologies and brutal crimes.<sup>2</sup> Fear and hatred of women or femininity and support for violence against women are found to be most strongly associated with violent extremism, whether among men or women.<sup>3</sup> Diverse sexual orientation and gender identity is also treated as a threat to others.<sup>4</sup> Some early warning signs for extremist violence include attacks on women’s rights and women’s human rights defenders, as well as persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity. For counterterrorism and violent extremism prevention strategies to be effective, they need to address not only causal factors such as poverty, socioeconomic grievances, extreme religiosity, social exclusion and oppression but also the overlaps between misogyny and conservative politics in religious fundamentalist and violent extremist groups. Increasingly, approaches to countering terrorism and violent extremism focus on prevention. They emphasize the empowerment of women to play active roles in prevention, response and building resilience.<sup>5, 6</sup> Community-based approaches with active engagement of women and girls, as well as men and boys, that prioritize human security and peace perspectives should be given increased importance to avoid over-securitization.<sup>7</sup>

### Climate change

The effects of climate change, environmental degradation and natural resource scarcity are exacerbating insecurity and instability. Climate change affects security in a number of ways which include altered mobility and displacement patterns. Natural disasters force millions of people to flee home each year. In 2022 alone, 8.7 million people globally were internally displaced as a result of disasters. The numbers of recorded internal displacements hit a record high in South Asia and one third of countries in East Asia and the Pacific, mainly in Southeast Asia. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Philippines are among the countries reporting the highest numbers of disaster-related internally displaced people in 2022.<sup>8</sup> Not all disaster displacement is climate-related, but as climate change induces more and more extreme weather events such as floods, storms, wildfires and droughts, even more people are at risk. The resilience of societies and their capacity to build and sustain peace is thus undermined.

The global evidence shows inextricable linkage between climate change and peace. Close to one billion people live in the countries most exposed to climate change and 40 per cent of them are affected by high levels of conflict and violence, which in turn correlates with low levels of women’s inclusion, participation

Continues on next page

- 1 Gretchen Baldwin and Taylor Hynes, “The Securitization of Gender: A Primer”, The Global Observatory, web page. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/the-securitization-of-gender-a-primer/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).
- 2 Antonio Guterres, “Address to the 74th session of the UN General Assembly”, address, 24 September 2019. Available at <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2019-09-24/address-74th-general-assembly> (accessed on 31 July 2024).
- 3 UN-Women and Monash University, “Misogyny & violent extremism: Implications for preventing violent extremism”, policy brief (Melbourne, 2019).
- 4 Baldwin, Gretchen, and Taylor Hynes, “The Securitization of Gender: A Primer”, article, The Global Observatory, 11 October 2022. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/the-securitization-of-gender-a-primer/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).
- 5 United Nations, “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism”, Report of the Secretary-General, A/70/674 (New York, 2015).
- 6 International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement* (Geneva, 2023).
- 7 Baldwin, Gretchen, and Taylor Hynes, “The Securitization of Gender: A Primer”, article, The Global Observatory, 11 October 2022. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/the-securitization-of-gender-a-primer/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).
- 8 International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), *2023 Global Report on Internal Displacement* (Geneva, 2023).

### BOX 6.1 Emerging security issues in the Women, Peace and Security agenda (*continued*)



and security.<sup>9</sup> Alongside climate-induced migration, natural resource scarcity and the climate-related pressure on land and water exacerbated by climate-induced and other disasters has become a major concern for the Asia-Pacific region. Natural resource scarcity and expanding competition over land and water create instability for people and communities and often impose heightened insecurity. This can have various dimensions, including food insecurity, loss of livelihood to gender-based violence and heightened social tension that could turn into conflicts. Women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other groups in vulnerable situations are disproportionately affected due to pre-existing inequalities. Study shows that a few Asia-Pacific countries are at high risk of issues related to gendered climate, peace and security.<sup>10</sup> It is however necessary to avoid the over-securitization of climate change and the consequential displacement and migration. Such an approach could risk all attention and funding being directed towards state security and migration restriction rather than human security and safety alongside climate adaptation and actions to address the root cause of climate change.<sup>11</sup>

#### Cybersecurity and AI-related security risks

While the COVID-19 pandemic has promoted digital connectivity and usage globally, it has also exposed increasing challenges of cybersecurity. Women and girls, ranging from ordinary users and online learners to women politicians and women human rights defenders, suffered a great increase in online harassment, threats, sexual exploitation and abuse during the pandemic. Online platforms have also been used to carry out cybercrime such as scamming, spread radical ideologies and recruit members of violent extremist groups. These issues do not exclusively affect women and girls. Yet women and girls, including women and girls of diverse sexual orientation and gender identities, women with disabilities and women and girls of certain religious backgrounds are particularly vulnerable. Weak regulation and the lack of women and diversity talents in the cybersecurity workforce in governments and the private sector mean this pernicious online environment is insufficiently challenged.

The WPS agenda is obliged to address cybersecurity and ensure a gender-inclusive cyberspace as part of the broader women, peace and security agenda. Across the Asia-Pacific region, the gendered cyber security context is diverse, with the Pacific and part of South Asia having a much lower degree of digitalization compared to East Asia and Southeast Asia. However, even countries with a lower degree of connectivity, face critical challenges related to cybersecurity. The cyber space has provided a broad spectrum of avenues for building peace and security, from raising awareness and transforming attitudes to using digital means to improve the efficiency of peacekeeping and peacebuilding actions, particularly for the engagement of civil society groups and of women, adolescents and groups at risk of marginalization in peace processes.<sup>12</sup> Yet the cyber space can only be leveraged to make positive changes for peace and security if countries address the gender digital divide and cybersecurity concerns particularly those that concern women and girls in all their diversity. Similarly, the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) has a double-edged effect on women, peace and security. It could be used to support the implementation of the WPS agenda but it could also be used to facilitate military interventions and incite hate speech, spread radicalization and encourage violence and even recruit members of violent extremist groups.<sup>13</sup>

9 Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Peace Index 2019: Measuring Peace in a Complex World* (Sydney, 2019), cited in United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, *Weathering Two Storms – Gender and Climate in Peace and Security* (New York, 2022).

10 UN Women, *Research Brief: Gender, Peace and Security in Natural Resource Management: Land, Forest, and Water Management in the Asia Pacific* (Bangkok, 2022).

11 Gretchen Baldwin and Taylor Hynes, "The Securitization of Gender: A Primer", article, The Global Observatory, 11 October 2022. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/10/the-securitization-of-gender-a-primer/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

12 UN Women, *Project Brief: Women, Peace and Cybersecurity: Promoting Women's Peace and Security in the Digital World (2021-2023) for the Asia Pacific Region* (Bangkok, 2023).

13 UN Women, *Action Brief: From Warfare to Peacebuilding: Employing Artificial Intelligence for the Women, Peace and Security Agenda* (New York, 2023).

**Thailand** established the Coordinating Center for Children and Women in the Southern Border Provinces (CCWC-SBP), a Government-CSO joint coordinating mechanism on women and children's issues in the Southern Boarder Provinces in 2019, in partnership with UN-Women and UNICEF. This aims to coordinate the implementation of its Measures and Guidelines on Women and the Promotion of Peace and Security.<sup>52</sup> While the CCWC-SBP was supported by a budget of 10 million Thai Baht to implement its activities in 2019, this budget was mostly provided by the UN agencies. A longer-term capacity building and financing mechanism is required to sustain its implementation.

**Implementation of the WPS agenda is often sidelined at times of crisis.** Security risks intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. These risks ranged from the rise of gender-based violence coupled with interrupted survivor support services, to increased cyber-based and technology-facilitated harassment and abuse. Despite these challenges, securing political will and funding support to implement the WPS agenda became harder during the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic recovery periods. Governments redirected resources to control the spread of the virus, maintain basic welfare and services, and restore livelihoods and the economy. Fragile political stability is another factor that can unravel the WPS agenda, as evident by the recent developments in **Afghanistan**. While the previous government adopted an NAP for WPS in 2015, the Taliban's takeover in 2021 has overturned every progress made in the past two decades towards strengthening women's rights and protection. This has been done through a systemic and institutionalized regime of decrees, policies and practices that entrench oppression and discrimination against women and girls.<sup>53, 54</sup> The funding outlook is likely to become even more dire as geopolitical fractions and wars affect an increasing number of countries and territories, including in Asia and the Pacific. In contrast to the limited and ambiguous financing for the implementation of WPS, the world military expenditure hit a record high of US\$ 2.24 trillion in 2022, of which 25.7 per cent was spent by countries in Asia and the Pacific.<sup>55</sup> It is expected to continue to rise in 2024 due to the protracted war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza, and the rising geopolitical tensions in Asia.

**While civil society can play a crucial role in upholding human rights and development, including in the WPS agenda, the shrinkage of the civic space, compounded by severe underfunding, poses profound challenges to implementation.** Addressing the increasingly complex security risks and intersecting forms of discrimination often requires effective engagement of community-based responses. Civil society and community-based organizations have unique strength in capturing context-specific realities, mobilizing support and generating broad-based buy-in at different levels (international, national, local and grass roots), building local capacity for implementation and delivery of assistance especially in the prevention of conflict and violent extremism, contributing to fundraising campaigns, and assisting in monitoring and evaluation to help governments rethink national and local priorities from a gender perspective.<sup>56</sup> Yet, shrinking civic spaces, compounded by a backlash against gender equality and women's rights and restrictions on freedom of speech and expression both online and offline, continue to narrow the room for participation and engagement of civil society stakeholders, including women human rights defenders. As a result, channelling funding to local organizations and groups, including those led by women and by forcibly displaced people, to participate in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, climate actions and protection from gender-based violence has become challenging.<sup>57</sup> In both **Afghanistan and Myanmar**, women's organizations and women activists have been shut down or repressed since the power shifts in 2021.<sup>58, 59</sup>

All twelve countries with an active NAP on WPS have acknowledged the meaningful participation of civil societies organizations in WPS efforts in the design, implementation, and monitoring stages of the respective NAPs on WPS. Nevertheless, none of these NAPs have specified financial support to civil society organizations. Despite this, Australia and the Philippines have indicated non-financial support such as capacity building (**Australia and the Philippines**); and support for existing community mobilization efforts and women's rights organizations to take the lead in peace and security discussions (**Australia**).

52 UN-Women, *Country Brief: Women, Peace and Security in Thailand* (Bangkok, 2023).

53 Farkhondeh Akbari and Jacqui True, "Women, peace and security in Afghanistan: How to support women and girls?", background paper prepared for Malala Fund's UN General Assembly engagements (Melbourne, 2022).

54 UN-Women, "Expert Group Meeting on International Strategies and Tools to Address the Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan, 26-27 July 2023, Istanbul, Türkiye", meeting report (Istanbul, 2023).

55 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Military Expenditure Database*. Available at: <https://milex.sipri.org/sipri> (accessed on 25 May 2024). The regional grouping of "Asia and Oceania" includes 44 countries and territories in Asia and the Pacific. The 2022 data excluded the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

56 ASEAN Secretariat, *Localisation Toolkit and Guidelines for the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2023).

57 UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2024* (Geneva and New York, 2024).

58 Farkhondeh Akbari and Jacqui True, "Women, peace and security in Afghanistan: How to support women and girls?", background paper prepared for Malala Fund's UN General Assembly engagements (Melbourne, 2022).

59 United Nations, "Letter dated 22 March 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General," S/2022/258 (New York, 2022).

**Timor-Leste** emphasized the protection of women human rights defenders and civil society organizations engaged in peace and security actions.<sup>60</sup>

Some countries have taken promising steps towards civil society engagement. For instance, the Government of the **Philippines** carried out comprehensive nationwide consultation with civil society stakeholders in the performance assessment of their previous national action plan (2017-2022) on WPS.<sup>61</sup> To address the concerns about declining participation of CSOs in NAP implementation, the latest NAP 2023-2033 commits to a range of tailored actions. These range from continuous and scale-up capacity building for CSOs, to work on the full cycle of conflict to providing psychosocial services to CSO service providers.<sup>62</sup> **Indonesia** has engaged CSOs, including faith-based organizations, to review its previous NAP and contribute valuable inputs, particularly with regard to the prevention of violent extremism, to its latest NAP (2020-2025).<sup>63</sup>

In **Thailand**, out of 28 members of the Committee of the CCWC-SBP, a joint Government-CSO coordination mechanism working in the Southern Border Provinces, 18 are representatives from women's groups and CSOs working on women and children's issues. Women-led groups work with the National Human Rights Commission and local governments to implement various social safeguards, deliver services and facilitate interfaith dialogues between Buddhist and Muslim communities.<sup>64</sup> **Nepal** involved representatives of women conflict victims' groups and other CSOs in the drafting committee and the implementation committee for its second NAP on WPS (2022-2025). **Bangladesh** held dialogues between CSOs and government representatives to discuss potential initiatives to support the implementation of its NAP on WPS.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, a consultation platform was established to ensure CSO participation in monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the NAP on WPS.<sup>66</sup>

**There is a pressing need to explore more diverse funding sources, beyond the sole reliance on public-sector funding, and more efficient mechanisms to allocate, use and monitor funding.** Resolving relevant challenges may require deliberate strategies to direct sufficient resources for gender equality in official development assistance to fragile states and economies, allocate targeted budgets in public and private climate financing schemes for addressing

gender-climate-security issues, institute long-term financial support such as regular allocation for WPS actions in peace operation budgets, and increase predictable, accessible and flexible funding for women's CSOs working on peace and security at all levels.

### 6.3 WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN EFFORTS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The right of women to meaningful participation is at the heart of the women, peace and security agenda. It is enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian and human rights law. In 2020, the United Nations Secretary-General articulated five goals on women, peace and security for the decade ahead. One of these goals was women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all efforts of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding as a non-negotiable political priority.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, women continue to have limited opportunities to influence peace and security processes. Women face similar structural barriers to meaningful participation in addressing other emerging security issues such as disaster and climate-induced risks, which will be discussed in [Chapter 7](#). The discussion in this section focuses on women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes including peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

**Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam** have emphasized specific measures to increase women's representation in peace negotiation and peacekeeping forces in their NAPs on WPS. These measures include initiatives such as promoting inclusive peace negotiations and/or decision-making processes at international, national and/or local levels (Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, and Tajikistan); increasing the number of women in military and police contingents for peacekeeping operations (Armenia, Bangladesh and Japan); providing leadership training for women in decision-making, as well as military and peacekeeping roles (Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam); advocating for quotas to ensure equal participation in decision-making roles, peace processes and mechanisms (the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam); implementing capacity building programmes to strengthen women's

60 Based on ESCAP review of respective national action plans.

61 ASEAN Secretariat, *Localisation Toolkit and Guidelines for the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2023).

62 Philippines, *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2033* (Manila, 2023).

63 Ibid.

64 ASEAN Secretariat, USAID and UN-Women, *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2021).

65 UN-Women, *Women, Peace, and Security in Bangladesh: In Brief* (Dhaka, 2023).

66 Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security" (Dhaka, 2022).

67 United Nations, "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

involvement in policymaking and peacebuilding efforts (Australia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Viet Nam); studying the international best practices to enhance women's participation in the defense sector (Armenia).<sup>68</sup>

### 6.3.1 Peace making

**Direct participation of women in peacemaking has been proven important for building inclusive and sustainable peace, yet few women have a seat at the table.** The peace negotiations between the Filipino Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) were led by a woman, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer. She chaired the peace panel and, on behalf of the Filipino Government, signed the final peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014, making her the first female chief negotiator in the world to sign a final peace accord. Additionally, women made up 40 per cent of the peace negotiators involved, 69 per cent of the secretariat, and 60 per cent of the legal team, and three out of the 12 signatories of the peace agreement were women. This unusually high representation of women in the peace process ensured considerations of gender and women's issues, which has led to the inclusion of gender provisions eight out of the 16 articles in the peace agreement signed in 2014.<sup>69, 70</sup>

Nonetheless, the success story in **the Philippines** has not been replicated in other parts of the region. There were no women in the US-Taliban negotiations between 2018 and 2020, nor any reference to women's rights or their political participation in the resulting Doha Agreement, which enabled the withdrawal of international forces from **Afghanistan** and the Taliban's return to power,<sup>71</sup> nor in the delegations for the negotiation or subsequent review of the five-point consensus of the ASEAN on **Myanmar** since 2021.<sup>72</sup> The five-point consensus signed between the ASEAN and the authorities of Myanmar had no mention of gender or women,<sup>73</sup> nor did any of the decisions which flowed out of the subsequent reviews between 2021 and 2023. To lead by example, the United Nations has made efforts to increase women's representation and leadership in special political missions and UN mediation support teams, resource dedicated gender and inclusion expertise. The UN has taken action to secure political and civil spaces for

women's participation in international processes and mechanisms, even in challenging contexts like Afghanistan.

### 6.3.2 Peacekeeping

**Promoting women, peace and security in United Nations peacekeeping operations requires improved participation of women.** Security Council resolution 2538 adopted in 2020 encouraged Member States "to develop strategies and measures to increase the deployment of uniformed women to peacekeeping operations" by providing access to information and training and by "identifying and addressing barriers in the recruitment, deployment, and promotion of uniformed women peacekeepers". The UN Department of Peace Operations has set out yearly targets to increase women's representation among uniformed peacekeeping personnel by 2028.<sup>74</sup> Despite progress made since 2018, more needs to be done to increase women's representation in all categories of uniformed personnel, especially among troops. As March 2024, women accounted for 22.99 per cent of all United Nations military experts on mission and staff officers, exceeding the 21 per cent target for 2024. Among all 26 troop-contributing countries in Asia and the Pacific, 15 countries have met or exceeded the 21 per cent target for women among all military observers and staff officers deployed (**Australia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Türkiye and Viet Nam**).<sup>75</sup>

**Actions must go beyond promoting gender parity to incorporate gender perspectives in capacity building of personnel and the delivery of peacekeeping mandates.** To address this issue, **Malaysia** provides training on gender and women's roles in peacekeeping missions, targeting countries in Southeast Asia, through the Malaysia Peacekeeping Centre (MPC). Courses are provided on maintaining a Gender Advisor; Comprehensive Protection of Civilians; Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; Women, Peace and Security; Gender Mainstreaming; and Preventing Sexual Violence. **Cambodia** has also provided specific training and orientation on the WPS agenda in the attempt to increase women's participation in peacekeeping leadership and in various roles such as

68 ESCAP review of national action plans from respective countries.

69 Philippines, *National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2033* (Manila, 2023).

70 Irene M. Santiago, "The Participation of Women in the Mindanao Peace Process", Research Paper prepared for the United Nations Global Study on 15 Years of Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) (New York, 2015).

71 Farkhondeh Akbari and Jacqui True, "Women, peace and security in Afghanistan: How to support women and girls?", background paper prepared for Malala Fund's UN General Assembly engagements (Melbourne, 2022).

72 United Nations, "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General", S/2023/725 (New York, 2023).

73 ASEAN Secretariat, "Chairman's Statement on the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting", ASEAN Statements, 24 April 2021 (Jakarta, 2021). Available at <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-on-the-asean-leaders-meeting-24-april-2021-and-five-point-consensus-2/>.

74 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPO), *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy* (2018-2028) (New York, 2018).

75 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UNDPO), "Operational Effect and Women Peacekeepers: Addressing the Gender Imbalance" (March 2024 data). Available at [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07\\_gender\\_statistics\\_72\\_march\\_2024.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_72_march_2024.pdf). (accessed on 31 July 2024).

medical personnel, security personnel, civil engineers and mine clearance experts, and has developed a Gender Mainstreaming Action Group for its military.<sup>76</sup>

### 6.3.3 Peacebuilding

**Women have made a vital contribution to peacebuilding by participating in peacebuilding initiatives at the local level.** Often excluded from high-level negotiations and formal mediation, women and women's groups have always played a positive role in building local peace infrastructures. They contribute to resolving communal conflict, restoring social cohesion, negotiating to secure access to water and other vital resources, and supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.<sup>77</sup> In **Myanmar**, women came together across ethnic and religious divides to foster social cohesion, alleviate intercommunal tension, provide humanitarian support to groups in vulnerable situations, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. They extended solidarity across gender, ethnic and religious differences in the civil society movement for inclusive and democratic governance.<sup>78</sup> In **Indonesia**, UN-Women and Wahid Foundation supported the Peace Villages initiative to train and mentor women to facilitate dialogues to combat intolerance and extremism, including interfaith dialogues for conflict prevention.<sup>79</sup> By mid-2023, 22 villages have declared themselves "Peacefull Villages".<sup>80</sup> In **Bangladesh**, the Centre for Peace and Justice, the Brac University and UN-Women co-created the Women Peace Café in four universities to allow young female students to receive leadership and social entrepreneurship training, and to create safe spaces for them to develop innovative solutions such as the Women Peace Ambassador initiatives to respond to violent extremism and strengthen social cohesion both online and offline.<sup>81</sup> Despite the tremendous contributions women and girls have made to peace processes, they often are depicted and perceived as passive victims in conflicts with their voices silenced and their experiences invisible in relevant documentation. Recognizing women and girls as active agents of peace and documenting and publicizing their contributions as peacebuilders are of equal importance to allocating funding and other support to their actions in communities.

### 6.3.4 Law enforcement

**Changing security contexts in Asia and the Pacific demand enhancing women's participation and gender mainstreaming in law enforcement.** As the need to prevent violent extremism and counter terrorism, cross-border human trafficking and emerging security risks such as cybersecurity arise, more and more countries in the region have recognized the importance of having a gender-inclusive law enforcement workforce. Women's strength in gaining community trust that is important for crime investigation and prevention and working on cases that involve sexual and gender-based violence, has been recognized. Indeed, the emergence of new crimes and security issues have helped shift the focus of police recruitment from physical strength to a broad set of skills. **However, law enforcement remains highly dominated by men in the region.** In 2019, the share of female officers in law enforcement in ASEAN countries ranged from 6 per cent to 20 per cent. Managerial positions were primarily occupied by men, despite the positive trend that more and more female officers are making their way to mid-management positions (12 per cent in Indonesia and 16 per cent in Brunei Darussalam). Female officers in high-ranking positions are particularly scarce. Many countries in the region made efforts to improve women's participation in law enforcement, including through quota policies as an intermediate measure to improve the recruitment of female officers and/or internal policies that require female officers in cases of women in conflict or crimes that involve women (**Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines and Viet Nam**).<sup>82</sup> **Pakistan** launched its first ever National Gender-Responsive Policing Framework in 2024 and has established the National Gender-Responsive Policing Unit to oversee the implementation of the framework.<sup>83</sup>

However, various challenges are reported. In some countries where quotas for female officers exist, they are used as a ceiling to limit the maximum number of women in recruitment practice. Female officers are often put in non-operational functions such as administration rather than operational roles, criminal investigation or specialist operations which are linked to better career advancement. Female officers have

76 ASEAN Secretariat, USAID and UN-Women, *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2021).

77 United Nations Secretary-General, "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General" (New York, 2023), S/2023/725.

78 United Nations, "Letter dated 22 March 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General," S/2022/258 (New York, 2022).

79 ASEAN Secretariat, USAID and UN-Women, *ASEAN Regional Study on Women, Peace and Security* (Jakarta, 2021).

80 Indonesia, The Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, National Report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Nusantara, 2024). Available at <https://www.asiapacificgender.org/node/244>.

81 UN-Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, "Empowered women, peaceful communities: Results and lessons learned from the regional program on preventing violent extremism in South and Southeast Asia", brief (Bangkok, 2024).

82 UNODC, Interpol, and UN-Women, "Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region" (Bangkok, 2020).

83 The Spokesman, "National Police Bureau Launches Gender Responsive Policing Unit", news, 2 March 2024. Available at: <https://dailyspokesman.net/live/national-police-bureau-launches-gender-responsive-policing-unit/> (accessed on 31 July 2024); The Friday Times, "National Police Bureau Launches First Gender-Responsive Policing Framework, Unit", news, 1 March 2024. Available at: <https://thefridaytimes.com/01-Mar-2024/national-police-bureau-launches-first-gender-responsive-policing-framework-unit> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

reported having limited access to continuous training while there is rarely mandatory training on gender and human rights. Other challenges include gender-biased performance assessment practices and lack of institutional support (such as paternity leaves and childcare support) to address the disproportionate family and childcare responsibilities for female officers. In some countries, social norms continue to limit female officers' ability to travel alone or travel together with their male colleagues, making it difficult for female officers to join operations and attend trainings.<sup>84</sup>

Limited women's participation in peace and security processes is underlined by the persistent underrepresentation of women in politics and in leadership positions, especially in sectors that lead decision making related to peace and security (see relevant data and discussion in [Chapter 5](#)). To make transformative change in women's meaningful

participation in peace and security, countries need to institutionalize formal mechanisms that mandate, support and empower women's political participation and leadership. Additionally, networking support is another recent and important development for promoting women, peace and security in the region. There currently exist several regional networks for women involved in peace and security processes, including the **Southeast Asia Women Peacebuilders' Network**, the N-Peace Network founded by UNDP, and the Southeast Asia Network of Women Peace Mediators. Such networks also exist at the national level, such as the Women Peace Makers organization and the Alliance for Conflict Transformation in **Cambodia**. Both organizations engage women and youth to address conflict, women's rights and prompt women's roles as agents of change for peace.<sup>85</sup> Such good practices at the subregional and national level should be used to inform broader actions in the region.

### BOX 6.2 Timor-Leste's commitment to promoting women's participation in peace and security actions



In Timor-Leste, women's inclusion and meaningful participation in peace and security actions are increasingly prioritized. The national Government – especially the National Directorate for Community Conflict Prevention (DNPCC), the Women's Parliamentary Group of Timor-Leste (GMPTL) and the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL) – has demonstrated leadership in incorporating gender perspectives into peace and security strategies.<sup>1</sup>

The country has made firm commitments to drive the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda forward. This includes active participation in the ASEAN regional project,<sup>2</sup> “Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN (2021-2025)”.<sup>3</sup> In September 2023, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MNEC), in collaboration with multiple international organizations, hosted a Women in Leadership and Diplomacy Forum as a component of the regional initiative. The forum addressed the issue of underrepresentation of women in leadership roles and promoted women's influence in creating a fair and peaceful future. Its main goals were to establish a support network for Timorese leaders and improve communication and mentoring platforms for prominent women in different sectors. Support networks were established in the National Parliament, Ministries, Secretariats of State, and mentors included former and current ambassadors, as well as women leaders in diplomacy, politics, and public affairs.<sup>4</sup>

The National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2024-2028 (NAP 1325) further exemplifies the country's commitment to integrating women's voices and agency, while acknowledging the need for comprehensive and collaborative efforts by multiple stakeholders to foster peace and security. The active participation of and consultation among government institutions, civil society organizations, and local

Continues on next page

- 1 UN Women, “Timor-Leste Launches 2nd Generation of Its National Action Plan 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (NAP 1325)”, press release, 16 February 2024. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2024/02/timor-leste-launches-2nd-generation-of-its-national-action-plan-1325> (accessed on 31 July 2024).
- 2 Timor-Leste was granted official observer status and received in-principal approval to become a member of the ASEAN during the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summits in Cambodia in 2022. It is not yet a full member of the ASEAN.
- 3 UN Women, “Empowering Women for Sustainable Peace: Preventing Violence and Promoting Social Cohesion in ASEAN”, Project Explainer (2022). Available at: [wps-asean\\_project\\_explainer\\_20240306.pdf](https://wps-asean_project_explainer_20240306.pdf) (unwomen.org).
- 4 Timor-Leste, “Forum on Women in Leadership and Diplomacy Reinforces Commitment to Gender Equality and Sustainable Development”, 2023. Available at: <https://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=34554&lang=en&n=1> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

84 UNODC, Interpol, and UN-Women, *Women in Law Enforcement in the ASEAN Region* (Bangkok, 2020).

85 Ibid.

## BOX 6.2 Timor-Leste's commitment to promoting women's participation in peace and security actions (*continued*)



communities, has ensured the incorporation of gender equality and women's leadership in all aspects of conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, post-conflict recovery, and humanitarian response in Timor-Leste. This is set out in Timor-Leste's NAP.<sup>5</sup>

In accordance with the NAP, since 2016 the DNPCC has been working to dismantle gender-based discriminatory customary practices and guarantee the meaningful participation of women as conflict mediators.<sup>6</sup> With the aim of promoting an inclusive environment for community conflict mediation and resolution processes, the actions have focused on recruiting and training more women mediators on conflict mediation.<sup>7</sup> In cooperation with UN-Women and other international organizations, the DNPCC increased the number of women mediators deployed across various municipalities from 18 to 21 (out of a total of 42 mediators) between 2019 and 2021,<sup>8</sup> and delivered several gender-sensitive training programs for both women and men mediators.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in 2023 the first National Mediation Network of Timor-Leste ("Rede Nacional Mediasaun") was officially established. The National Mediation Network contributes to promoting alternative avenues for resolving disputes and conflicts arising at the community level, as well as collaborating with the Conflict Prevention Network for conflict management and prevention.<sup>10</sup>

In another significant effort to address community conflicts, the GMPTL, with the assistance from UN-Women and other international organizations, organized multiple dialogues with local communities to address significant issues resulting from conflicts. These discussions centered around topics such as justice for victims of violence and shared perspectives on factors contributing to community insecurity, including domestic violence, the marginalization of women, and exclusion from decision-making on community matters.<sup>11</sup>

The PNTL demonstrated its commitment to enhancing women's participation within the policy force and the institution through the official launch of its Gender Strategy (2018-2022) in partnership with various international organizations. A commitment was made to enhancing the representation of women in the community-level PNTL and providing gender equality and gender-based violence training to police officers.<sup>12</sup> Yet more needs to be done to deliver tangible results. Despite some positive change in women officers who have assumed important positions in some municipalities and/or were supported to attend leadership courses abroad,<sup>13</sup> the representation of women within the country's national police force stands at 15 per cent, which falls short of the 18 per cent target set in its Gender Strategy for 2022.<sup>14</sup>

The Government of Timor-Leste has made strides towards fostering an inclusive environment for women to participate in setting and leading the implementation of the WPS agenda. Despite ongoing challenges of underrepresentation, the concerted efforts of government institutions like the DNPCC, the GMPTL and the PNTL can contribute to bolstering women's leadership in national security, law enforcement, and policymaking.

5 UN Women, "Timor-Leste Launches 2nd Generation of Its National Action Plan 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (NAP 1325)", press release, 16 February 2024. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2024/02/timor-leste-launches-2nd-generation-of-its-national-action-plan-1325> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

6 UN Women, "Women Mediators Breaking Stereotypes and Working to Bring Peace in Timor-Leste", web page. Available at <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/06/women-mediators-breaking-stereotypes-and-working-to-bring-peace-in-timor-leste> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

7 UN Women, *Timor-Leste Quarterly Newsletter January-March 2020* (Dili, 2020).

8 *Ibid.* and José De Sà, "UN-Women offers financial support of sixty thousand US dollars to SEPC for DNPCC", TATOLI Agência Noticiosa De Timor-Leste, 29 July 2021. Available at <https://en.tatoli.tl/2021/08/21/sscp-and-stakeholders-to-launch-second-period-of-women-mediators-training/19/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

9 José De Sà, "NDPC and UNW to provide capacity building for mediators across municipalities", TATOLI Agência Noticiosa De Timor-Leste, 3 August 2021. Available at <https://en.tatoli.tl/2021/08/03/ndcp-and-unw-to-provide-capacity-building-for-mediators-across-municipalities/11/> (accessed on 31 July 2024); José De Sà, "SSCP and Stakeholders to launch second period of Women mediators training", TATOLI Agência Noticiosa De Timor-Leste, 21 August 2021. Available at <https://en.tatoli.tl/2021/08/21/sscp-and-stakeholders-to-launch-second-period-of-women-mediators-training/19/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

10 José De Sà, "UNW and Mol launch National Mediation Network to promote Alternative Dispute Resolution", TATOLI Agência Noticiosa De Timor-Leste, 31 July 2023. Available at <https://en.tatoli.tl/2023/07/31/unw-and-moi-launch-national-mediation-network-to-promote-alternative-dispute-resolution/16/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

11 Silverio Beli-Siri Andrade da Silva, "Survivors meet with women of parliament in Timor-Leste", *Chega! Ba Ita*, 3 September 2019. Available at <https://chegabaita.org/blog/news/survivors-meet-with-women-of-parliament-in-timor-leste/>; UN Women, "Timor-Leste's women parliamentarians engage with rural women on issues of peace and security, past and present", blog, 19 November 2013. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2013/11/timor-lestes-women-parliamentarians> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

12 UN Women, "National Police of Timor-Leste is committed to promote gender equality in the institution by unveiling its first Gender Strategy for 2018-2022", blog, 20 August 2018. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2018/08/national-police-of-timor-leste-is-committed-to-promote-gender-equality> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

13 Da Costa, M., "PR concerned about the position of women in the PNTL", *Timor Post Português*, news, 16 August 2022. Available at: <https://pt.timorpost.com/geral-pt/tp-23498/pr-preocupado-com-posicao-das-mulheres-na-pntl/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

14 UN Women, "Timor-Leste Launches 2nd Generation of Its National Action Plan 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (NAP 1325)", press release, 16 February 2024. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2024/02/timor-leste-launches-2nd-generation-of-its-national-action-plan-1325> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

### BOX 6.3 The role of women's networks in advancing gender equity in law enforcement in Pacific Island countries and South Asia



The establishment of women's networks in Pacific Island countries, Bangladesh and Pakistan is a notable example of promoting gender equity and mainstreaming in police services across the Pacific and South-Asia subregions.

Operating within the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) since 2003, the Women Advisory Networks (WANs) advise the regional body on issues impacting women in policing. Currently there are 22 members<sup>1</sup> in the PICP, with the Commissioner, Chief or Director of Police of each national police service representing a member State.<sup>2</sup> Under the WAN Strategic Direction 2020-2024, WANs commit to supporting the Chiefs' collective vision of 'Our Blue Pacific: Safer together' through its mission to empower women to effect positive changes for a safer Pacific.<sup>3</sup> This includes empowering a network of women; strengthening productive partnerships between Chiefs and their WAN; and advancing and reforming Pacific policing for women, with women.<sup>4</sup> A recent achievement at the national level is the establishment of a Sexual Assault Unit headed by a female officer within the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.<sup>5</sup>

In South Asia, Bangladesh initiated the establishment of its Police's Women Network (BPWN) in 2008,<sup>6</sup> as part of the Police Reform Program, today comprising over 15,000 women police officers.<sup>7</sup> The BPWN has recently published its new Strategic Plan 2021-2023, with the objective of ensuring the complete participation of women in the police force departments, prioritizing their welfare, professional advancement, and an equitable allocation of resources and opportunities. Additionally, the Strategic Plan advocates to maximize female police officers' contribution in supporting police forces to provide a gender responsive policing service.<sup>8</sup>

In Pakistan, Women Police Councils (WPC) were established in all provinces in 2022, and the National Fellowship Conference for WPC was conducted.<sup>9</sup> The conference offered training to the newly appointed members of the WPCs, who formulated their respective WPC annual plans.<sup>10</sup> The WPCs have made recommendations to appoint women officers as heads of police stations and official complaint registrars. The recommendation was welcome, and several women officers were appointed leadership roles in police stations in Lahore and Islamabad.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the WPCs have formed committees to tackle harassment problems and implemented gender sensitivity training. Moreover, the WPCs play a key role in promoting the professional growth of women officers, facilitating the establishment of female restrooms and childcare centres in police facilities, and addressing individual service-related concerns.<sup>12</sup>

These networks in the Pacific, Bangladesh and Pakistan serve as a remarkable illustration of regional collaboration and national networks that contribute to the fulfilment of the respective countries' obligations outlined in their National Action Plans for Women, Peace, and Security, especially with regard to law enforcement. Additionally, they can act as facilitators for mainstreaming gender perspectives into national strategies that seek to promote equal and meaningful participation of women in law enforcement.

1 American Samoa, Australia, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Tokelau.

2 Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), "Our Blue Pacific Together," web page. Available at: <https://www.picp.co.nz/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

3 Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), *Strategic Plan 2020-2024* (n.p., 2020).

4 Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP), "Our Work: Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police," web page. Available at: <https://www.picp.co.nz/our-work> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

5 Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF), "RSIPF WAN AGM Highlights Successes," web page. Available at: <https://www.rsipf.gov.sb/?q=node/1617> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

6 Bangladesh Police Women Network (BPWN), "Home," web page. Available at: <https://www.bpwn.org.bd/index.php> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

7 Bangladesh Police Women Network (BPWN), *Strategic Plan 2021-2023* (Dhaka, 2021). Available at: <https://www.bpwn.org.bd/strategy2021.php> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

8 Ibid.

9 Kayani, A., and Siddiqui, J., "In Pakistan, women police push for gender equality: Women Police Councils offer a path toward greater inclusion for women in Pakistan's male-dominated police force," blog, United States Institute of Peace, 23 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/blog/2023/03/pakistan-women-police-push-gender-equality> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

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11 Ahmed, S., "Lahore police to appoint more female investigators," ProPakistani, 22 August 2022. Available at: <https://propakistani.pk/2022/08/22/lahore-police-to-appoint-more-female-investigators/> (accessed on 31 July 2024); Sajid, A., "A dozen women officers given leadership roles at Islamabad's police stations," ProPakistani, 11 November 2022. Available at: <https://propakistani.pk/2022/11/11/a-dozen-women-officers-given-leadership-roles-at-islamabads-police-stations/> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

12 Kayani, A., & Siddiqui, J., "In Pakistan, women police push for gender equality: Women Police Councils offer a path toward greater inclusion for women in Pakistan's male-dominated police force," United States Institute of Peace, 3 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.usip.org/blog/2023/03/pakistan-women-police-push-gender-equality> (accessed on 31 July 2024).

## 6.4 PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT AND EMERGENCY SETTINGS

Protecting women's and girls' human rights and from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is an essential precondition for women's meaningful participation in peace and security processes. SGBV devastates women's ability to participate in peace and security processes by creating terrors, jeopardizing humanitarian assistance (much of which is delivered by women and women's organizations), and inhibiting voluntary, safe and sustainable returns of those displaced. SGBV has also tremendous immediate physical and psychological health consequences that can impact the survivors over the long term. While women and girls are disproportionately affected, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is not exclusively perpetrated on women and girls. Men and boys, persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, as well as women and men with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities, can be subject to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and their experiences of such violence are often even more underreported. A more intersectional approach is needed to better understand and address the issue.

### 6.4.1 Prevalence of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence

**In conflict-affected areas, sexual and gender-based violence is not only a by-product of fragility but a deliberate tactic for destabilization and repression.** In 2022 alone, the United Nations verified 2,455 reported cases of conflict-related sexual violence while many more went unreported or cannot be verified.<sup>86</sup> Widespread attacks — from harassment, threats, disinformation, and hate speech to killings — against women, girls, women human rights defenders and civil society organizations working in the field of human rights in conflict-affected settings continue. **An increasing trend of these acts has also been observed in the Asia-Pacific region.** They are

systematically deployed to silence the voices, and discredit the work, of women and girls, women human rights defenders and civil society organizations.

In **Myanmar**, sexual assaults in detention settings against political prisoners, participants in the civil disobedience movement and LGBTI activists, as well as online hate speech and reprisals against women human rights defenders and politically active women, have been reported since the military coup in 2021. A continuing trend of conflict-related sexual violence including rape, killings and trafficking perpetrated on civilians within the borders of Myanmar and against **Rohingya refugees** from Myanmar in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh have been observed.<sup>87, 88</sup> The Security Council adopted resolution 2669 on Myanmar in December 2022, urging the de facto authorities to protect the rights of women and children and to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian process.

In **Afghanistan**, 42 per cent of Afghan women human rights defenders and leaders had to escape Kabul after the Taliban's takeover in 2021 without any assistance in their resettlement processes.<sup>89</sup> Harassment against and detention of women protesters was reported in 2022. With grave difficulty in obtaining data on cases of conflict-related sexual violence, the United Nations Assistance Mission managed to verify 30 cases in 2022, affecting 16 girls and 14 boys. In the previous year, more than 80 cases of murder, rape, forced and child marriage, assault and "honour" killings were documented. None had been prosecuted by the justice system under the de facto authorities.<sup>90</sup> Afghan women have been banned from working in non-governmental organizations and for the United Nations since April 2023,<sup>91, 92</sup> hampering their access to and participation in humanitarian assistance. As a result, half of female-headed households mentioned that the reduction in female aid workers was one of the reasons that they were not able to access humanitarian services.<sup>93</sup> In addition, more than half of the safe spaces for women and girls across the country in operation in 2021 had suspended their operation by the end of 2022.<sup>94</sup>

86 United Nations Secretary-General, "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General" (New York, 2023), S/2023/725.

87 United Nations, "Letter dated 22 March 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General," S/2022/258 (New York, 2022).

88 United Nations Security Council, "Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General," S/2023/413 (New York, 22 June 2023).

89 United Nations Secretary-General, "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General" (New York, 2023), S/2023/725.

90 United Nations Security Council, "Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General," S/2023/413 (New York, 22 June 2023).

91 Ibid.

92 Farkhondeh Akbari and Jacqui True, *Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan: How to Support Women and Girls?* (Background paper prepared for Malala Fund's UN General Assembly engagements, September 2022).

93 OCHA, "Afghanistan: Humanitarian Update - March 2024" (Geneva and New York, 2024).

94 United Nations Security Council, "Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General," S/2023/413 (New York, 22 June 2023).

## 6.4.2 Actions to address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence

**Actions to address conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and survivor-centred safeguard and support systems exist but are far from sufficient.** In Myanmar, IOM partnered with UNFPA and other organizations to train CSO legal service providers on better assisting SGBV and trafficking survivors in navigating legal systems and seeking support. The training covered topics such as legal frameworks, survivor-centred case management, referral pathways, and trauma-informed care.<sup>95</sup> Despite such efforts, significant challenges remain. Effective responses require a coordinated approach across sectors, including healthcare, legal support, mental health services, and economic reintegration. There are sectors which are often not fully functioning in conflict settings. Maintaining a quality-assured referral pathway is particularly difficult in these areas due to the high likelihood of infrastructure and coordination system disruptions.<sup>96</sup>

**Building resilience, especially for populations in vulnerable situations, is key to the prevention of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence.** States should be held accountable for upholding their human rights responsibilities. However, the level of compliance by parties to a conflict with relevant international laws and norms remains low.<sup>97</sup> While restoring institutional resilience is crucial, States and international actors are also responsible for assisting populations in vulnerable situations build economic and security resilience to prevent conflict. Building institutional, economic and social resilience helps communities better weather crises and mitigate risks of increased sexual and gender-based violence. This strategy has shaped actions by various United Nations entities and the World Bank in **Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh** where nearly one million Rohingya refugees are living, 52 per cent of whom are women and girls.<sup>98</sup>

Projects run by IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNODC and UN-Women in **Myanmar** and in **Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh** to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence combine actions to strengthen

institutional and community mechanisms for prevention and response. They focus on building the resilience of groups vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence by providing them with awareness of the risks, help-seeking guidance and economic empowerment.<sup>99</sup> The World Bank's Emergency Multi-Sectoral Rohingya Crisis Response Project (2019-2025) takes a multi-sectoral approach to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Bangladesh to build social resilience of the displaced Rohingya population. It combines contingent emergency response with interventions to strengthen service delivery related to water, sanitation, sexual and reproductive health care and GBV prevention and response. It extends support to households in host communities to manage the economic and social impacts of the refugee crisis.<sup>100</sup>

The World Bank has adopted a similar approach in **Türkiye** to address the Syrian refugee crisis, where 3.6 million refugees have fled the war since 2011.<sup>101</sup> The 2021 Syrian Women Refugee Job Creation Program established four social cooperatives in Ankara, İzmir, İstanbul, and Mersin in Türkiye between August 2020 and December 2021. These cooperatives, aimed at Syrian refugee women and marginalized women in host communities, create quality jobs, reduce barriers to labour force participation, and foster community cohesion. The Project also provides childcare support, transportation, daily stipends, and other financial support to help women refugees and local women overcome socioeconomic barriers.<sup>102</sup>

**The United Nations and international humanitarian forces continue to play a critical role in addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict settings.** To date, the United Nations Security Council has called for the deployment of women's protection advisors in the mandate authorizations and renewals of ten peace operations around the world. Such advisors have been deployed to eight countries (as of June 2023). Dedicated monitoring and early warning mechanisms have been established in four peacekeeping missions and four special political missions.<sup>103</sup> These practices have been found to have positive effects in ensuring more timely, accurate and reliable information and action-

95 IOM Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, *Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Information Sheet, October-December 2021* (NA, 2021).

96 IOM, *Institutional Framework for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in Crises* (Geneva, 2019).

97 United Nations Security Council, "Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General," S/2023/413 (New York, 22 June 2023).

98 World Bank Group, *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV): A Development Approach to Advancing Gender Engagement and Addressing Gender Inequalities in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Situations* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

99 Stop Rape Now – UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, "Field Updates: Myanmar," web page. Available at: [https://www.stoprapenow.org/field\\_updates/myanmar/](https://www.stoprapenow.org/field_updates/myanmar/) (accessed on 9 June 2024).

100 World Bank Group, *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV): A Development Approach to Advancing Gender Engagement and Addressing Gender Inequalities in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Situations* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

101 UNHCR Türkiye, "Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Türkiye," web page. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-turkey> (accessed on 30 July 2024).

102 World Bank Group, *Fragility, Conflict, and Violence (FCV): A Development Approach to Advancing Gender Engagement and Addressing Gender Inequalities in Fragile, Conflict, and Violent Situations* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

103 United Nations Security Council, "Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General," S/2023/413 (New York, 22 June 2023).

taking. They are, however, challenged by human and budgetary resource constraints, without earmarked contributions in the regular budgets of the United Nations peace operations. Interagency efforts across 25 UN entities to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence has been coordinated by the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict network, with support from a multi-partner trust fund.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the multi-partner trust fund has supported actions in **Myanmar** and in **Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**.<sup>104</sup> In addition, the UN has taken special measures to prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations personnel, including in conflict settings.<sup>105</sup> The efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence in conflicts need to be backed by a more comprehensive mechanism to address gender issues in humanitarian settings. The **Asia Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group**, co-chaired by UN-Women, UNOCHA and Plan International, was set up to integrate a comprehensive gender perspective across all response sectors. By 2023, the Working Group had supported humanitarian responses in Afghanistan, Bangladesh including Cox's Bazar, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines. It produces gender analyses and assessments to inform response plans; facilitates direct participation of local women focused organizations in humanitarian planning and response processes; and builds a network of national and sub-national working groups and communities of practice on gender in humanitarian action.<sup>106</sup>

## 6.5 ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY

Access to justice is an integral part of peaceful and just societies. Lack of access to justice means that conflicts remain unresolved, and people cannot obtain protection and redress. Failure to provide justice is tantamount to tolerating human rights violations which can themselves lead to violence. Women's justice needs are highly complex. Upholding their rights is a challenge as their needs relate to issues linked to family, marriage, property, inheritance and land disputes to rights to work, labour exploitation, harassment and violence, immigration and asylum

seeking. There is also a need for criminal justice for women in conflict with the law. Where the situation of women is worst in terms of inclusion, justice and security – countries in the bottom tercile of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index – women are more likely to have unmet justice needs and unresolved legal problems. They are less likely to know where to get legal advice. Women are more likely than men to experience challenges related to family legal problems related to separation and divorce, domestic violence, receiving child support, harassment at work, workplace discrimination, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence.<sup>107</sup>

### 6.5.1 Level of legal protection

**Major gaps remain in the legal protection provided to women and girls in Asia and the Pacific – both on paper and in practice – which shape their justice needs.** The World Bank's Women, Business and Law initiative measures laws related to women's mobility, workplace, pay, marriage, parenthood, entrepreneurship, assets, and pension. It found that legal gaps for the protection of women's rights are the largest in South Asia, and East Asia and the Pacific, only second to Middle East and North Africa. Nonetheless, only 9 per cent of legal reforms undertaken by the world's economies between October 2022 and October 2023 to improve legal protection of women took place in East Asia and the Pacific, and none in South Asia. This is despite champions like **Malaysia** and **Uzbekistan**, which have undertaken commendable reforms to improve women's rights in relation to the workplace, pay, marriage and parenthood. The implementation of laws which protect women's rights, where they do exist, is also weak in these regions due to insufficient frameworks to support their implementation.<sup>108</sup>

**The experience of multiple and overlapping discrimination and barriers increases the likelihood of women and girls facing justice related problems.** Depending on the socioeconomic and family status of individual women and girls, and various factors such as ethnicity, location and disability, women and girls can face various barriers to accessing legal and justice services. Such barriers can relate to legal identity, legal capacity recognized by law, legal literacy, language, financial resources and the ability to travel alone and away from home.

104 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, "UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict," web page. Available at <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/un-action/#~:text=UN%20Action%20Against%20Sexual%20Violence%20in%20Conflict%20%28UN,during%20and%20in%20the%20wake%20of%20armed%20conflict> (accessed on 5 June 2024).

105 United Nations, "Sexual exploitation and abuse: implementing a zero-tolerance policy; Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations; Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, Report of the Secretary-General," A/77/748 (New York, 2023).

106 Asia Pacific Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, "Summary of 2023 country-level GIHA activities," infographic (n.p., 2024).

107 UN-Women, International Development Law Organization (IDLO), World Bank, and Task Force on Justice, *Justice for Women: High-level Group Report* (New York, 2019).

108 World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

## BOX 6.4 A snapshot of justice gaps for women with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in Asia and the Pacific



The rights of women with disabilities are promoted and protected by all international human rights frameworks, and most explicitly in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The most relevant article of the CEDAW for women's access to justice is Article 15, which guarantees the right to equal recognition before the law, including the right to legal capacity, which is essential for the right to access justice. However, CEDAW does not make explicit mention of women and girls with disabilities.

The CRPD is the first international human rights treaty to recognize that persons with disabilities are rights holders and legal decision makers. Article 6 of CRPD provides specific protection for women and girls with disabilities and Article 12 further enumerates the rights of persons with disabilities to equal recognition before the law and legal capacity. Article 13 of the CRPD provides for the right to access to justice for persons with disabilities, including the opportunity for victims/survivors of human rights violations to receive redress. It covers all fora and procedures involved in the administration of justice. In Asia and the Pacific, 49 out of 53 ESCAP members and one associate member have ratified or acceded to CEDAW,<sup>1, 2</sup> and 50 out of 53 ESCAP members and one associate member have ratified or acceded to CRPD,<sup>3, 4</sup> as of April 2024.

Women and girls with disabilities are more likely to face discrimination than their peers without disabilities, or than men and boys with disabilities, regarding education, employment, legal capacity, political participation and autonomous living. They are at greater risk of poverty and violence, exploitation and abuse.<sup>5</sup> Because women and girls with disabilities are often stereotyped as unable to fulfill traditional roles as mothers and care givers and are perceived as recipients of care and protection, human rights violations against them are normalized. In particular, women and girls with disabilities — and other persons with disabilities — are often denied legal capacity due the inaccurate perception that they are incapable of exercising legal capacity, which disproportionately affects persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities. This misperception overlooks evidence that they can make “rational” decisions guided by emotion or instinct even if some may require a certain degree of support to make their own decisions.<sup>6</sup>

A UN Women-led legal needs survey in four Asia-Pacific countries – Fiji, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines – in 2022 found that women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities face entrenched barriers to access justice. The majority of respondents (96 per cent) indicated experiencing at least one legal problem in the past two years, related to issues ranging from consumer rights, land and housing, to family, relationship and violence, to work, education and health care. However, they were often hesitant to describe their problems as “legal” and often described them as “bad luck”, “family or private matters” or “social/community matters”. This points to the need to raise legal awareness. Only 26 per cent of respondents identified their problem as resolved. When these challenges did get resolved, 73 per cent felt that the outcomes were unfair to them. Only 34 per cent took their legal problem to a formal justice actor. The majority sought advice from family, friends or acquaintances or other informal groups, networks or community organizations. Respondents indicated the reasons for not seeking legal advice being concerns about the legal process being stressful, being scared to take legal action and the financial burden.<sup>7</sup>

Reforms are needed to remove larger systemic barriers that women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities face when engaging with the formal justice system, such as discrimination and stigma against women with disabilities in law enforcement, and inaccessible court proceedings. In the meantime, State and non-State actors, including organizations of persons with disabilities and women's groups, need to collaborate to improve legal awareness and provide legal assistance to women with disabilities, as well as to transform attitudinal barriers and norms in the communities.

1 United Nations Treaty Collection (UNTC), “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Ratification Status,” web page. Available at [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_en) (accessed on 5 June 2024).

2 Afghanistan ratified the CEDAW on 5 May 2003 and Myanmar acceded to it on 22 July 1997.

3 UNTC, “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): Ratification Status,” web page. Available at [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq\\_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=\\_en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsq_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=_en) (accessed on 5 June 2024).

4 Afghanistan acceded to the CRPD on 18 September 2012 and Myanmar acceded to it on 7 December 2011.

5 United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), “General Comment No. 3 on Women and Girls with Disabilities,” CRPD/C/GC/3 (Geneva, 2016).

6 United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), “General Comment No. 1: Article 12 – Equal Recognition before the Law,” CRPD/C/GC/1, para. 9 (Geneva, 2014).

7 UN-Women, *Closing the Justice Gap for Women with Intellectual and/or Psychosocial Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, 2023).

### 6.5.2 Delivery of justice services

**Justice systems in the region fail to extend sufficient justice services to women and girls in need.** Despite the high prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls within and outside of the home, underreporting and barriers to help-seeking remain two major challenges,<sup>109</sup> which to some extent reflects the lack of trust in the justice systems.<sup>110</sup> While awareness about the unacceptability of violence is rising and countries in the region are increasingly passing laws to address violence against women and girls, institutional support to enable and encourage reporting and investment to improve court practices and legal services in dealing with such cases remains insufficient. The capacity of justice systems is even more challenged in conflict-affected settings, where sexual and gender-based violence are even less likely to be reported and punished, in dealing with emerging forms of safety and security threats such as online abuse and harassment.<sup>111</sup> Similar challenges exist in delivering justice to women and girls concerning their family, marriage, economic and other rights. Besides, the need for criminal justice for women as suspects, accused and detainees is often overlooked, and in some scenarios, women human rights defenders and activists are detained and criminalized because of their activism. Justice systems in the region face challenges in addressing the justice needs of children in contact with the law. They frequently fall short of sufficiently protecting girls and boys who are victims, survivors and witnesses of crimes, in compliance of international child protection standards.<sup>112</sup>

**Entrenched biases and gender stereotypes, including those held by justice sector actors, contribute to the failure of justice systems to respond to the needs of women and girls and vulnerable groups.** While legal rights may appear to be gender neutral, gendered stereotypes perpetuating inequalities women and girls face

across the family and society affects their access to justice. Judges and other justice professionals are influenced by biases and gender stereotypes. Common gender stereotypes in legal cases include assumptions about women's role in the family, their credibility or reliability, rape myths that blame women and girls for the perpetrators' criminal behaviours, and discrimination and stigma against persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender diversity. Court processes and decisions based on gender stereotypes or on evidence presented in a discriminatory manner sabotage justice integrity as much as they harm women and girls. The same gender stereotypes penetrate not only the formal but also informal justice systems.<sup>113</sup> While women judges are not automatically less influenced by biases and gender stereotypes, the underrepresentation of women in the judiciary and in politics across Asia-Pacific countries contributes to the challenge of transforming gender social norms in the justice sector (see more discussion in Chapter 5).

**The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed the justice gaps and the lack of resilience of justice systems.** Lockdowns and emergency orders have led to a multitude of repercussions, exacerbating existing risks for women in abusive relationships, for those working in vulnerable conditions and without job security, for women and girls at risk of harmful practices and discriminatory laws, as well as those in fragile humanitarian settings. With resources diverted towards immediate public health measures, institutions such as the courts, hotlines/helplines, crisis centres, legal aid and social welfare services were often curtailed.<sup>114</sup> Some countries (**Australia, China, Malaysia and the Republic of Korea**) innovated to continue justice services by digital means.<sup>115, 116</sup> Yet many women and girls and other vulnerable groups, especially older persons and those in rural and remote areas, have experienced additional barriers in using digital justice services due to lack of digital literacy, access to Internet connectivity or

109 UNFPA, "Measuring prevalence of violence against women in Asia-Pacific" web page. KNOWVAW Data indicator: Help-seeking after violence. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/knownvawdata#:~:text=Globally%2C%20addressing%20violence%20against%20women,hands%20of%20an%20intimate%20partner> (accessed on 5 June 2024).

110 Justice systems in a broad term include the police, health services, judiciary, prosecution, social services, prison services, lawyers, paralegals, community justice workers and other legal aid providers. See UN-Women, IDLO, World Bank and Task Force on Justice, *Justice for Women: High-level Group Report* (New York and Washington, D.C., 2019). Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Justice-for-women-High-level-group-report-en.pdf>.

111 UN-Women, IDLO, World Bank and Task Force on Justice. *Justice for Women: High-level Group Report* (New York and Washington, D.C., 2019).

112 UNICEF, "Justice for children", web page. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/protection/justice-for-children> (accessed on 14 July 2024).

113 "Informal justice systems" refers to all conflict resolution and justice mechanisms that operate outside of the formal or State legal system. This includes religious and customary systems, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and popular justice forums. See UN-Women, IDLO, World Bank and Task Force on Justice, *Justice for Women: High-level Group Report* (New York and Washington, D.C., 2019).

114 UNODC, "Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Response – UNODC Thematic Brief on Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls", (United Nations, 2020). Available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/GBVAW\\_and\\_UNODC\\_in\\_COVID19\\_final\\_7Apr2020.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/GBVAW_and_UNODC_in_COVID19_final_7Apr2020.pdf).

115 UN-Women, IDLO, UNDP, UNODC, World Bank and The Pathfinders, *Justice for Women amidst COVID-19* (2020). Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/justice-women-amidst-covid-19>.

116 OECD, *Access to Justice: Compendium of Country Practices*, accessed June 5, 2024, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/governance/global-roundtables-access-to-justice/access-to-justice-compendium-of-country-practices.pdf>.

mobile phones.<sup>117</sup> For the cases of violence, many survivor support services were not considered part of essential services that were maintained under emergency circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Many women and vulnerable groups were left with even more precarious access to justice compared to pre-pandemic times.

**With an increasingly digital landscape, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the legal field, justice system reforms need to account for the “double-edge” effects of AI-driven tools.** On the one hand, such tools offer efficient solutions ranging from automated data entry to predicting court processes or generating draft decisions using a predictive algorithm. On the other hand, the use of AI in case processing and legal decision-making must be approached with great caution to ensure transparency while protecting data and privacy. Using AI to support the processing of cases must comply with fundamental constitutional principles and human rights, as well as the possibilities of AI reinforcing gender and other biases and stereotypes. A survey among judges in the ASEAN region in 2021 on emerging technologies and judicial integrity suggests that electronic filing platforms and electronic/automated case management systems are most commonly used by courts in ASEAN. The use of virtual hearing and AI tools in court proceedings are not yet prevalent but emerging. Judges participating in the survey were generally positive about the impact of new technologies on the transparency of hearing processes and court decisions and making court services more accessible to everyone, especially women who often face safety concerns, economic barriers and time poverty and persons with disabilities. However, they also cited various concerns about security, confidentiality protection, as well as equity in relation to literacy, internet access and economic status.<sup>118</sup>

**Transitional justice mechanisms are critical to the implementation of the WPS agenda. Yet existing mechanisms in the region remain largely ineffective.** Impunity remains the norm in the most fragile contexts. Perpetrators can be affiliated to State or non-State armed groups, terrorist groups, transnational criminal networks and even peacekeeping and security personnel,

as well as humanitarian workers. Weakened or collapsed justice institutions in conflict-affected areas, and the increasing use of largely ungoverned digital platforms, have compounded challenges for accountability of perpetrators, protection and reparation for survivors, or truth-seeking for victims/survivors. For many women and girls who are survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, seeking justice or recourse could subject them to further vulnerability due to stigma, retaliation and reprisal.<sup>119</sup>

Transitional justice processes and mechanisms are set up to investigate violations of human rights that occur in the past, bring perpetrators to justice, help victims/survivors rebuild their lives and dignity. They also aim to reform laws and institutions to ensure that the mass violations will not recur.<sup>120</sup> It can also contribute to fighting against impunity for violations of economic, social and cultural rights, and to their prevention.<sup>121</sup> In particular, reparations have the potential to dismantle the structural inequality and discrimination that drive sexual violence.<sup>122</sup> Both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms have been established in several Asia-Pacific countries to support transitional justice processes. But the implementation of these mechanisms is not without major challenges. These transitional justice processes and mechanisms are commonly undermined by un-sustained political will, the absence of a holistic approach which incorporates all key aspects of transitional justice and reforms to prevent the recurrence of human rights violations, and insufficient participation of women's groups and civil society groups.<sup>123</sup> While women and girls are often disproportionately affected by human rights violations and structural discriminations, transitional justice processes have not always been well designed to empower women and girls and address sexual and gender-based violence they face.<sup>124</sup>

Improving access to justice for women and girls requires a holistic approach to eliminate discriminatory laws and regulation across all domains, to systematically strengthen the prevention and response to intimate partner violence, to increase women's representation in the workforce and leadership positions, including in the judiciary and police forces, and to increase funding support

117 UNDP, *Emerging Technologies and Judicial Integrity in ASEAN* (Bangkok, 2021).

118 Ibid.

119 United Nations Security Council, “Conflict-related sexual violence, Report of the Secretary-General,” S/2023/413 (New York, 2023).

120 United Nations, *Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: United Nations Approach to Transitional Justice* (New York, 2010).

121 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), *Transitional Justice and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (Geneva, 2014).

122 United Nations Security Council, *The Rule of Law and Transitional Justice in Conflict and Post-conflict Societies: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2011/634 (New York, 2011).

123 Transitional Justice Asia Network, “Transitional Justice Asia Network,” web page. Available at: <https://asia-ajar.org/transitional-justice-asia-network/> (accessed on 5 June 2024).

124 Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York, 2015).

to legal assistance and justice services for women. It will require reforms in the justice systems designed specifically to remove discriminatory provisions, procedures and practices against the most vulnerable — women and girls facing multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination — and investment in substantially improving the capacities of justice systems to deliver gender-responsive, accessible and inclusive services for all, including at times of emergencies. A closer collaboration between formal and informal justice systems, including grassroots bodies working on women's rights, is equally essential.

On the other hand, to fully access justice, women and girls need legal, economic and body autonomy. They need control over income and financial resources, health and childcare support, and sufficient literacy and education levels. They have to confront familial and societal pressure to excuse or defend their abusers who are often intimate partners or someone they know, as well as shame, stigmatization, victimization and even retaliation in the search for justice. Therefore, systematically transforming the structural barriers women face and harmful gender social norms are of equal importance to gender-responsive justice systems reform.

#### **BOX 6.5 Bangkok General Guidance for Judges on Applying a Gender Perspective in South and Southeast Asia (2022)**



The judiciary is one of the most important building blocks of justice systems. Making the judiciary gender responsive is critical for access to justice by women and girls. In June 2016, judges from **Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste** adopted the first edition of the General Guidance for Judges in applying a gender perspective at a judicial dialogue organized by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) and UN-Women in Bangkok. Since then, the Supreme Court of Indonesia has integrated the General Guidance into its domestic practice through Supreme Court Regulation No. 3 of 2017.

In 2021, ICJ brought together a drafting panel and a working group of six judges from South Asia to amend the 2016 General Guidance with a view to contextualizing it in a manner that would be equally applicable to the South Asia subregion. The updated edition was launched by judges from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in May 2022.

The 2022 Bangkok General Guidance provides assistance to judges. It supports their understanding and application of gender equality and non-discrimination principles and identifies harmful gender stereotypes which must be eliminated to ensure access to justice for all. The initiative guides all justice sector professionals in all areas of law, ranging from court officers, police officers, prosecutors, mediators, arbitrators, facilitators, lawyers, social workers, medical practitioners, forensic experts to civil society representatives, on identifying situations that could lead to gender-based discrimination. The recommendations it gives contribute to the implementation of a justice system that guarantees the rights of all to equal access to fair and gender-sensitive investigation processes, court proceedings, mediation processes, adjudication and enforcement of judgments. Additionally, the General Guidance also addresses recommendations with respect to institutional policies, such as gender parity in judicial appointments, gender-friendly justice infrastructure and procedures, gender disaggregated justice data collection and gender mainstreaming in judicial training curricula. These are to be adopted by the courts to help them become more gender sensitive and responsive.<sup>1</sup>

1 International Commission of Jurists, *Bangkok General Guidance for Judges on Applying a Gender Perspective in South and Southeast Asia* (Geneva, 2022).



Women learn how to use social media platforms to promote peaceful and resilient communities in Java island in Indonesia. © ASEAN

## 6.6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The WPS agenda is a transformative strategy to leave no one behind in conflict-affected and emergency settings and address the underlying ideologies and conditions that tolerate violence, drive conflict and create security risks in the first place. Women's full and meaningful participation in building peace and fostering security should be central to the WPS agenda, and it should be a norm rather than an aspiration. Meanwhile, transforming institutional settings and practices of the justice systems is essential to guaranteeing access to justice for all. The United Nations Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace<sup>125</sup> calls for Member States to "transform gendered power dynamics in peace and security", as one of his recommendations for addressing current and emerging peace and security challenges, from the threat of nuclear weapons and small arms to technology-facilitated warfare and violence, and climate-related insecurity. He further pledged 15 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) to projects where gender equality is a key objective, including a minimum one per cent of ODA directly to women's organizations, especially grass-roots groups working for peace.

In this context, countries in the Asia-Pacific region are encouraged to consider the following actions:

- + Support member States to localize the WPS agenda based on their national and subnational contexts, developing designated national/subnational action plans or incorporating the WPS agenda into other relevant action plans, policies and strategies. Ensure sufficient financial support and robust monitoring and evaluation for the effective implementation relevant actions.
- + Create synergy between the implementation of the WPS agenda and other relevant agendas such ending violence against women and girls, violent extremism prevention and climate security. Accord high priority to addressing human security concerns, increasing women's participation and leadership, and transforming harmful social norms as the root causes.
- + Deploy regular and sustainable capacity to bolster WPS expertise in the region, particularly among decision makers and personnel in the peace and security sectors, at the national and subnational levels. Pay special attention to emerging security

125 United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace* (New York, 2023).

risks for the region when undertaking capacity building – such as violent extremism (both online and offline), cybersecurity risks and climate-induced security risks.

- + Institutionalize measures and formal mechanisms to secure women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels of decision-making related to peace and security, introducing specific and quantifiable requirements to ensure women's direct participation and providing training, logistical and operational support for all parties involved in specific peace processes to comply with their gender-responsive obligations.
- + Provide training and network support to women peace mediators, negotiators, peacekeepers and other women peace agents in the region for gender-responsive and inclusive peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding at the national, regional and international levels.
- + Ensure that the national legislation adheres to international law and obligations to protect civic spaces and uphold human rights to enable effective CSO participation in the WPS agenda and protect civil society actors and activists.
- + Set specific objectives and funding allocation for concrete actions to eradicate conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, including adopting robust legislation, exploring innovative means of reporting, documentation and data management of cases and incidents, holding accountable perpetrators, and providing quality, coordinated multi-sectoral services and support to survivors across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
- + Continue to remove discrimination against women and girls in all their diversity in laws, policies and regulations that contribute to the substantive inequality faced by women and girls and their lack of access to justice, especially in relation to legal capacity, family, children, work and welfare.
- + Dedicate specific investment to increasing women's representation in the justice sector and improving the capacity of justice systems (in terms of procedures and personnel capacity) to deliver gender-responsive, accessible and inclusive justice services for all, especially those who face multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, including at times of emergencies.
- + Align the implementation of the WPS agenda with transitional justice mechanisms. Incorporate objectives, interventions and budgets related to transforming harmful gender social norms in all actions.
- + Monitor the implementation of the United Nations Secretary-General's pledge for at least 15 per cent of ODA allocation for gender equality and one per cent of ODA to support women's organizations.
- + Expand the financing schemes in support of WPS implementation by institutionalizing gender budgets in relevant budget allocations for peace and security (including those dedicated for climate actions) and provide predictable, accessible and flexible funding to CSOs working on peace and security at all levels.
- + Prioritize resources and assistance from the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies in the region such as the ASEAN to address dire peace and security situations for women and girls in fragile States such as Afghanistan, Myanmar and other least developed countries in the region.

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

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