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

CHAPTER 8

ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
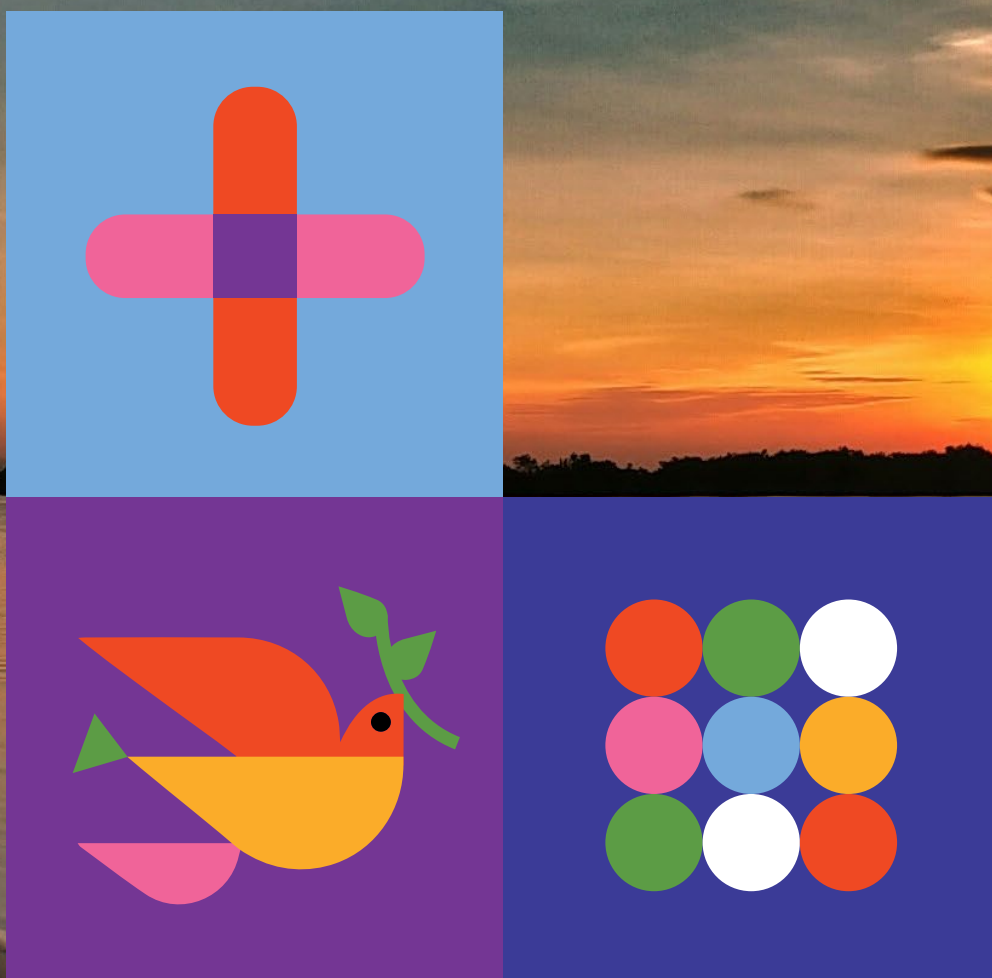for Asia and the Pacific

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

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

**Forward-looking strategies
for gender-transformative
outcomes in Asia and the Pacific**

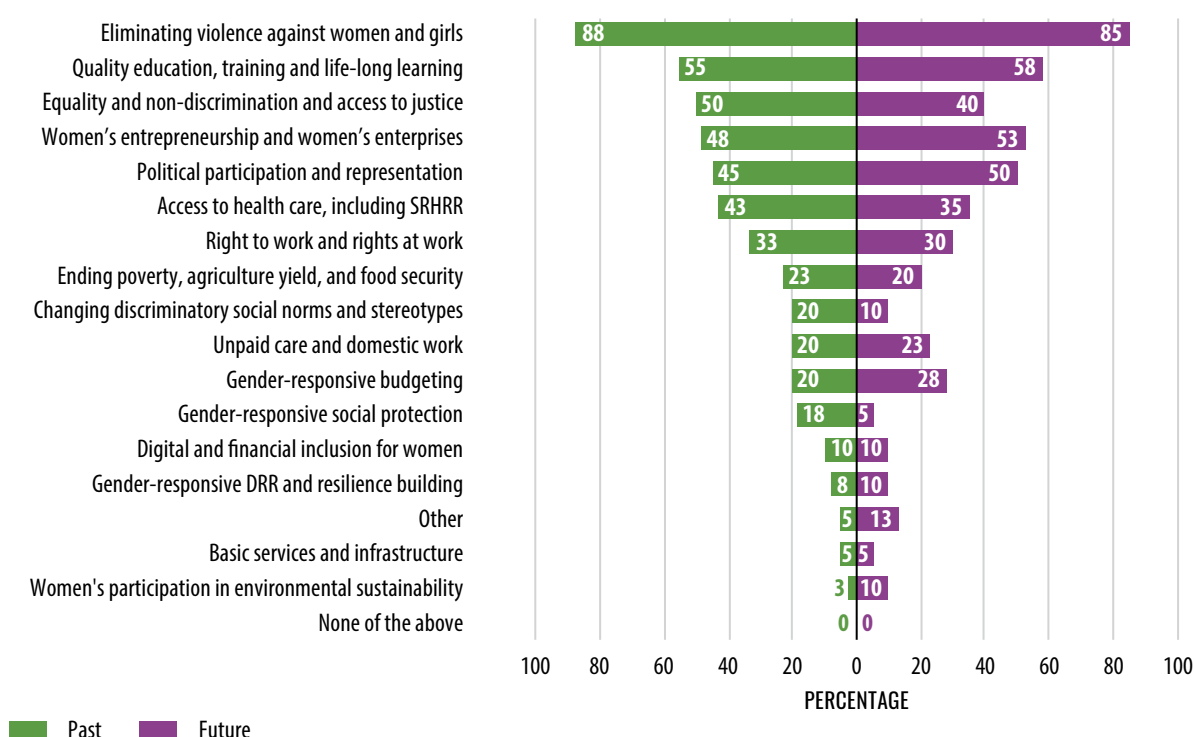A woman with disability doing sports. © Getty Images/Alex Liew

The review of the six thematic areas of issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific provides valuable information on areas where the region has made progress, 30 years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA). Areas that require further investment and concerted action by governments and key stakeholders have also been identified. A range of strategic opportunities have emerged from this assessment which the region can harness to achieve better outcomes.

This chapter elaborates on three sets of strategies for collective regional action and increased future investment. The first set of strategies outline actions to make substantial changes in three areas with the largest gaps in the implementation of BPfA. These areas include: (i) women's economic empowerment and resilience; (ii) women's representation, participation and leadership; and (iii) gender-based violence and access to justice. The second set of strategies focuses on actions to harness opportunities presented by three key transitions that have emerged since the adoption of BPfA in 1995 for achieving gender-transformative outcomes across thematic areas. The transitions are a just transition towards green and blue economies, the emerging care economy, and digital and technological transformation. The third set

of strategies proposes targeted actions to strengthen the foundations for the region to accelerate progress towards gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, in the following cross-cutting areas: gender social norms, gender data and statistics, gender-smart financing, and innovative partnerships.

8.1 THE WAY FORWARD: ACCELERATE ACTION WHERE THE BIGGEST GAPS REMAIN SINCE 1995

To accelerate the implementation of commitments made through the BPfA, actions and resources must be prioritized to areas where the largest gaps remain. Among the 40 Asia-Pacific governments participating in the global survey for the Beijing+30 review carried out in 2024, at least half of these governments indicated that they would accord priority to the following areas for accelerating progress in the next five years: (i) eliminating violence against women and girls; (ii) quality education, training and life-long learning for women and girls; (iii) economic empowerment of women including through women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises; (iv) political participation and representation; and (v) equity and non-discrimination and access to justice (Figure 8.1).

FIGURE 8.1 **Top priorities selected by Asia-Pacific governments for accelerating progress, 2020–2024 versus 2025–2030 (percentage of reporting countries)**

Priority	Past	Future
Eliminating violence against women and girls	88	85
Quality education, training and life-long learning	55	58
Equality and non-discrimination and access to justice	50	40
Women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises	48	53
Political participation and representation	45	50
Access to health care, including SRHRR	43	35
Right to work and rights at work	33	30
Ending poverty, agriculture yield, and food security	23	20
Changing discriminatory social norms and stereotypes	20	10
Unpaid care and domestic work	20	23
Gender-responsive budgeting	20	28
Gender-responsive social protection	18	5
Digital and financial inclusion for women	10	10
Gender-responsive DRR and resilience building	8	10
Other	5	13
Basic services and infrastructure	5	5
Women's participation in environmental sustainability	3	10
None of the above	0	0

Source: Based on survey responses from 40 ESCAP member States participating in the global survey for the Beijing+30 review as of 18 July 2024. In the survey questionnaire, governments were asked to select the top five priorities for their actions undertaken in the past five years and the top five priorities for the next five years.

Some of these priority areas are interlinked. For instance, concerted investment in quality education, training and life-long learning; women's entrepreneurship; access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; work-related rights; addressing unpaid care and domestic work; gender-responsive social protection; and digital and financial inclusion for women will contribute to reduced poverty and greater economic empowerment of women and girls. Similarly, eliminating violence against women and girls cannot be achieved without strengthening equality and non-discrimination and access to justice. Women's participation and representation — in politics and/ or other developmental areas such as environmental sustainability – are central to upholding women's rights, especially in the context of the megatrends in the region. Gender-responsive budgeting serves as an enabler for accelerated actions, while changing discriminatory social norms and stereotypes is fundamental to achieving transformative changes.

Based on major gaps, challenges and opportunities identified under Part II and the priorities identified by member States, the following recommendations, grouped under three broad thematic areas are made, for the consideration of national governments, and all relevant stakeholders, for implementation depending on the specific situation/context of their respective countries.

8.1.1 Advancing women's economic empowerment and resilience

Intersecting global crises have slowed down the region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, compromised livelihoods and pushed more people and families into poverty, and threatened to erase hard-won progress on women's economic empowerment in the past three decades. These global crises, compounded with megatrends such as digital and technological transformation, climate change and population ageing, require countries to invest not only for stimulating growth but also for building resilience of their economies and people, particularly women and girls who are often hardest hit during various crises. Unleashing the tremendous untapped potential of women and girls would add trillions in value to the region's economies and enrich societies. More proactive measures are needed to protect income security, boost decent work and support entrepreneurship by women, by targeting policy interventions and investment where gaps and inequalities are wider. In particular, priority should be given to the following actions:

(a) Gender-responsive social protection should be presented not as a welfare expenditure but an enabler for sustainable growth. Social protection schemes in the region not only require an increase in the level of public spending but gender-responsive design and

operation that effectively deliver income security to women and girls across the life cycle and reach those who are currently not within reach, including women and girls among the rural poor, migrants, those living in urban slums and persons with disabilities across the region. Only when their income security is sufficiently protected, especially for those who engage in informal and vulnerable employment, can women and girls be empowered to stay active and productive in the economy. Schemes need to be developed to address the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work that women and girls bear, and to enable them to enter, stay and participate fully in the labour market on a more equal footing with men.

(b) Gender-inclusive labour market policies in the region need to focus on equipping women and girls with a skills portfolio that are aligned with evolving labour market demands, creating not only more jobs but decent work, and turning care from a burden into a new engine of job growth. These measures are particularly important for low- and middle-income countries, as well as subregions, where the informal sector makes up a large share of the economy and the share of low-skilled workers remains large. These labour market actions need to be grounded in sustainable, inclusive human capital accumulation that is based upon the provision of equitable and quality education and health care, including sexual and reproductive health services. Countries need to act, in a timely and innovative manner, to adapt to and capitalize on opportunities presented by the emerging digital, green and care economies, which are particularly relevant to Asia and the Pacific given the region's rapid digitalization, heightened climate and environmental risks and population ageing. Supporting women and girls in the region to acquire the skills required to participate in the labour force of these growing sectors on an equal footing to men is essential. Public and private partnerships to invest in a regulated and formalized paid care sector and care-sensitive infrastructure would not only release women from unpaid work to participate in the labour market but also create millions of new job opportunities for women and men. Decent work principles and practices, including equal pay for work of equal value, equal access to social protection, elimination of work-related safety concerns and gender-based violence and harassment, as well as equal participation in social dialogues, need to be equally applied in these emerging sectors.

(c) Enabling entrepreneurial ecosystems for women require gender-inclusive, affirmative solutions to incentivize and empower women entrepreneurs to develop and grow their businesses, including in high-potential, high-value sectors such as those engaged in the digital and green economies. Particular attention is required to women-owned MSMEs which are extremely active in the region's economy overall

but remain vulnerable to shocks. Reforms are needed in business governance processes to remove barriers for women to register and thus formalize their businesses, including MSMEs, and extend favourable taxation and credit policies to cover women-owned MSMEs. More proactive measures are needed to empower women-owned MSMEs throughout the business value chain, including providing diversified solutions to capital access. Central to this push must be mobilizing microcredit and other financial institutions, impact investment instruments, venture capital and foreign direct investment; galvanizing public and procurement mechanisms to buy from women-owned businesses which would expand market access while helping to build viability of women-owned businesses; and prioritizing building business skills, especially for starting up and operating businesses in emerging sectors and the use of digital marketplaces and tools, and supporting networks for women entrepreneurs. Moreover, learning from lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, countries need to consider measures that strengthen the resilience of MSMEs, especially those owned by women, in times of crises. For instance, ensuring that shock-responsive measures such as those related to favourable taxation, credit and public procurement policies are within reach to women-owned MSMEs. Overcoming logistics and market access constraints should be central to response plans.

8.1.2 Enhancing women's representation, participation and leadership

Gender inequalities in all domains of life are underpinned by the persisting gender power imbalance, which is further complicated by its intersection with other factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, and disability. Shifting such power imbalances is not possible unless systematic changes are made to women's underrepresentation in politics and in leadership and decision-making across sectors. This shift is both a central objective of gender equality in itself and a catalyst for change. Action needs to go beyond non-discrimination measures and take a proactive enabling approach. The following priority actions are recommended:

(a) Creating a conducive environment for women's leadership requires comprehensive reforms in political and governance systems. Such reforms may include transitional and affirmative measures such as gender and equity quotas for electoral candidates and representation in parliaments and government institutions. Beyond this, investment is required in strategies that would bring about more systematic changes over time, including engaging political parties to adopt more gender-equal candidate nomination policies and allocate dedicated funding to support women candidates. The representation of

women and girls from diverse backgrounds needs to be considered in candidacy and political agenda-settings. Election commissions must implement gender-inclusive voter education to tackle gender biases and stereotypes about women's leadership capability and address gender-specific barriers to women's participation in political elections and governance processes. Such barriers include limited political literacy, lack of access to relevant information and procedural knowledge and an absence of care support in political processes.

Gender-responsive procedures and practices are required to shape recruitment, appointment, performance assessment, and career advancement in political and governance systems. Resources must be dedicated to capacity building programmes targeting women leaders and officers, and gender equality sensitization programmes for all leaders and personnel, including potential male champions. Strong measures are essential to combat violence and harassment against women political leaders, activists and voters both online and offline. Where appropriate, digital platforms may be leveraged as a safer, alternative space to enable expression of opinions by women and girls. Similar reforms are needed in the private sector to put more women in the leadership pipelines and positions.

(b) Breaking down gendered occupational segregation in management and leadership which prevails across politics, governance systems and private sectors requires a deliberate strategy. Investment in long-term norm-changing action is needed to transform the common undervaluation of "feminized" sectors and the stereotypical distinction between women's and men's capabilities. Only this can remove the expectations that confine women in certain sectors and functions, most likely those related to gender equality, women, children, family and welfare affairs, even when they are appointed to managerial or leadership positions. To make meaningful changes, countries need to put more women into professional, management and leadership pipelines across sectors, with intentional measures including quotas and targeted capacity building, especially in value chains and/or governance institutions for sectors of growing strategic importance such as those concerning digital technology, climate change, finance, peace and security, in both relevant value chains and governance institutions related to these sectors.

8.1.3 Eliminating gender-based violence and strengthening access to justice

Gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful practices, in its various overlapping forms, remain a major threat to the rights of women and girls in Asia and the Pacific, in particular their safety and security, economic

empowerment and political participation. Gender-based violence often intersects with ageism, ableism and other sources of discrimination, posing challenges to intervention. The consequences, for both victims/survivors and for societies, are multifaceted and can be passed on to future generations. Yet change is possible, with deliberate investments in prevention and response recommended below:

(a) Designated action plans for GBV prevention and response need to be institutionalized at the national and subnational levels and, where appropriate, at the subregional or regional level to coordinate actions across borders. Such action plans should set clear objectives, indicators and targets for interventions, with well-resourced budgets, clear accountability of all actors involved, and a sound monitoring and evaluation plan. Action plans need to account for the intersectional discrimination and risk factors that contribute to GBV, based on sexual orientation and gender identity, age, disability, ethnicity, migrant status, refugee status and other socioeconomic factors, and tailor preventive and response measures to meet the differentiated needs of individuals of diverse backgrounds. In recent decades, an increasing number of countries have introduced national action plans to address GBV or violence against women and girls. However, many action plans centre on responding to violence after it has occurred, without sufficient focus on interventions focused on prevention.

More investment in prevention efforts is urgently needed. These should include school- and family-based socialization programmes engaging both women and men, girls and boys, community mobilization and media campaigns that aim at behaviour and social norm changes; community-based interventions to prevent violent extremism; interventions aimed to address economic and social stressors and build economic and social resilience of people and communities; investment in safe, gender-friendly public spaces, transportation and digital environments; and strengthening zero-tolerance laws and policies and community policing. A focus on primary prevention does not diminish the significance of victims/survivors-centred response measures and services that engage first responders across law enforcement, justice systems, education institutions, health systems, as well as social and community service sectors.

It is necessary to engage the private sector, particularly businesses premised in digital spaces, to respond to GBV occurring online, and to secure spaces for civil society engagement in action. The implementation of action plans to address GBV is often challenged by insufficient funding, lack of designated capacity and trained personnel and backlash on civic participation and gender equality, especially at times of crises

and in conflict-affected or emergency situations. To cope with these challenges, countries may consider strategic alignment between actions plans to address GBV, women, peace and security (WPS), prevention of violent extremism, access to justice for women and girls, as well as the broader action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment to enable more efficient use of resources and consolidated interventions. Diversified funding sources, including from the private sector, should be considered to better resource relevant actions.

(b) Tackling technology-facilitated gender-based violence and harmful practices should be an urgent priority in countries' strategies related to gender equality and to digitalization. The increasing digitalization of societies is characterized by vast scale, rapid speed and ease of online communication, and the anonymity, pseudonymity and impunity afforded by digital spaces. With weak legal and regulatory frameworks, these factors create a conducive environment that breeds technology-facilitated violence – ranging from online harassment to hate speech, threats and disinformation – that disproportionately affect women and girls, including politicians, activists and human rights defenders. The nature of technology-facilitated violence is constantly evolving, with new forms and patterns emerging alongside digital transformation and technological innovation. Research is needed to better understand the forms, impacts and dynamics of technology-facilitated violence. Effective regulatory systems must be established, coupled with increased support for gender-responsive prevention and response initiatives. Strong collaboration among governments, the technology sector, women's organizations, civil society and national human rights institutions is pivotal to establishing sound regulatory frameworks and platform accountability; improving risk identification, perpetrator tracking and accountability procedures; updating knowledge and capacity of GBV first responders, and making changes in the design (including algorithm), dissemination and use of digital technologies to prevent gender biases and stereotypes and tolerance to violence.

(c) Addressing gender-based violence in the peace and security context is of increasing importance to the region, given the heightened global peace and security risks. GBV is both a predictor of, and a tactic to create, peace and security threats. There have been many lessons learned that women and girls' rights have been too easily sidelined and their safety and security sabotaged during political turbulences, such as in Afghanistan and Myanmar, and in other emergency settings. National, regional and international actors must take collaborative actions to identify risks of women's human rights violation, incorporate interventions to build economic and social resilience of women and girls and the local communities affected, provide victims/survivors-centred support, restore justice services and support transitional justice systems in the conflict-affected and emergency contexts. These measures need to be part of a holistic WPS agenda that involve all allies and highlight the engagement of women and girls as actors and active agents of change.

8.2 OPPORTUNITIES NOT TO BE MISSED: HARNESS KEY TRANSITIONS WITH PROFOUND IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY

The review of the megatrends and their linkages with the key thematic areas for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) reveals the strategic importance of addressing gender concerns in three key transitions – the just (green) transition, digitalization and the care economy – that have emerged and/or intensified since the adoption of the BPfA in 1995. Strategies to close gender gaps in these key transitions align with the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions[1] put forward by the United Nations Secretary-General to encourage investment in accelerating the SDGs, through a job-rich, human centred recovery and just ecological, technological and societal transitions, focusing on the green, digital and care economies. The section contains recommendations on strategic investments that could generate gender-transformative economic and social returns from these key transitions.

8.2.1 Making the just (green) transition gender-responsive

The gender-differentiated impacts of extreme weather events due to climate change, which disproportionately disadvantage women and girls, are rooted in systemic gender-based discrimination and societal expectations. The complex intersection of identity and socioeconomic factors, such as gender, disability, geographic location, indigenous status, income level and educational background, places women and girls facing intersectional discrimination at a greater risk of being impacted by the adverse effects of climate change over a prolonged period of time. A just transition towards green and blue economies necessitates sufficient investment in gender-responsive public services, social protection, healthcare systems and legal reforms that are adaptive to climate change and its gendered effects.[2]

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1   Just transitions in the Global Accelerator are defined broadly to cover the transitions to towards the green, digital and care economies. See United Nations, "Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions", web page. Available at: https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/ (accessed 29 July 2024).

2   UN-Women, "The climate-care nexus: addressing the linkages between climate change and women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work", working paper (New York, 2023).

(a) Empowering women and girls to pursue climate justice

While women and girls experience climate change in diverse ways and bear its consequences disproportionately, they are excluded from decision-making in many contexts. In the pursuit of climate justice, actions are needed to recognize women and girls' rights and accord rightful value to their labour and knowledge (recognition); share equitably economic resources and opportunities (redistribution); make collective decisions with the inclusion of all voices (representation); and acknowledge historical injustices, being accountable to past and future generations (reparation).[3] Countries need to recognize the role of women and girls as agents of change, by integrating their voices and perspectives into decision-making at all levels and relying on their leadership to develop and implement gender-responsive climate mitigation and adaptation policies.[4]

Governments urgently need to reform existing legislative and institutional frameworks that continue to limit women's access to land tenure, inheritance rights and access to natural resources, and restrict their mobility and access to essential information and services. If unchanged, these legislative and institutional barriers will compromise the ability of women and girls to cope with the direct consequences of climate change, such as livelihood loss, increased scarcity of natural resources, food insecurity and more frequent extreme weather events as well as disasters. Moreover, resources need to be earmarked within climate financing instruments to support women and girls to recover from livelihood and income loss due to climate change, start and grow low-carbon, climate-resilient livelihoods and businesses, and access climate-resilient social protection.

(b) Addressing the nexus between climate, care, security and gender

In promoting gender-responsive climate action, the climate-care nexus deserves particular focus. Climate change and environmental degradation often lead to increased unpaid care, domestic and communal responsibilities. When equipped with intentional gender-responsive measures, climate change mitigation and adaptation, along with efforts to build a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, provide an opportunity to build and improve sustainable infrastructure that helps to reduce women and girls'

unpaid care and domestic work while improving their health and socioeconomic outcomes. It can contribute to creating decent jobs and economic opportunities that enable women and girls to be active participants in the green and blue economies.

Equal attention must be given to the interlinkages between climate change and peace and security, as well as their gender implications. The impacts of climate change exacerbate socioeconomic, political and environmental pressures, which amplify threats to peace and security with disproportionate impacts on women and girls due to their frequent association with national resources collection, usage and management. Conversely, conflicts and crises weaken communities' capacities to adapt to the increased frequency of hazards and changing conditions regarding the availability and distribution of natural resources.[5] In their climate change mitigation and adaptation actions, countries need to strategically leverage women and girls' unique knowledge and skills to facilitate sustainable natural resource management, build climate-resilient communities, and sustain peace and stability. Concerted and coordinated efforts across sectors, involving governments, grassroots women's organizations and other actors and stakeholders engaged in climate mitigation and adaptation, peace and security and women's empowerment agendas.

8.2.2 Promoting ethical, inclusive digital ecosystems for gender equality

Digital transformation has taken our societies well beyond connectivity, into a new era of technological transformation, including artificial intelligence (AI) that encompasses a broad range of technologies. Digital and emerging technologies present new economic and educational opportunities, and make possible new solutions for environmental protection, climate-resilient infrastructure and public services, smart communities, and universal design-based accessibility. Yet the digital transition also inherits, and possibly intensifies, pre-existing inequalities by further concentrating economic and societal powers in the hands of those who control latest technologies. Most, if not all countries in the region have elevated digital development as one of their top policy-setting agendas as they seek to turn the digital divide into a digital dividend.[6] To harness this strategic momentum for gender equality, action has to go beyond closing gender divides in digital connectivity and skills and promote ethical, inclusive and gender-responsive digital innovation and their use.

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3   UN-Women, *Feminist Climate Justice: A Framework for Action* (New York, 2023).

4   UNFCCC, "Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women, Synthesis report by the secretariat", FCCC/SBI/2022/7 (Bonn, 2022).

5   UNEP and others, *Gender, Climate & Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change* (Nairobi, 2020).

6   ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/L.1.

(a) Strengthening governance of digital and emerging technologies, including AI

Governments need to act urgently to adopt legislations and take steps to promote the common good, protect privacy and personal data, and take appropriate actions and preventive measures against abusive uses of digital and emerging technologies, including AI. Given the increasing use of digital and emerging technologies in political, social, economic and cultural activities and the delivery of public services, regulatory frameworks should give specific account of non-discrimination and equity in access to such technologies and information, with necessary measures to prevent the potential marginalization and exclusion of population groups who face challenges in accessing and using digitalized information and services. These regulatory frameworks could only be effective if accompanied with clear accountability, effective due diligence, oversight and remedy mechanisms, as well as collaboration with the private sector and civil society. Investment in training and capacity building of policy makers, judges and other legal professionals is urgently needed to ensure these regulatory frameworks and others concerning human rights in all respects are effectively implemented both online and offline.

The commitment of the private sector is important in developing, disseminating and guiding the uses of digital and emerging technologies, as well as information, content and services premised on such technologies.[7] Digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms are strongly encouraged to develop industry accountability frameworks, in consultation with governments and other stakeholders including users of diverse backgrounds. Such corporate accountability frameworks should help ensure that digital and emerging technologies such as AI are inclusive and privacy-respecting by design. Such frameworks can help increase transparency around the systems and processes of digital and emerging technologies to inform decision making by policy makers and users, mandate risk assessments, define corporate responsibilities and social safeguards standards. Digital technology companies, developers and social media platforms can ensure the provision of training on online safety, cybersecurity and other safeguards to their users, and help establish safe, secure and accessible reporting mechanisms for users and their advocates to report potential violation of relevant laws and standards and provide access to redress.[8]

Across regulatory frameworks, corporate accountability frameworks and industry actions, a strong gender and social inclusion perspective is needed to account for the human rights and the interest of women and girls, including the most socioeconomically marginalized groups among them. Vulnerable groups, including children, that interact with digital and emerging technologies should be proactively engaged in discussions about relevant policies and governance frameworks. Particularly, digital governance dialogues and frameworks need to address the critical issues related to combatting all forms of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, hate speech and discrimination, mis- and disinformation, cybercrimes, cyberbullying and child sexual exploitation and abuse, that occurs through or is amplified by the use of digital technology. Moreover, as data have become critical resources in the digital age and are generated and stored in ever-greater volumes as a result of digital technology developments, digital governance frameworks need to address privacy, safety and integrity in data flows, management and use.[9] In particular, given the increasing use of digital platforms and AI for the delivery of health services, Governments should put forward prudent policy measures regarding health, especially reproductive health data with respect to women and girls' bodily integrity and rights.[10]

(b) Investing in digital innovation for gender equality

Another crucial dimension of ethical, inclusive digital innovation is to ensure technologies do not exacerbate existing inequalities and that individuals, businesses and societies, regardless of background and size, can equally benefit from digitalization and thrive in the digital economy.

Countries in the region need to make gender-smart investments to close gender divides in digital connectivity, digital literacy and skills, and the talent pools and workforces that design, develop, use and govern emerging technologies, including AI. It is equally important to consider policy incentives for companies and employers in sectors that are increasingly reliant on digital and emerging technologies, including AI, to hire women and increase women's representation in technical, professional and leadership positions in these sectors.

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7   Ibid.

8   See A/RES/78/213, A/78/L.49 and United Nations Internet Governance Forum 2023, "Internet Governance Forum – Kyoto IGF Messages", Kyoto, 8 to 12 October 2023, available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/300/26576 (accessed on 19 August 2024).

9   United Nations Internet Governance Forum 2023, "Internet Governance Forum – Kyoto IGF Messages", Kyoto, 8 to 12 October 2023, available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/300/26576 (accessed on 19 August 2024).

10   Anita Gurumurthy and Nandini Chami (IT for Change), "Innovation to Tackle Gender Inequality: A Back-to-Basics Roadmap", expert paper prepared for UN-Women Expert Group Meeting in October 2022. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/EP.6_Anita%20Gurumurthy.pdf.

Countries in the region need to make strategic investment in digital public infrastructure that could enable women-owned businesses to benefit from and thrive in the booming digital economy. Such digital public goods may include public data pools and datasets, public data exchange protocols, cloud infrastructure, digital payment means as well as other digital business means and platforms using emerging technologies which are foundational to the digital economy. Essential to such investment is making sure that women-owned businesses, especially women-owned MSMEs and digital start-ups can access, afford and leverage productivity and efficiency advantages of these digital and emerging technologies. Preferential terms and technical assistance may be extended to women producers, platform workers and microentrepreneurs for the use of digital marketplaces, considering the market disadvantages they often face. Governments should deploy public financing investment, and facilitate collaboration between digital technology companies, developers and platforms and women's collectives and business networks.[11]

Countries can leverage digital and emerging technologies to make essential public services accessible and safe. The use of digital and technological innovation in public service delivery would be especially meaningful in remote and hard-to-reach communities, for persons with disabilities and for women and girls threatened by sexual and gender-based violence, whose reporting and help-seeking are hindered by safety concerns and economic and cultural barriers. Intelligently deployed, digital and emerging technologies could provide a safe space for women and girls to express their voices and opinions about sensitive issues, including during public emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, it is crucial to be mindful of various barriers to connectivity, access and user literacy that these groups face, especially older women and poor and less educated women and girls. Only when coupled with intentional investments to close gender digital divides and gender-responsive, inclusive safeguard measures, would digitalized public service delivery not lead to exclusion. Besides, digital service delivery should not entirely replace traditional service delivery means. These remain necessary for meeting diversified access needs and patterns of different population groups.

(c) Improving cross-border, multi-stakeholder cooperation on digital governance and innovation

The uses and impact of digital and emerging technologies, including AI, transcend national borders. Close collaboration and partnerships must be fostered at the regional and global levels, with particular attention paid to assisting developing countries in building and capitalizing on the digital dividend while navigating emerging challenges. Existing platforms such as the United Nations Internet Governance Forum should be leveraged to provide multi-stakeholder expertise and facilitate global multi-stakeholder dialogue and cooperation. A global governance mechanism that is founded upon dialogues among countries, with sufficient flexibility for adaptation in different national and local contexts, and upon collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society and academia is urgently needed in the context of rapidly evolving digital and emerging technologies.

The respective responsibilities and accountability of all parties in the digital governance life cycle need to be further clarified. Policy discussion, development and analysis concerning emerging technologies such as AI, which are currently focused in and on the Global North, need to more thoroughly account for the situations and solutions needed in and for the Global South.[12] These policies and governance frameworks need to be translated into actionable measures and effective implementation, with sound mechanisms to oversee and track the implementation and impact. Potential unintended effects of relevant regulations and policies, including those related to transparency, safety, privacy and the protection of expression and other rights, also need to be monitored and further understood.

Countries, digital technology companies and social media platforms, the civil society and other stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific are strongly encouraged to make concerted investment in actions recommended in existing regional and global frameworks, such as the Action Plan for Implementing the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Initiative, 2022 – 2026.[13] This is particularly relevant to those with the vision and objective to leave no one behind, and to support the implementation of the Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society[14] and the United Nations Secretary-General's Initiative on "Our Common Agenda", its seventh commitment on "improving digital cooperation" in particular.[15]

11   Ibid.
12   United Nations Internet Governance Forum 2023, "Internet Governance Forum – Kyoto IGF Messages", Kyoto, 8 to 12 October 2023, available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/300/26576 (accessed on 19 August 2024).
13   ESCAP/CICTSTI/2022/L.1.
14   United Nations and International Telecommunication Unions, "World Summit on the information Society: Plan of Action", document WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/5-E, 12 December 2003. Available at: https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html (accessed on 19 August 2024).
15   United Nations, "Our Common Agenda: Policy Brief 5: A Global Digital Compact – an Open, Free and Secure Digital Future for All" (New York, 2023).

Throughout the efforts to foster global, multi-stakeholder collaboration on the governance of digital and emerging technologies including AI, special attention should be paid to avoiding fragmentation of efforts and employing an inclusive approach. It is necessary to build and share relevant technical, social and legal expertise for the development, distribution, impact assessment and governance of digital and emerging technologies, including AI, to ensure the safeguard of human rights, the promotion of gender equality and social inclusion, and the responsible use of such technologies.[16] To ensure the employment of gender and inclusion lenses in these actions, the participation and leadership of women and girls in processes – from design, development, distribution, use and governance of digital and emerging technologies – is of utmost importance.

8.2.3 Investing in the care economy for broad-based empowerment of women and girls

Unpaid care and domestic responsibilities constitute one of the biggest contributors to gender gaps in educational, economic, social and political participation and undermines women and girls' well-being. It leaves them systematically disadvantaged. These gaps and challenges begin at a young age, increase during women's prime reproductive and economically productive years, and continue into the old age. In many cases, older women continue to care for young children, ageing spouses and other family members. This has led to a large number of the region's older women living without income security or sufficient care support. Public health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change-induced resource depletion and increasingly frequent disasters intensify women and girls' unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, at the expense of their own physical and mental health and their participation in education, employment and other income-generating activities. Holistic investment in the care economy is critically important in Asia and the Pacific.

(a) Making care-sensitive, gender-responsive investment in social, economic policies and climate action

As governments create policies to adapt to demographic changes, pandemics and climate emergencies, it is important that these policies are designed with the objective to recognize, reduce and redistribute the enormous unpaid care and domestic work burden borne by women and girls. The design of social protection schemes needs to account for the care needs of families and individuals, such as children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and the costs of care. Social protection schemes should provide adequate benefits to allow access to affordable and quality care services and compensate for the loss of income for unpaid caregivers who are often women. In particular, contributory social protection schemes should consider mechanisms to address women's career interruptions due to reproductive activities and care responsibilities. Such interruptions often result in discontinuity or low levels of contributions in contributory schemes, compromising women's eligibility and access to adequate level of benefits. Labour market and workplace policies and measures, often incentivized by the attempt to mitigate low fertility rates and shrinking labour forces, should bring in gender perspectives to support women in mitigating the impacts of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities and be mindful of the unintended consequence of reinforcing women's roles as carers. Moreover, investments in affordable, accessible and quality paid care services are equally necessary to redistribute care work between the family, the State and the market. These investments are promising for creating formal and decent job opportunities in the care sector, particularly benefiting women who are overrepresented among care workers. Infrastructure investments aimed at climate adaptation, as well as sustainable energy and water solutions, should incorporate care-responsive considerations to reduce women's time spent on resource collection and management.

(b) Shifting the paradigm of care

Developing the care economy requires significant resources allocation to be mobilized from public financing, private capital, climate and social impact investments and bonds and other innovative financing schemes. To achieve this, the paradigm of care must be shifted from understanding care as a private responsibility to be provided within the family or a welfare service to acknowledging it as a social responsibility and a public good of social and economic significance. Governments, academia, the private sector and regional and international organizations need to take concerted action to improve the generation and quality of time-use and other care-related data and statistics and advocate for the use of such data and statistics in socioeconomic analysis. Additionally, the fundamental norms that lead to unequal labour division between men and women must be transformed through both formal laws and policy incentives, such as statutory paternity and parental leaves shared by both parents. Informal norm changing processes should be embedded in family education, schooling and public education, with a particular focus on the engagement and mobilization of men and boys.

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16   See A/RES/78/213 and A/78/L.49, and United Nations Internet Governance Forum 2023, "Internet Governance Forum – Kyoto IGF Messages", Kyoto, 8 to 12 October 2023, available at: https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/300/26576 (accessed on 19 August 2024).

8.3 FOUNDATIONS FOR ACCELERATING PROGRESS: STRENGTHEN GENDER NORMS TRANSFORMATION, DATA INSIGHTS, FINANCING AND PARTNERSHIP MECHANISMS

To expedite progress in the priority areas presented above, countries in the region should employ proactive measures to tackle the entrenched gender social norms, close persisting gaps in gender data and statistics, promote gender-smart financing and foster innovative partnerships. Strengthening these underlying, cross-cutting areas provides the foundation for countries in the region to excel across all thematic areas concerning gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

8.3.1 Transforming gender social norms

Biased and harmful gender social norms underlie gender gaps and inequalities that women and girls experience across all dimensions of their life experiences. These gender norms contribute to enabling gender-based violence and stymying access to social protection. They undermine women and girls' sexual and reproductive health, their reproductive rights, and their access to education and skills training. Biased and harmful gender norms stop women and girls from fully participating and leading politically and deny them the ability to shape the global agenda related to the just and digital transition. Interacting with other norms that discriminate and/or exclude individual and groups by other identity factors, gender norms can lead to even higher levels of social exclusion of women and girls in all their variety. Those who have diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and those who are older, living with disabilities, from indigenous communities and are migrants often face extra discrimination. The impacts go beyond individual rights and experiences – including those of men and boys – to hinder economic and societal progress. These social norms penetrate the daily life and are passed on across generations through socialization in the home, at school, via the media and social media, in the workplace and the communities. They are perpetuated, reinforced and institutionalized through biased and discriminatory laws and policies. Therefore, transforming gender social norms has to be based upon progressive reforms in socialization, policies and institutions, and laws and regulatory frameworks – as the three levers of change to gender social norms.

(a) Socialization

People start to acquire gender norms, and the associated expectations and behaviours, from an early age through parental attitudes, education and social interactions through schools, workplaces, religious institutions, the media and social media. Challenging the socialization and internalization of gender norms often requires intentional reforms in content and practices of parenting, education in both formal and informal settings, religious activities, the media and social media. Typical contents and notions in these media that require radical changes are those that stereotype individuals' appearance, behaviours and perceptions, and social expectations about their roles, based on their sex. These stereotypes underestimate women and girls' capability, undervalue their work and normalize gender-based violence. While public education and community mobilization in various forms are necessary, these efforts must be institutionalized in order to achieve consistent, positive changes. Mandating gender and inclusion education in school curricula and regulating media and social media contents are extremely important for scrutinizing gender-based biases, stereotypes and discrimination, and fostering new, healthy gender social norms.

Engaging parents, educators, religious and community leaders, media and social media influencers – of different genders – in the actions is crucial. For instance, in India a school-based curriculum that engaged both boys and girls in classroom discussions about gender equality was found to result in more progressive gender attitudes. In Pakistan, an intervention that mobilized men's support for women's voting helped increase women voters' turnout as well as men's practical support to women's participation in voting. Another study in India suggests that social media can successfully reshape social gender norms and reduce the social acceptability of gender-based violence. To address negative portrayals of women and girls and gender bias in the media, including social media, 58 per cent of countries that responded to the online survey on the Beijing+30 review[17] reported having provided training to media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotypical, balanced and diverse images of women and girls in the media. The other most often reported actions included enacting, strengthening, and enforcing legal reforms to combat discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media (53 per cent) and promoting the participation and leadership of women in the media (50 per cent).

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17   A total of 40 Asia-Pacific countries responded to the global survey on the Beijing+30 review as of 18 July 2024.

(b) Policy incentives and institutional support

Biased gender norms normalize discriminatory practices such as unequal labour division in the home, occupational segregation and gender hierarchies in workplace and religious practices. These discriminatory practices can reinforce behaviours and attitudes towards individuals and groups of different genders. Any attempt to confront these norms could face social sanctioning while obedience would be socially rewarded. Investment in gender-responsive public policies and institutions with deliberate objectives to shift the distribution of labour and resources within and outside the household can contribute to transforming discriminatory practices. For example, paternity or parental leave policies, coupled with access to affordable and quality care services, can incentivize men to share childcare responsibilities and enable more women to enter the labour force. Social protection that reaches women and girls can increase their bargaining power at home, boost their likelihood to stay in school and lower the likelihood of early marriage. Gender-responsive budgets help enforce policies and programmes in a gender-responsive manner across sectors.

(c) Proactive reform in laws and regulatory frameworks

In some situations, biased gender norms are institutionalized in laws and policies as well as institutional mechanisms. This is evident in laws and policies restricting women and girls' mobility and their participation in education, economic and political life that continue to exist in many parts of the world. While removing these discriminatory laws and regulatory frameworks is important, legislative reforms must more proactively strengthen laws and regulatory frameworks that explicitly and deliberately support gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in order to transform gender norms. For example, laws against gender-based violence are needed which clearly define unacceptable behaviours, penalties for perpetrators, and the rights and redress for victim/survivors can foster a zero-tolerance culture. Laws that stipulate gender and equity quotas and reserved seats can lead to a tangible increase in women's representation in politics and leadership, and thus contribute to building the credibility of women as leaders, while gradually changing misconceptions of women's leadership capacity.

Tackling gender norms in socialization, public policies and institutional settings, and regulatory frameworks are all important to change gender social norms. A single intervention is unlikely to change systemic problems that are deeply entrenched in societies and cultures. A systematic approach is therefore needed to enable these change levers to interact and be mutually reinforcing. A change of gender norms must be at the heart of policy initiatives. For instance, shared parental leave should include a mandatory quota of leave to be taken by fathers to encourage a break with the norm of mothers bearing the full responsibility of childcare. Promoting women and girls' agency and leadership is essential in any intervention, especially those aimed at transforming gender norms. Removing literacy, economic and social barriers for women and girls is essential if women are to lead and take part in setting the agenda in the public and private sectors. Engaging men and boys is critical to transform gender norms. While men and boys often are privileged based on gender norms that perpetuate men's exercise of power over women, biased gender norms can harm men and boys as well, especially when they do not conform to norms of masculinity. Engaging men and boys, therefore, is essential to gender equality from a more diverse and inclusive social transformation perspective.

8.3.2 Bridging gaps in gender data and statistics

Gender data and statistics are critical for enabling robust gender analysis, progress monitoring, and impact assessment, which are necessary processes for evidence-based, gender-responsive policymaking and programming. Yet, significant gender data gaps persist across the Asia-Pacific region. An in-depth mapping of gender data availability in five Asia-Pacific countries during the period 2010–2020 revealed that 46 per cent of the 98 gender-relevant indicators of the SDGs were missing or lacked sex-disaggregation.[18] The proportion of indicators with sex-disaggregated data was at most 77 per cent across all six assessed domains, including health, education, economic opportunity, political participation, human security and the environment. Notably, the environment domain had the lowest proportion, with a mere 4 per cent at the national level.[19] A positive upward trend has been recorded in the availability of SDG statistics among ESCAP members and associate members in recent years. Yet in 2023, only 52 per cent of SDG indicators had two or more data points, while 39 per cent of the indicators lacked data altogether. Gender equality (Goal 5) continued to have the least available data in the region, with merely 16 per cent

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18   The 98 indicators were sourced from the list of SDG indicators or recommended by UN-Women to supplement the SDGs. Armenia, Bangladesh, Mongolia, the Philippines and Samoa were included in the study. See Open Data Watch, Data2X and ESCAP, "Bridging the gap: Mapping gender data availability in Asia and the Pacific", technical report (n.p., 2021).

19   Open Data Watch, Data2X and ESCAP, "Bridging the gap: Mapping gender data availability in Asia and the Pacific", technical report (n.p., 2021).

of indicators possessing sufficient information. Sex-disaggregated statistics were available for only 25 out of the 231 indicators to enable regional progress assessment.[20]

The COVID-19 pandemic has recently highlighted the consequence of the scarcity of sex-disaggregated data, which has limited a comprehensive assessment of the pandemic's gendered impacts and hindered the effectiveness of response and recovery efforts. Besides, data and statistics challenges in the region have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which regular data collection and generation in many countries were interrupted. In 2020, according to a survey that involved 23 Asia-Pacific countries, 40 per cent of the headquarter offices of national statistical offices (NSOs) in the region were fully or partially closed, more than half of them completely stopped field data collection involving face-to-face interviews, and nearly 75 per cent of them had to postpone fieldwork for planned censuses.[21]

Over the past five years, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have made efforts to strengthen gender data and statistics. Among the 40 Asia-Pacific governments that responded to the global survey on the Beijing+30 review, 45 per cent reported having established inter-agency coordination mechanisms on gender statistics, 43 per cent had legislated the development of gender statistics, 38 per cent reported using more gender-sensitive data in policy formulation and implementation, and 35 per cent had conducted new surveys to produce national baselines information on specialized topics. Going forward, participating governments recognized the continued need to invest in these actions. Investment and collaboration are urgently needed in the following regional priorities to fill the critical gaps in gender data and statistics:

(a) Prioritizing filling data and statistics gaps concerning existing and emerging regional priorities

The World Bank (WB) has proposed 13 areas for further research to close gender data gaps, including assets, care, climate change, conflict, crime and justice, entrepreneurship, environment, fiscal policy, gender-based violence, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), social norms, technology, and work and employment.[22] While these areas are equally relevant and important to Asia and the Pacific, national statistical offices, academia, private-sector actors, regional and international organizations could further focus attention on regional priorities of closing gender data gaps. These include: (i) quality

data on care and its gendered, socioeconomic implications; (ii) quality data and statistics on sexual and reproductive health, including data to measure effective interventions which could be used to inform actions to accelerate progress in reducing maternal mortality that has stagnated over the last decade in the region; (iii) data on women's political leadership and influence, focusing not only on representation but also on the influence of women in power; (iv) data on the prevalence of female genital mutilation and cutting which is nearly non-existent in the region; and (v) measuring emerging issues such as technology-facilitated gender-based violence and gender implications of climate change and disasters, with special attention paid to experiences of groups who are often excluded in data collection such as adolescents, older women and others.

(b) Improving methods, standards and guidelines for measuring emerging and essential issues

The comparability and quality of gender data remain a challenge. National statistical offices, academia, regional and international organizations urgently need to increase research and technical consultations to inform the development of improved methods, international standards and guidelines for quality and comparable data collection, expanding data collection scales, and strengthening ethical and safety adherence. Such actions are especially needed in areas related to gender-based violence and emerging issues such as climate change and digitalization, including technology-facilitated sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, innovative and diversified methods and means for continuing data collection during emergency situations need to be explored to ensure the availability of quality gender data to inform response actions.

(c) Ensuring that gender data and statistics account for intersectionality and power dynamics

Even where data exist, there are gaps in sufficient, comparable and high-quality data to account for the situations of different population groups. This can be partially ascribed to the lack of consistent, sufficient disaggregation of statistics by gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability, geographic location, migration status, income level, educational attainment and other identifiers. It is also due to the lack of intersectional analysis of data and statistics. Future data actions need to produce data that uncover the experiences and realities of those who have remained invisible in data. Data analysis needs to go beyond

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20   ESCAP, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024: Showcasing Transformative Actions* (United Nations publication, 2024).

21   ESCAP, UN DESA and the World Bank. "Monitoring the state of statistical operations under the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region, (July 2020). Available at: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Statistical_operations_under_COVID-19_in_the_Asia-Pacific_region.pdf.

22   Anna Tabitha Bonfert et al., "Levering Gender Data to Accelerate Gender Equality", World Bank Group Gender Thematic Policy Notes Series, July 2023.

accounting for differences between women and men, and measure gender power dynamics, such as gender social norms, and the issue of stigmatization associated with gender-based violence, to illuminate hidden realities.

(d) Creating the demand for gender data and statistics

Gender data gaps exist not only because of limited data collection capacity but due to the lack of appetite to use data to address gender concerns across sectors. National statistical systems in the region generally have restricted capacities to analyse data and statistics with a gender lens and intersectional methodologies, and to disseminate and communicate data in an effective and accessible manner. Consequently, this constrains the interest and ability of governments, women's organizations, academia, media and other stakeholders to use gender data and statistics to inform policy- and decision-making, research, service provision and advocacy. In many countries, data users are largely disconnected from producers. While potential users may be unaware of the availability of gender data, producers often fail to meet the needs of clients beyond government entities. To increase the availability, accessibility and use of gender data, there is an urgent need to address political, institutional, financial and technical shortfalls that perpetuate data gaps, and to better connect data producers and users.

8.3.3 Boosting gender-smart financing

Achieving gender equality costs. It is projected to cost $7.6 trillion annually from 2023 to 2030 for all developing economies around the world to achieve eight key SDG indicators related to gender equality.[23] This represents a per capita annual cost of about $1,383 to reach gender quality in pivotal areas, such as eradicating poverty, alleviating hunger and supporting women's equal participation in society. Despite the urgent financial needs, the current government spending trajectory leaves a stark spending gap at $420 billion each year globally, with all developing economies counted. Upper-middle and high-income developing economies, and small island developing states (SIDS), face the largest annual gap relative to the total annual cost, at approximately 6 per cent of their total required funds.[24]

The agreed conclusions of the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2021), inter alia, state that significant investments are needed to close resources gaps for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through the mobilization of adequate financial resources from all sources possible.[25] Efforts may include domestic and international resource mobilization and allocation, the full implementation of official development assistance (ODA) and combatting illicit financial flows. The importance of promoting the control, ownership, management and participation of women in the mobilization of adequate resources, capacity building and transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms, in order to enhance the effective use of such resources and technologies to enable gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, was also stressed.

Despite increasing consensus on the urgency of adequate resources allocation for gender equality, the actual allocation of funds remains marginal in the Asia-Pacific region, relative to the scale of interventions needed, and is at risk of being sidelined in face of other challenges. Among the 40 Asia-Pacific governments that responded to the global survey on the Beijing+30 review, 88 per cent reported having a valid national strategy or action plan for achieving gender equality. However, less than half (45 per cent) indicated that the national strategy or plan was costed and allocated with sufficient financial resources for the implementation. Half of the responding governments (50 per cent) had not tracked the proportion of their public budgets invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The economic fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global debt crisis threaten to further shrink the resources allocation for gender equality. A total of 21 responding governments reported having introduced fiscal consolidation or austerity measures over the past five years. Only four countries had assessed the potential impact of these measures on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls before putting them in place and one country assessed the impacts after relevant measures were put in place. There is a pressing need for countries to diversify financing schemes and invest more and better.

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23   The estimate is based on per capita cost assessed by a study of 48 developing economies, home to 68 per cent of people living in developing economies worldwide, and applied to all developing countries worldwide. The eight indicators covered in the cost estimate include SDG 1.1.1A15F (proportion of population below international poverty line (%), age 15+, female; SDG 1.3.1 (proportion of population covered by social assistance programs (%); SDG 2.1.2F (prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity, female (%); SDG 3.1.1 (maternal mortality rate); SDG 5.4.1 (proportion of time spent on unpaid care work (%), ratio female/male); SDG 5.5.1 (proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (% of total seats); SDG 5.5.2 (proportion of women in managerial positions – 13th ICLS(%); SDG 8.6.1 (proportion of youth not in education, employment or training – 13th ICLS (%). See UN Trade & Development (UNCTAD), The costs of achieving the SDGs: Gender quality (webpage). Available at: https://unctad.org/sdg-costing/gender-equality (accessed on 08 June 2024).

24   UN Trade & Development (UNCTAD), The costs of achieving the SDGs: Gender quality (webpage). Available at: https://unctad.org/sdg-costing/gender-equality (accessed on 08 June 2024).

25   E/CN.6/2021/L.3.

Member States and stakeholders in Asia and the Pacific may consider boosting gender-smart financing through the following recommended actions:

+ Prioritize **gender-responsive budgeting** by establishing robust linkages between planning and budgeting processes, ensuring that gender considerations are integrated into all stages of the planning and budgeting cycle, from policy formulation to resource allocation and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation.

+ Develop gender-responsive **fiscal policies** that promote gender equality, address women's and girls' specific needs, and ensure an equitable distribution of resources. While countries have limited fiscal space, a change of mindset is in need to view spending on gender equality and the empowerment of women as investments for sustainable and better socioeconomic and environmental returns that would benefit all.

+ Analyse the gender-differentiated impact of **revenue-raising policies** including through gender audits and by removing gender bias and discrimination in tax policies to ensure that tax revenues are raised and spent in ways that promote gender equality.

+ Introduce gender-responsive **progressive taxation strategies** by designing tax policies that consider gender disparities in income, wealth and economic opportunities and redistribute wealth to benefit women and girls.

+ Promote **sustainable and gender-inclusive debt instruments** such as social and sustainability-linked bonds and loans that have gender equality as a priority objective, as well as debt swaps that target specific gender equality goals. These are meant to finance projects that reduce gender inequalities and promote the empowerment of women.

+ Increase the share of **climate and environment finance** that supports gender equality outcomes through multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder implementation, including dedicated budgets that focus on gender equality as a specific outcome of climate and environment investments.

+ Create and finance targeted initiatives in **key sectors** such as agrifood systems that aim to increase women's empowerment and well-being through transformative solutions, enhancing the documentation of experiences, assessment of impacts, dissemination of knowledge and promotion of successful initiatives to scale.

+ Strengthen the enabling environment for access to **capital**, including through micro credit institutions, venture capital, private equity and other blended finance[26] tools, to support women's entrepreneurship and women-owned micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

+ Promote **private sector engagement** in national efforts that promote gender equality or similar initiatives that improve women's and girls' livelihoods, including through encouraging a shift in investment practices from investment for profit to **investment for impact**, as an alternative asset class that channels large-scale private capital to address social and environmental challenges, directing it towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

+ Incorporate gender considerations in **foreign direct investment** (FDI) strategies and decision-making to amplify the positive impact of FDI on women in the host economies.

+ Explore financing schemes to address critical funding gaps to address gender inequalities in **fragile states**, focusing not only on relief and recovery but also on actions that take a development approach to build socioeconomic resilience of people, including women and girls. In these contexts, a combination of overseas development assistance, philanthropic funding and private-sector resources may be considered to enable sufficient and timely funding allocations.

8.3.4 Fostering innovative partnerships

The increasing complex challenges that emerge from megatrends, namely climate change, demographic shifts and digital and technological transformation, require creative partnerships. At the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2021), Member States agreed to strengthen international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, to make progress in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, noting the importance of these various cooperation mechanisms complementing each other.[27] Innovative partnerships should be tailored to make timely and proactive moves to seize opportunities presented in key transitions associated with these megatrends.

The traditional roles and mindsets of and interactions among different stakeholders involved in the partnership landscape need to be adjusted or redefined. Governments should mainstream gender throughout governance systems and practices. They need to be proactive in formulating responsive strategies

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26 Blended finance refers to catalytic concessional capital from philanthropic and public sources that can be used alongside commercial capital to help overcome market failures and address constraints for potential projects with high development impact and uncertain commercial returns. Blended finance tools including loan, bonds, equity and debt-sharing facilities can mobilize more capital for women-owned businesses which are especially important to emerging and developing economies. See IMF, *Closing the Gender Finance Gap through the Use of Blended Finance*, (Washington, D.C., 2022).

27 E/CN.6/2021/L.3.

and policies to capitalize on emerging sectors while preventing them from widening pre-existing inequalities. There needs to be more nuanced understanding of where and how the power of **the private sector** can be best utilized to accelerate the implementation, for the benefit of women and girls as well as population groups who tend to gain less from growth and development. The contribution by the private sector has to be based on meaningful partnerships and incentives beyond corporate social responsibility and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. **Civil society stakeholders, including women's CSOs and youth organizations**, have been instrumental in prioritizing gender equality and women's empowerment on the development agenda, delivering services to women and girls in need, and mobilizing communities alongside government entities.

Where institutional gaps exist, their roles and contributions are particularly important. An open and pluralistic civic space needs to be maintained as it is critical for CSOs' independent functioning and advocacy. CSOs need to be supported and empowered to communicate and collaborate more strategically and effectively with other actors within Government and the private sector, as well as the general public, to fulfil their role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Partnership strategies may be curated to facilitate transformative actions. These may include:

+ Policy stimulus, public procurement and various financing arrangements (e.g., sovereign and non-sovereign loans, development finance, development impact bonds, social impact bonds, and foreign direct investment) channelled to support the sectors involved in the green, digital and care economies should be tied to specific objectives that increase women's workforce participation and decent work in the respective sectors, and gender-equal and inclusive outcomes.

+ Private sector stakeholders need to be motivated to integrate gender equality and inclusion into their core principles for innovation, corporate accountability frameworks and industry actions. This means that the design of products, algorithms and other technological innovations need to be conscious about their differentiated impacts on different genders. To transform the currently gender-biased or at best gender-blind practices, systematic changes need to take place in higher education, professional training and professional standards for relevant occupations.

+ Data collaboration needs to be broadened to include not only national statistical systems, academia and regional and international organizations but also civil society organizations and the private sector, including digital technology companies. Such partnerships should aim to diversify data sources, improve the availability, accessibility and quality of gender data across sectors through participatory processes, including the generation, analysis and uses of new forms of data. Consensus must be found on gender-responsive, ethical principles for data collection, analysis, dissemination, communication and use.

Partnerships and collaboration should be fostered to assist countries, where large gender gaps and inequalities exist, to promote inclusive socioeconomic development. Asia and the Pacific is a highly heterogeneous region in many dimensions. Progress towards the 2030 Agenda has been uneven across the region. Countries in special situations, including SIDS, least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), are most in need of support to make progress.[28] The regional Beijing+30 Review has found that each of the subregions (i.e., East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, the Pacific, South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia) has a unique set of achievements and challenges in the implementation of the BPfA. This means regional collaboration should aim to direct more financial and technical resources, as well as investments, to empower countries lagging furthest behind. Moreover, partnership and collaboration are needed to address problems most relevant to country specificities. Learning and exchange on good practices should be promoted among countries with similar contexts and situations, including by leveraging vehicles such as South-South cooperation and triangular cooperation.

8.4 CONCLUSION

Despite the many challenges and uncertainties faced by countries in the region today, there is some satisfaction to be drawn from the progress made and hope in the context of opportunities for gender equality that arise from digital and technological innovations. These provide potential solutions which were before out of reach. Some of the crises present "silver linings," incentivizing governments to invest more in strengthening resilience of the people, the economy and the environment. If seized, these opportunities have the potential to propel transformative change if gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is made an integral part of the development agenda. The geographical vastness; the cultural, religious and societal diversity; and the demographic dynamics of Asia and the Pacific require strategies and solutions to foster equitable development across subregions and countries to ensure just transitions for all.

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28   ESCAP, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024: Showcasing Transformative Actions* (United Nations publication, 2024).

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

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