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## UNCSW

Strengthening the Protection and Empowerment of Women in the Asian Subcontinent, addressing the Plights of Rohingya, Uyghur, and Afghan Women



## ***United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW)***

### **“Strengthening the Protection and Empowerment of Women in the Asian Sub-continent, addressing the Plights of Rohingya, Uyghur, and Afghan Women”**

Gender equality is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is both a standalone goal – Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – and a core component of 13 of the 17 SDGs.<sup>1</sup> Overall, 76 of the 169 SDG targets establish conditions for gender equality and women’s rights, and 53 of the 231 indicators explicitly mention women, girls, gender or sex. The fundamental principle of leaving no one behind requires addressing the structural causes of gender inequality as well as its consequences on the lives of millions of women and girls around the world. The momentum initiated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has opened up new perspectives on change, mobilized new actors, and paved the way for the implementation of new policies and programmes that seek to achieve gender equality.

Twenty-five years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995, Southeast Asian governments have demonstrated their commitment to advancing on the path towards gender equality. All countries in the region have signed and ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). At the regional level, political commitments have primarily taken place within the framework of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In 2010, ASEAN countries committed to gender equality through the comprehensive Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children (ASEAN, 2010[1]). It was followed in 2015 by the adoption of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, which pledged to promote a high quality of life and equitable access to opportunities for women and to protect their human rights (ASEAN, 2015[2]). In 2017, ASEAN countries operationalised their political commitment and aligned it with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the ASEAN Declaration on the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the Sustainable Development Goals (ASEAN, 2017[3]). The declaration represents a key milestone, as it urges governments to collect high-quality and sex-disaggregated data. Moreover, it introduces the concepts of gender-responsive policies and budgeting, encourages women’s equal access to and full participation in the decision-making bodies and mechanisms involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and calls for the engagement of men and boys as agents of change. In 2020, ASEAN countries strengthened their commitments toward gender equality and the advancement of women’s rights through the consolidation of the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework.



Yet, achieving gender equality in Southeast Asia remains a long journey, and discriminatory social institutions continue to critically undermine women's and girls' rights and opportunities. Many legal frameworks discriminate against women and girls in essential areas of their lives. Moreover, patriarchal and customary norms continue to influence both personal and collective opinions and behaviours throughout the region. The effect on women's and girls' lives is profound, ranging from an unequal distribution of household chores, poor labor status and lower political representation to pervasive domestic violence. In this regard, women and girls in Southeast Asia face systemic discrimination every day, which severely limits women's access to economic and leadership opportunities. As the COVID-19 crisis unfolds across the world, its socio-economic consequences already exacerbate women's vulnerabilities and reinforce existing imbalances (OECD, 2020[4]). This chapter explores these deeply entrenched discrimination in Southeast Asia and provides policy recommendations to address the root causes of gender inequality and ensure that all women and girls in the region can live their lives fully empowered.

## **Discriminatory social institutions constitute major barriers to women's empowerment**

### **Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to transform the world so that every woman and girl benefits from full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment are removed. Beyond SDG 5, which specifically targets gender equality, gender equality and women's empowerment are necessary requirements for the achievement of all SDGs. As stated by the United Nations, the empowerment of women is "the process by which women take control over their lives, acquiring the ability to make strategic choices" (United Nations, 2002[15]). In other words, women's empowerment implies that women are in a position to make meaningful choices, to exercise control over their lives, and to influence decisions that affect their lives in both the private and public spheres (OECD, 2017[16]).

Against this backdrop, numerous dimensions and tools are critical to empowering women. Women's empowerment is a complex and multidimensional concept that results from a combination of many factors. In particular, quality education, training, self-confidence, access to and control over resources, political representation and decision-making power, proper health, control over their bodies, and the capacity to transform social institutions constitute critical determinants of women's empowerment. In many ways, women's empowerment is intrinsically linked with human development, as the critical factors of empowerment – such as education, skills or health – overlap with the fundamental building blocks of human capital. Any constraint placed on these factors hampers women's empowerment and diminishes their potential human capital development, which has long-term implications for the



productivity of the current and next generations of workers, as well as for the present and future socio-economic status of countries.



Discriminatory social institutions, and particularly gender-based social norms, are at the heart of limitations placed on women's empowerment. Embedded social and cultural values, norms, and beliefs constitute the basis for structures and institutions of power. These power structures are key determinants of women's educational, economic, health and political status within a society, which in turn play a critical role in women's opportunities and abilities to achieve equal power compared to men. For instance, the combination of child marriage among girls and norms favouring boys' education can severely diminish girls' educational status, which has adverse consequences on their empowerment and their future ability to gain control over their lives. Likewise, traditional views of women's roles within the household and imbalances of unpaid care and domestic work significantly hamper women's economic empowerment.

This section sheds light on these interlinkages between a range of key factors affecting women's empowerment and discriminatory social norms from the perspective of Southeast Asian women across four major areas: health, education, economic empowerment and political empowerment..



# Current status of women

- One in every 10 women is living in extreme poverty (10.3 per cent). If current trends continue, by 2030, an estimated 8 per cent of the world's female population – 342.4 million women and girls – will still be living on less than \$2.15 a day. Most (220.9 million) will reside in sub-Saharan Africa [5].
- Women are less likely to have access to social protection. Gender inequalities in employment and job quality result in gaps in access to social protection acquired through employment, such as pensions, unemployment benefits, or maternity protection. Coverage of women lags behind men by 8 per cent (34.3 per cent and 26.5 per cent, respectively). Globally, an estimated 73.5 per cent of women in wage employment do not have access to social protection [6].
- Women are more food insecure than men. Gender gaps in food insecurity have grown from 1.7 per cent in 2019 to more than 4 per cent in 2021, with 31.9 per cent of women moderately or severely food insecure compared to 27.6 per cent of men. This is even more acute for older and indigenous women, women of African descent, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities, and those living in rural and remote areas [7].
- Women and girls suffer most from the dearth of safely managed water and sanitation. Women and girls are responsible for water collection in 70 per cent of households without access to water on premises. Menstrual hygiene management is difficult in the absence of water, soap, and gender-responsive sanitation facilities, whether at home, school, or work [8].
- Women are less likely than men to have access to financial institutions or have a bank account. The gender gap in bank account ownership has dropped in 2021 after years of stagnation, although rates vary across economies. In developing economies, the gender gap stands at 6 per cent while globally it sits at 4 per cent with 78 per cent of men reporting having an account at a formal financial institution compared to 74 per cent of women [9].
- The digital divide remains a gendered one with 37 per cent of women globally not using the internet, meaning 259 million fewer women have access to the internet than men [10].

## CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN:

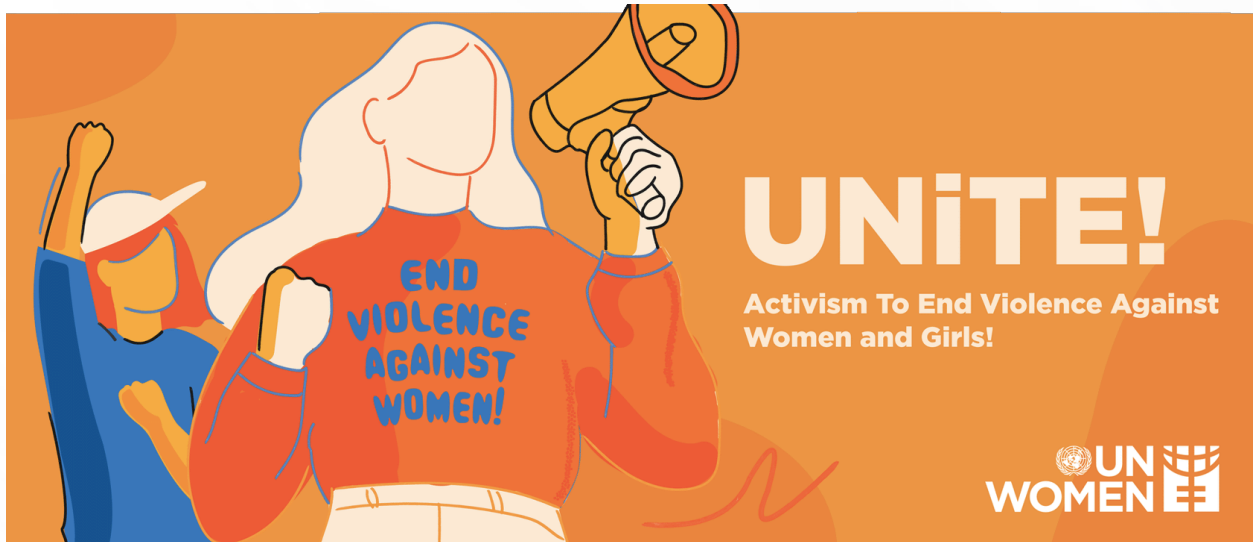
### 1. Gender Based Violence:

Gender-based violence is a worldwide pandemic today: an estimated 27% of women experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetimes. In South Asia specifically,



the prevalence of lifetime intimate partner violence is 35% higher than the global average. The reasons are complex and include a combination of socio-economic structures, patriarchal attitudes, and prevalent social norms that define gender roles.

We know that violence against women and girls leaves deep emotional scars and disrupts the social, economic, physical, mental, and emotional needs of the survivors. But it is also a tragic loss of human potential—girls and women who suffer violence often miss out on the chance to access education, healthcare, and employment, as well as participate meaningfully in society. Global economic costs of violence against women are estimated to be 2% of global GDP, or US\$1.5 trillion.



### ***Gender-based violence is a critical challenge to development and prosperity***

The World Bank's approach to gender-based violence has evolved through the years, influenced by the global movement to elevate women's rights and gain a deeper understanding of the devastating impact of violence. Over the past ten years, the World Bank has increasingly integrated the fight against gender-based violence as a core area of engagement across multiple sectors and programs in South Asia—from agriculture and food to water and transportation. As we mark the 2022 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence, the World Bank is more committed than ever to supporting countries with context-specific policies and solutions to help prevent it.

### ***Supporting the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence***

Gender-based violence is a complex multi-sectoral challenge. Our approach prioritizes the delivery of services that promote the health, well-being, and safety of women and girls. It includes the creation of safe spaces, providing access to economic opportunities, and building infrastructure and systems that safeguard women and girls.



In Nagaland, India, around 2,000 government-run schools will benefit from gender-based violence interventions via the World Bank-supported Enhancing Classroom Teaching and Resources project. About 64% of women in Nagaland have neither sought help nor reported the violence perpetrated against them. Childline Kohima, a civil society organization, recorded 500 “child protection risk” cases between 2015-2019 based on its helpline initiative. The project is committed to making the learning environment in schools free from violence—from building separate bathrooms for girls; working with parents, teachers, students, and the community to help them understand what violence against children is; and ensuring that schools have well-established procedures to deal with instances of violence.

Gender-based violence intensifies in the context of conflict, disaster, and other shocks. In Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, where around one million Rohingya who fled violence and persecution in Myanmar’s Rakhine State currently reside, the Government of Bangladesh’s Health and Gender Support Project for Cox’s Bazar District, which is supported by the World Bank, provides female survivors of violence access to safe spaces where they can be in the company of other women, bring their children for nutrition services, and get mental health support. Currently, more than 400,000 girls and women—among both the displaced Rohingya population and the larger host community of Cox’s Bazar—are using these services within the camps and in the localities outside the camps respectively.

## **2. Women and Healthcare:**

In 1994, something remarkable happened at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo. After years of often heated negotiations, 179 governments agreed on a Programme of Action that, for the first time, placed individual dignity and human rights firmly at the heart of human development.

It did so by reconciling widely divergent views on population and development, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health, and sustainable development – to empower individuals and, by extension, entire societies and nations.





A core component of ICPD is universal access to sexual and reproductive health. Women must be able to shape their lives through access to rights-based family planning, including modern contraception and skilled birth attendance – ensuring that every pregnancy is wanted and every childbirth is safe. Without this we cannot achieve women's empowerment, including their economic empowerment.

For young persons, ICPD refers to the components now included in comprehensive sexuality education, providing accurate and timely information on issues that go beyond sexual and reproductive health to embrace gender equality and a respect for diversity, establishing a solid foundation for life.

For all countries, ICPD underscores the importance of robust data for development, gathered through censuses and other mechanisms, providing governments with accurate representations of their populations, forecasting demographic patterns such as the youth bulge and ageing populations, enabling countries to capitalise on opportunities and plan better for challenges.

Truly revolutionary at the time, ICPD remains all the more urgent a quarter of a century later in this era of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and, ironically, at a time of growing conservatism around the world.

Many long-time ICPD champions are changing course. Hard-won individual rights and freedoms are being curtailed. Censuses and data gathering are being politicised, with vulnerable populations disenfranchised in the process.

In this environment, Asia-Pacific governments gathered last week at the United Nations regional hub in Bangkok – to take stock of how far we've come in achieving ICPD, especially in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

Maternal mortality remains high: 85,000 women in Asia-Pacific died while giving birth in 2015. And, last year, an estimated 132 million women in the region had an unmet need for contraception.

While many countries have adopted laws, national policies and action plans on gender equality and eliminating violence against women and girls, 15-68% of women in Asia-Pacific have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a partner in their lifetime.

Rates of child marriage and teenage pregnancy also remain high. By the age of 18, one in seven girls in the region has given birth, and more than one third of girls are married.

Women's labour force participation has stalled in our region, and in South Asia it has





actually fallen over the past decade. Women remain concentrated in informal employment and continue to have primary responsibility for unpaid care work.

These trends are closely inter-related. Globally, women's labour force participation decreases with each additional child by around 10-15% among women aged 25-39. Unintended pregnancy constrains opportunities for education and economic advancement for women and girls. Violence against women leads to higher health costs, lost days at work, and lost income. The estimated economic cost of gender-based violence runs from 1.2-3.7% of GDP – similar to what many countries spend on education.

In listing these and other gaps that need to be bridged, governments reiterated that without ICPD, we would not have the SDGs. The Programme of Action is truly integral to the 2030 Agenda.

Similarly, without fulfilling ICPD, we will not achieve the SDGs, whose ultimate pledge is to leave no one behind.

### **3. Discrimination in Education:**

Today more girls than ever go to school. However, despite progress, women and girls continue to face multiple barriers based on gender and its intersections with other factors, such as age, ethnicity, poverty, and disability, in the equal enjoyment of the right to quality education. This includes barriers, at all levels, to access quality education and within education systems, institutions, and classrooms, such as, amongst others:

- harmful gender stereotypes and wrongful gender stereotyping
- child marriage and early and unintended pregnancy
- gender-based violence against women and girls
- lack of inclusive and quality learning environments and inadequate and unsafe education infrastructure, including sanitation
- Poverty

The international community has recognised the equal right to quality education of everyone and committed to achieving gender equality in all fields, including education, through their acceptance of international human rights law. This means that states have legal obligations to remove all discriminatory barriers, whether they exist in law or in everyday life, and to undertake positive measures to bring about equality, including in access of, within, and through education.



The right to education on the basis of non-discrimination and equality is a recognised right under human rights law. Provisions relating to gender equality in education can be found in both general and specific international treaties, as well as treaties concluded in most regions of the world.

At this point it may be useful to refer to our page education as a right, which explains the normative content of the right to education, that is what rights-holders are entitled to (education must be acceptable, accessible, adaptable, and available) and states' legal obligations to realise that content, including obligations of immediate effect, minimum core obligations, and progressive realisation, which are key to understanding the content laid out below.

To summarise, all provisions related to non-discrimination carry immediate obligations and are considered a minimum core obligation, which means states must take immediate action as a matter of priority. Provisions related to achieving substantive equality, if they are not concerned with eliminating discrimination, and achieving the right to quality education for all (with some exceptions) are subject to progressive realisation. This means that states have an obligation to take deliberate, concrete, and targeted steps, according to maximum available resources, to move expeditiously and effectively towards the full realisation of the right to education.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979, CEDAW) is the only legally binding treaty at the international level focusing exclusively on women's rights. It interprets and applies the right to education in a way that considers the specific needs and circumstances of women and girls. Article 10 of CEDAW is the most comprehensive provision on women and girls' right to education in international law. It sets forth the normative content in relation to the elimination of discrimination against women and ensuring equal rights with men in the field of



education, including:

- the same conditions for access to studies and diplomas at all educational levels, in both urban and rural areas
- the same quality of education
- the elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women (see below)
- the same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants
- the same access to programmes of continuing education, including literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing the gender gap in education
- the reduction of female student drop-out rates and programmes for women and girls who have left school prematurely
- the same opportunity to participate in sports and physical education
- access to educational information on health, including advice on family planning

***A number of other CEDAW provisions are also relevant to gender equality in education.***

- Article 1 defines discrimination against women as:

“any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

- Article 2 sets out the legal and policy measures states should undertake to eliminate discrimination against women and therefore applies to the totality of rights found in CEDAW. This includes legal and policy measures related to the implementation of the right to education on a non-discriminatory basis.
- Article 3 requires states to take all appropriate measures in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields to ensure that women can exercise and enjoy their human rights on a basis of equality with men.
- Article 4 sets out the conditions for the use of temporary special measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women.



- Article 5 requires states to take appropriate measures to eliminate gender stereotyping (see below), prejudices, discriminatory cultural practices, and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.
- Article 7 is on the right to participate in public and political life. These rights are fundamental in ensuring that gender perspectives and issues are considered when laws, policies, and other measures affecting gender equality in education are designed, formulated, and implemented.
- Article 11 (1) (c) provides for the right to vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training, and recurrent training.
- Article 14 (d) sets out the right to education of rural women, which includes the right to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy.
- Lastly Article 16 sets out the rights of women with respects to marriage and family life. Article 16 (2) expressly prohibits child marriage and requires states to set a minimum age of marriage (see below).

## **THE ROHINGYA CRISIS:**

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugees as ‘people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country’ (UNHCR, n.d.-a). Refugees are protected by international law. The Refugee Convention (1951), a key legal document, defines a refugee as ‘someone unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.’ Global Trends in Forced Displacement-2020 by the UNHCR estimated the number of refugees worldwide at 26.4 million, among which 20.7 million are under the UNHCR mandate (“UNHCR Global Trends – Forced Displacement in, 2020,” n.d.). Based on the same report, 82.4 million individuals have been forcibly displaced globally at the end of 2020 due to conflict, persecution, violence, human rights violations and events disturbing public order (UNHCR, 2020). With war, civil unrest and political persecution enduring, thousands more join this list each year.

Often the terms ‘refugees’ and ‘migrants’ are used interchangeably; however, the UNHCR notes that these are not necessarily synonymous. The important distinction lies in the fact that the former is ‘forced’ to flee their countries of origin where their safety is threatened and seek refuge in a foreign land, while the latter ‘choose’



to move to foreign lands to improve their lives. (Refugees, n.d.-b). While there are similarities between these two sets of people, an important difference lies in the fact that immigrants have the choice of returning to their native country. When they do so, they will be reinstated with the protection of the government.



## **The Rohingya community: A premise**

The Rohingyas are a group of religious and ethnic minorities, predominantly Muslim, native to the Rakhine state (also known as the Arakan) of a Buddhist majority Myanmar. Historical accounts show that they inhabited this region even prior to the British East India colonisation. However, the new Myanmar government passed legislation in 1982 excluding these natives of the Arakan state from citizenship (Majeed, 2019).

Persecution from the majoritarian regimes within their country has left these people stateless (Milton et al., 2017) and bereft of human rights (Blackmore et al., 2020). Further, Myanmar's changing political scenario and the predominant military regime have allegedly persecuted these minorities under operations such as 'Operation King Dragon' and 'Operation Clean and Beautiful State', which have led to en masse exodus since the early 1990s. With the heightening of this conflict in 2017, the United Nations (UN) agency in 2018 approximated that about 671 000 Rohingya



refugees had since fled Myanmar to neighbouring Bangladesh alone. Others have sought refuge in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India (Mahmood et al., 2017; Majeed, 2019; Tay et al., 2019b). These individuals have suffered decades of discrimination, violence and persecution in Myanmar (previously Burma) and are one of the largest 'stateless' populations globally.

52% of these refugees living in Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps in Cox's Bazar are women and children (UNHCR-Rohingya emergency, n.d.). It comes with little surprise then that these debased families live in overcrowded shelters, often having to share it with more than one family. It is said that in these refugee camps, 93% of the population live below the UNHCR emergency standards, which are set at 45 square metres per person. Moreover, this region of Bangladesh is prone to severe monsoons with flooding, landslides and cyclones, adding the element of natural calamity to an already precipitous living environment. Thus, there is high morbidity from infectious diseases and malnutrition besides insufficient sanitary and hygiene facilities.

In August 2017, armed attacks, massive scale violence, and serious human rights violations forced thousands of Rohingya to flee their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State. Many walked for days through jungles and undertook dangerous sea journeys across the Bay of Bengal to reach safety in Bangladesh. Now, more than 960,000 people have found safety in Bangladesh with a majority living in the Cox Bazar's region - home to the world's largest refugee camp. The United Nations has described the Rohingya as ***"the most persecuted minority in the world."***





## Who are the Rohingya?

The Rohingya are a Muslim ethnic minority group who have lived for centuries in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar - formerly known as Burma. Despite living in Myanmar for many generations, the Rohingya are not recognized as an official ethnic group and have been denied citizenship since 1982, making them the world's largest stateless population.

As a stateless population, Rohingya families are denied basic rights and protection and are extremely vulnerable to exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and abuse.

## How did the Rohingya refugee crisis begin?

The Rohingya have suffered decades of violence, discrimination and persecution in Myanmar. Their largest exodus began in August 2017 after a massive wave of violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State, forcing more than 742,000 people - half of them children - to seek refuge in Bangladesh. Entire villages were burned to the ground, thousands of families were killed or separated and massive human rights violations were reported.





## Where are the Rohingya seeking refuge?

More than 1 million Rohingya refugees have fled violence in Myanmar in successive waves of displacement since the 1990s. Now, more than 960,000 Rohingya refugees are living in Bangladesh with a majority settled in and around Kutupalong and Nayapara refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region — some of the largest and most densely populated camps in the world.

More than half of all Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh (52 percent) are children, while 51 percent are comprised of women and girls. The current refugee population accounts for one-third of the total population in the Cox's Bazar region, making support to host communities essential for peaceful coexistence.

Since 2021, to decongest the 33 camps in Cox's Bazar, nearly 30,000 refugees have been relocated to Bhasan Char island by the Government of Bangladesh. While protection services and humanitarian assistance have been scaled up on the island, significant gaps remain in service delivery and the sustainability of critical assistance.

Rohingya refugees have also sought refuge in other neighboring countries like Thailand (92,000) and India (21,000), with smaller numbers settling in Indonesia, Nepal and other countries across the region.

Armed clashes across Myanmar have continued to trigger displacement, bringing the total number of internally displaced people (IDP) within the country to more than 1.8 million — including 1.5 million of whom have been internally displaced since February 2021.

## What is happening to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh right now?

In May 2023, Cyclone Mocha struck Bangladesh and Myanmar, the most severe storm to hit the region in recent years, causing widespread destruction. Cyclone Mocha had a devastating impact on homes, infrastructure and millions of people across Bangladesh and Myanmar. The storm impacted 2.3 million people in Bangladesh,







including 930,000 Rohingya refugees.

With the monsoon rains starting soon after, residents of the camp have attempted to rebuild as best they can before the rainy season reaches its peak. But only a fraction of damaged and destroyed shelters have been repaired, and thousands of people remain exposed to the elements.

UNHCR and its partners, along with government agencies, are on the ground to provide emergency relief to the affected communities. Rapid assessments are ongoing. The immediate priorities include the provision of emergency shelter, clean drinking water, food supplies and ensuring access to health and sanitation facilities.

### **How is UNHCR supporting Rohingya refugees?**

Rohingya refugees lack legal status and livelihood opportunities, and their movements outside the camps are restricted, leaving them entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance and at heightened risk of exploitation and abuse. UNHCR's activities include registering refugees, providing protection and legal assistance, preventing gender-based violence, ensuring provision of adequate shelter, health care and sanitation, supporting education and skills development, as well as livelihood opportunities and distributing life-saving relief items where needed.

Given the camps and their inhabitants are highly exposed to weather-related hazards such as severe storms like Cyclone Mocha, or to fires, flooding and landslides, UNHCR also works to protect and mitigate against such dangers. Underfunding directly affects the successful implementation of climate actions, in particular the provision of liquefied petroleum gas to refugees as a clean and reliable source of energy for cooking, and one which protects women and children from long and dangerous daily treks to collect firewood.

### **What is the condition of women of the Rohingya Community?**

UNHCR continues to engage in political dialogue on their voluntary repatriation. Until safe and dignified returns are possible, Bangladesh and the Rohingya refugees will require sustained and adequate financial support to ensure they can live safely.

Exposure to violence, structural discrimination, movement restrictions and socio-economic hardship in both Myanmar and Bangladesh drive onwards migration. There are currently two main routes from Bangladesh and Myanmar to other countries of Southeast Asia and beyond: by boat across the Andaman Sea to Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere; and by land through Myanmar, across the border into Thailand and onwards to Malaysia and elsewhere.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more



than 3,500 Rohingyas attempted sea crossings in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal in 2022. This figure represents a 360 per cent increase and signals increasing desperation compared to 2021 when around 700 individuals were recorded to have made similar journeys. Regarding the death toll, around 348 individuals are believed to have died or gone missing at sea making 2022 one of the deadliest years for the sea journey since 2014.

Nearly 45 per cent of those rescued were women and children. Routes across land are also risky. In many situations, travellers never reach their destination. They may be arrested, abandoned, or die en route. Others are abused or exploited.

### **Experiences of abuse and exploitation en route include:**

- Extortion from brokers such as:
- Transportation fees rising four or five-fold after departure or demands of extra money for passengers to disembark boats or complete the journey.
- Threats, violence and sometimes abduction of family members in different countries to recover debts/extra costs.
- Violence, torture or rape by brokers and security forces.
- Being 'sold on' to other syndicates on route for the purpose of extortion.
- Forced labour on route, including portering for brokers.
- Food and water shortages, ill-equipped, overcrowded vehicles and unseaworthy boats.
- Injury and death resulting from abuse and inhumane conditions.

### **Experiences of exploitation at the destination include:**

- Forced/abusive marriage including early marriage.
- Commercial sexual exploitation.
- Domestic servitude.
- Debt-bondage.
- Child labour.



- Unsafe and unregulated work.
- Unpaid wages/wage theft.

**Rights violations and abuses by state security forces en route and at destination include:**

- Failure to provide humanitarian assistance to passengers on boats in distress.
- Push-backs' of boats into high seas and international/neighbouring country waters.
- Denying passenger disembarkation.
- Lack of access to asylum procedures or identification of trafficking victims and stateless people.
- Detention on arrival, denial of access to

**UNHCR in detention, detention for indefinite periods, inhumane detention conditions for example in Malaysia and India.**

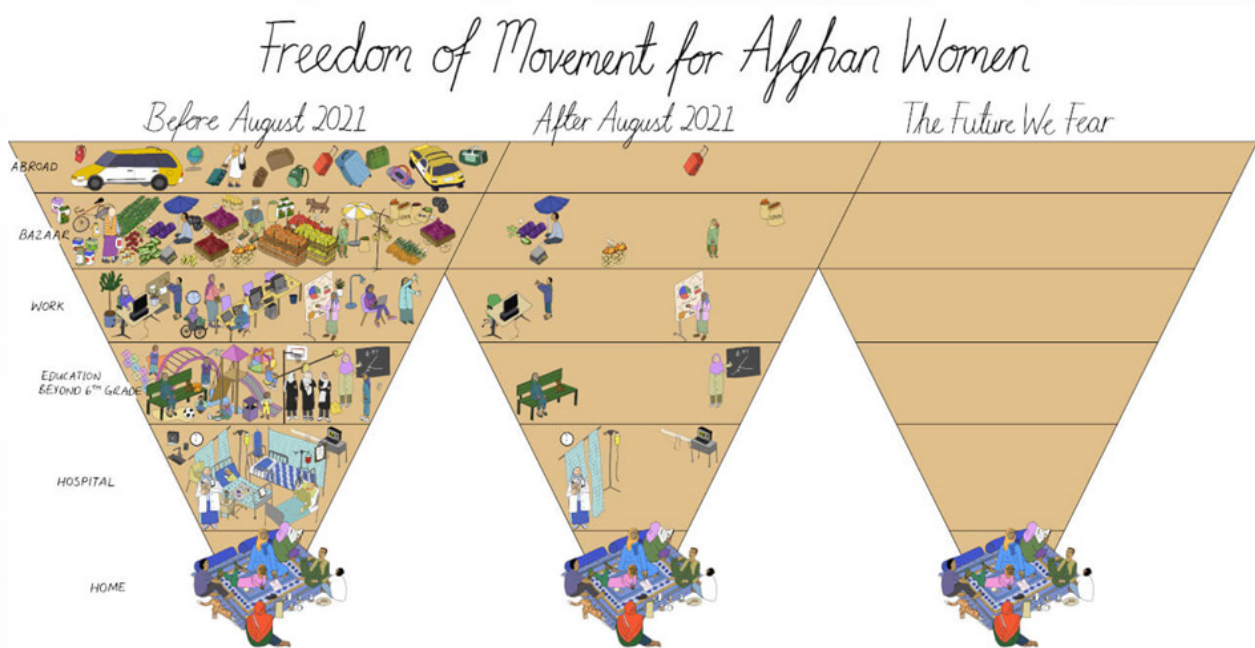
- Refoulement to Myanmar following 'rescue' at sea, even where they are refugees registered in Bangladesh.
- Arrest and detention en route through Myanmar often without access to legal assistance and with insufficient finances to secure release.
- Torture and abuse in custody.
- Lack of social support and re-integration services for separated children (often where adults are imprisoned), survivors of sexual violence, and other trafficking survivors.
- Failure to provide household registration to returnees, leading to ongoing abuse and vulnerabilities.



## THE AFGHAN WOMEN UNDER TALIBAN:

UN Women partnered with Mona Chalabi to illustrate the scope and the severity of the restrictions on women and girls' access to public space and public life in Afghanistan. In international treaties this is referred to as "freedom of movement". Together, these illustrations show the sheer speed at which progress on gender equality can vanish, and then reverse in a matter of months, while the world watches.

Women in Afghanistan: From almost everywhere to almost nowhere



There are social movements that shake the world. The Afghan women's rights movement is one of them. Afghan women's fight for freedom and equality spans generations. Their most fierce battle has been for visibility and presence in public life—for their names to be known, their voices to be heard, and their presence to be acknowledged and valued.

### A few statistics [1]:

In 1920, the first school for girls opened in Afghanistan [2]. In 1991, 7,000 women enrolled in higher education, 230,000 girls were in schools, 190 women were professors, and 22,000 women taught in schools across the country [3].

By the end of the Taliban's first rule in 2001, less than one million Afghan children were in school, and none of them were girls [4].

In 2004, a new constitution enshrined gender equality and reserved 27 per cent of seats in parliament for women. By 2021, Afghan women had secured 69 out of 249 seats in parliament, women were negotiating peace across the country, and laws



were in place allowing women to include their names on their children’s birth certificates and identification cards. There was a Ministry of Women’s Affairs, an independent human rights commission, and a law-making violence against women a crime. But more than this, women were visible—from law, politics, and journalism, to sidewalks, parks, and schools.

Over the last two years, the Taliban have issued 80 edicts, 54 of these directly target women and girls [5]. The roll backs started as soon as they took power in August 2021, when they ordered women to stay at home because their foot soldiers were “not familiar with seeing women outside the house and were not trained to respect women” [6]. One year into their rule, and it was clear gender segregation and restricting women’s movement remained the cornerstone of their vision for society. The so-called “Taliban 2.0” never eventuated. On women’s rights, Afghanistan went back to the future.

We are now two years into their rule. Women have been banned from going to parks, gyms, and public bathing houses. They have been stopped from pursuing education beyond the sixth grade. Their ability to work outside of health and education is all but prohibited. The cumulative effect of the Taliban’s edicts and behaviours has largely resulted in the imprisonment of women within the walls of their homes.





The question is, what more can be taken away? On 15 August 2024, on 15 August 2050, what spaces will be left for Afghan women to access? What will this visual look like?

For many women across the world, walking out your front door is an ordinary part of life. For many Afghan women, it is extraordinary. It is an act of defiance. Despite all these challenges, women have found ways to carve out pockets of hope. Afghan women are still forming new civil society groups to address community needs, running businesses, and providing health, education, and protection services. Afghan women will not give up their right to live full lives, equal in dignity. They will not accept living in a world where they are not worthy of living the same life as a man.

And neither should we.

Afghanistan is not the only country in the world where women's rights are being rolled back. But what is happening in Afghanistan is an alarm bell for all of us because it shows how decades of progress on gender equality and women's rights can be wiped out in months. It is a clarion call to everyone that the fight for women's rights in Afghanistan is a global fight, and a battle for women's rights everywhere.

"In 2002, after years of being denied their rights under the previous Taliban regime, Afghan women celebrated International Women's Day full of hope. The day was observed in Afghanistan and at UN Headquarters with the theme 'Afghan women today: Realities and Opportunities' and commitments were made to support our Afghan sisters rebuild their lives and be full partners in the post-conflict reconstruction of the country. On that day the international community said that the plight of Afghan women had been "an affront to all standards of dignity, equality and humanity." It stressed that world support for reasserting their rights should go beyond expressions of solidarity.

Despite challenges, Afghan women and girls made steady advances towards fulfilling their human rights. However, the situation has significantly regressed to the pre-2002 period, and women are denied their fundamental rights and freedoms including the rights to education, to work, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, freedom of movement and freedom from fear and want and from discrimination.

Now, over two decades later, girls in Afghanistan have been banned from secondary school and women from tertiary education. Women and girls have been banned from entering amusement parks, public baths, gyms and sports clubs for four months. Women have been banned from working in NGO offices. Since the take-



over of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021, women have been wholly excluded from public office and the judiciary. Today, Afghanistan's women and girls are required to adhere to a strict dress code and are not permitted to travel more than 75 km without a mahram. They are compelled to stay at home.

All over the country, women report feeling invisible, isolated, suffocated, living in prison like conditions. Many are unable to have their basic needs met without access to employment or aid, including access to medical healthcare and psychological support in particular for victims of violence, including sexual violence. It's a sobering reminder of how swiftly and aggressively women's and girls' rights can be taken away.



In two weeks, a new school year will start in Afghanistan. If the restrictions are indeed temporary, as the Taliban claim, they have an opportunity to prove it by lifting the ban on girls and women attending secondary and tertiary education institutions and allowing them to resume their studies at the start of this school year.

We call on the de facto authorities to end the harmful annihilation of women rights and lift restrictions imposed on women, including on their working with NGOs.

We further call on the de facto authorities to fulfil their obligations under the international human rights treaties, including CEDAW, to which Afghanistan is a State party.



## THE UYGHUR COMMUNITY:

Human rights groups believe China has detained more than one million Uyghurs against their will over the past few years in a large network of what the state calls “re-education camps”, and sentenced hundreds of thousands to prison terms.



A series of police files obtained by the BBC in 2022 has revealed details of China’s use of these camps and described the routine use of armed officers and the existence of a shoot-to-kill policy for those trying to escape.

The US is among several countries to have previously accused China of committing genocide in Xinjiang. The leading human rights groups Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have published reports accusing China of crimes against humanity.

China denies all allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The Chinese government - speaking after details of the Xinjiang Police Files were published - said the peace and prosperity brought to Xinjiang as a result of its anti-terrorism measures were the best response to “all sorts of lies”.





## Who are the Uyghurs?

There are about 12 million Uyghurs, mostly Muslim, living in Xinjiang, which is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The Uyghurs speak their own language, which is similar to Turkish, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian nations. They make up less than half of the Xinjiang population.



Recent decades have seen a mass migration of Han Chinese (China's ethnic majority) into Xinjiang, allegedly orchestrated by the state to dilute the minority population there.

China has also been accused of targeting Muslim religious figures and banning religious practices in the region, as well as destroying mosques and tombs. Uyghur activists say they fear that the group's culture is under threat of erasure.

## Where is Xinjiang?

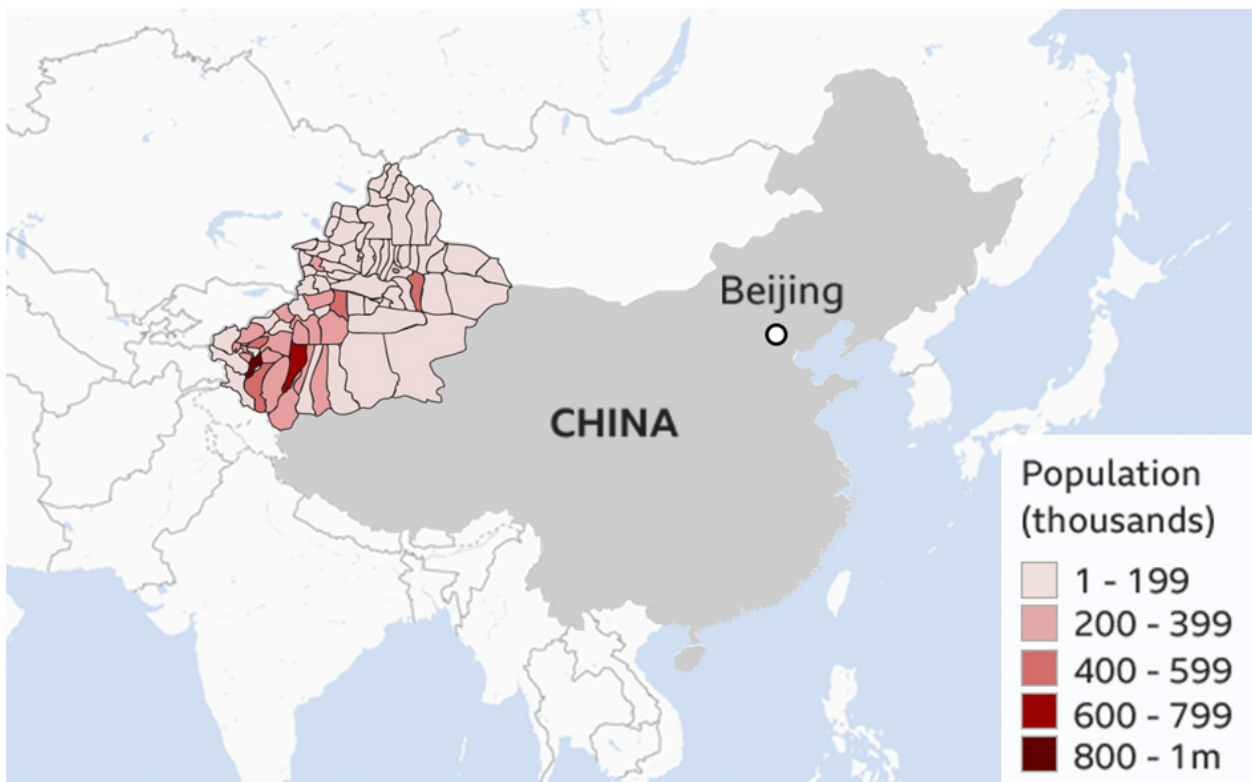
Xinjiang lies in the north-west of China and is the country's largest region. Like Tibet, it is autonomous, meaning - in theory - it has some powers of self-governance. But in practice, both regions are subjected to major restrictions by the central government.

Xinjiang is a mostly desert region and produces about a fifth of the world's cotton. Human rights groups have voiced concerns that much of that cotton export is picked by forced



labour, and in 2021 some Western brands removed Xinjiang cotton from their supply chains, leading to a backlash against the brands from Chinese celebrities and netizens. In December 2020, research seen by the BBC showed that up to half a million people were being forced to pick cotton in Xinjiang. There is evidence that new factories have been built within the grounds of the re-education camps.

## Uyghur population in Xinjiang



Source: Xinjiang government

BBC

The region is also rich in oil and natural gas and because of its proximity to Central Asia and Europe is seen by Beijing as an important trade link.

In the early 20th Century, the Uyghurs briefly declared independence for the region but it was brought under the complete control of China's new Communist government in 1949.

It has been nearly a decade since China began its systematic campaign of human rights abuses against the Uyghur population — a minority ethnic group that has been targeted by Beijing for practicing Islam — and other vulnerable minority groups in its northwest Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Over one million Uyghurs have been imprisoned in “re-education centers” and subjected to forced labor, torture, rape and sterilization. The United States and several like-minded states have determined based on the scope and scale of these crimes that they constitute genocide and crimes against humanity against the Uyghurs.



Washington and the international community have taken a number of measures to draw attention to the ongoing atrocities and to hold China accountable. These efforts have been complemented by the efforts of Uyghur civil society, who have pursued accountability through both multilateral and domestic institutions, including domestic courts. Despite this progress, Beijing has shown no sign of unwinding its policies toward the Uyghurs.

In late August last year, the United Nation's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) released its long-awaited report assessing human rights concerns in XUAR, finding significant evidence that Beijing is committing crimes against humanity. The report was published just a few minutes before High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet's four-year term officially ended on September 1. China, which took extraordinary measures to limit the scope of the report and delay its release, forcefully dismissed the report as a U.S. plot and claimed it exceeded the OHCHR's mandate.

Despite the report's conclusions, many observers were critical of the quiet, last-minute release, suggesting the approach sought to placate Beijing and detracted from the findings of the report. Bachelet's successor, Volker Turk, has largely avoided any direct criticisms of Beijing, opting for a quiet diplomatic approach, rather than public condemnations and accountability efforts. This approach has raised similar concerns for advocates.

Beijing continues to use its vast influence to manipulate U.N. processes and to ensure that its allies avoid public acknowledgement of the persecution of the Uyghurs. Following the release of the OHCHR report, the U.N. Human Rights Council voted down a motion brought forward in October by the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to hold debate on human rights abuses in Xinjiang, marking only the second time in 16 years that the council rejected a motion. The rejection was condemned by Uyghur activist groups — many of whom helped lead advocacy efforts around the resolution — who called it a major setback for accountability efforts and the credibility of the Human Rights Council.

Among the member states that rejected the motion were Qatar, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, members of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with strong ties to Beijing. This demonstrated an alarming lack of solidarity from Muslim majority countries that are quick to condemn much less consequential forms of discrimination against Muslims in the West. In March 2022, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi attended a meeting of the OIC in Islamabad. While the meeting concluded with a resolution condemning the oppression of Muslims in specific countries and the rise of Islamophobia in the West, there was no mention of the persecution of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang or abroad.

Despite China's influence over the U.N.'s political bodies, some U.N. mechanisms



and member states have continued to criticize Beijing's treatment of the Uyghurs. On March 6, the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights released its findings on Beijing's progress in implementing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Among the findings was that Beijing's discrimination against the Uyghurs was severe and systematic, including forced labor; large-scale, arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and coercive family planning policies. The committee also called on Beijing to immediately end violations of human rights and dismantle systems of forced labor in Xinjiang.

Not only were these recommendations critical to further developing a U.N. record of findings on China's treatment of the Uyghurs, the committee's review process provided an important opportunity for advocates to publicly pressure Beijing. Uyghur and international human rights advocacy organizations including the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, and the International Service for Human Rights submitted civil society reports on China's progress in implementing the covenant presenting arguments that Beijing's conduct toward the Uyghurs constitutes forced labor and mass atrocities.

Member states have also used U.N. fora to draw attention to Beijing's treatment of the Uyghurs. At the U.N.'s first-ever International Day to Combat Islamophobia on March 15, which Chinese officials also attended, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield said, "... the Chinese government has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

## **China responsible for 'serious human rights violations' in Xinjiang province: UN human rights report**

The report published on Wednesday in the wake of the visit by UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet in May, said that "allegations of patterns of torture, or ill-treatment, including forced medical treatment and adverse conditions of detention, are credible, as are allegations of individual incidents of sexual and gender-based violence."

In a strongly-worded assessment at the end of the report, OHCHR said that the extent of arbitrary detentions against Uyghur and others, in context of "restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights, enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity."

### ***'Rigorous review'***

The UN rights office said that Wednesday's report was "based on a rigorous review of documentary material currently available to the Office, with its credibility assessed



in accordance with standard human rights methodology.

“Particular attention was given to the Government’s own laws, policies, data and statements. The Office also requested information and engaged in dialogue and technical exchanges with China throughout the process.”

Published on Ms. Bachelet’s final day of her four-year term in office, the report says that the violations have taken place in the context of the Chinese Government’s assertion that it is targeting terrorists among the Uyghur minority with a counter-extremism strategy that involves the use of so-called Vocational Educational and Training Centres (VETCs), or re-education camps.

### ***‘Interlocking patterns’***

OHCHR said that the Government policy in recent years in Xinjiang has “led to interlocking patterns of severe and undue restrictions on a wide range of human rights.”

Even if the VETC system has as China says, “been reduced in scope or wound up”, said OHCHR, “the laws and policies that underpin it remain in place”, leading to an increased use of imprisonment.

The systems of arbitrary detention and related patterns of abuse since 2017, said OHCHR, “come against the backdrop of broader discrimination” against Uyghur and other minorities.

### ***Violations of international law***

“This has included far-reaching, arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms, in violation of international laws and standards”, including restrictions on religious freedom and the rights to privacy and movement.

Furthermore, the report said that Chinese Government policies in the region have “transcended borders”, separating families, “severing” contacts, producing “patterns of intimidations and threats” against the wider Uyghur diaspora who have spoken out about conditions at home.

OHCHR said that the Chinese Government “holds the primary duty to ensure that all laws and policies are brought into compliance with international human rights law and to promptly investigate any allegations of human rights violations, to ensure accountability for perpetrators, and to provide redress to victims.”



## A path towards gender equality: Key policy recommendations

“Words must be matched by action if change is to become lasting”

Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General

In order to address discriminatory social institutions and build a truly inclusive society, policy makers and all relevant stakeholders across Southeast Asian countries need to take action. The COVID-19 pandemic calls for much stronger political commitments to include a gender perspective in crisis management efforts. The pandemic should be an opportunity to put addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including harmful social norms, at the heart of recovery policies. By taking the gendered impact of policy measures into account from the onset of policy design through country-level analysis, countries can avoid excessive socio-economic costs and allow faster recovery from the crisis while ensuring that the pandemic does not reverse the progress made towards the achievement of SDG 5 and other gender-related targets. This section outlines policy recommendations and develops them across five critical, cross-cutting areas:

- update and harmonise legislation in line with international standards
- develop enforcement mechanisms to effectively deliver justice
- adopt a holistic and intersectional approach, taking into account women's diversity while engaging men and boys as positive agents of change
- strengthen the scope and the quality of sex-disaggregated data collection at all geographical levels
- improve communication and awareness.



## Update and harmonise legislation in line with international standards

**Southeast Asian** governments should ensure that their national legal frameworks are in agreement with international conventions and amend laws to eliminate discriminatory legislation

Southeast Asian governments should strengthen their efforts to close legal loopholes that allow negative practices, such as child marriage among girls or female genital mutilation, and amend discriminatory provisions concerning women's workplace, land and citizenship rights. Furthermore, legislation related to violence against women should be comprehensive and aim for a systemic approach. In addition, Southeast Asian governments should harmonise customary, religious or traditional laws with national and subnational legal frameworks in order to guarantee that every woman and girl is equally protected under the law regardless of her ethnicity, marital status, religion or location. Customary practices governing women's access to land, inheritance, financial resources and justice restrain the efficacy of laws and policies aimed at fostering gender equality and women's empowerment.

In particular, policy makers in Southeast Asia should focus on the laws covered by the following SIGI indicators:

- In the “Child marriage” indicator, Southeast Asian governments should set 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage for girls and boys without any legal exceptions. In Indonesia, for instance, the Constitutional Court amended the Marriage Act in 2019 and raised the minimum legal age for marriage to 19 years for women ([Government of Indonesia, 2020\[65\]](#)).
- In the “Violence against women” indicator, policy makers should incorporate comprehensive and inclusive approaches covering all forms of violence – including sexual harassment, domestic violence, rape and honour crimes. In Malaysia, for instance, the Domestic Violence Act was amended in 2017 to extend its scope and enhance the protection of victims and survivors of domestic violence. In addition, relevant provisions under the Penal Code were also modified to ensure that women were effectively protected from any harm or abuse ([Government of Malaysia, 2019\[66\]](#)).
- In the “Female genital mutilation” indicator, some Southeast Asian governments still need to recognise female genital mutilation as a harmful practice and abide by international commitments made in this area. Countries in which certain communities perform and encourage the practice of female genital mutilation should enact legislation to criminalise this practice and establish penalties for all perpetrators, including parents and medical prac-



titioners.

- In the “Workplace rights” indicator, Southeast Asian governments should enhance women workers’ legal protections and strengthen labour legislation in order to guarantee women’s equal access to employment, ensure adequate protection from gender-based discrimination at work, comply with the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value, and provide paid maternity and paternity leave schemes. In Indonesia, for example, the government issued and approved Regulation No. 78 in 2015, which mandates that every worker has the right to receive the same wage for work of the same value ([Government of Indonesia, 2015\[67\]](#)). In addition, in 2018, the government of the Philippines passed the 105-Day Expanded Maternity Leave Law, which extended the length of maternity leave from 8 weeks to 15 weeks, with 100% salary coverage ([Government of the Philippines, 2018\[68\]](#)).
- In the “Citizenship rights” indicator, Southeast Asian governments should pass legislation to provide married women with the same rights as married men to confer their nationality on their children and spouses. In Viet Nam, for instance, the 2008 Law on Vietnamese Nationality establishes equal rights between women and men to acquire Vietnamese nationality through marriage and naturalisation. In addition, the law provides equal rights to retain (Art. 10), change (Art. 27) and confer nationality on children (Arts. 14-17) ([Government of Viet Nam, 2008\[69\]](#)).

## **Develop enforcement mechanisms to effectively deliver justice**

**Southeast Asian** governments should strengthen the capacity building of law enforcement authorities and guarantee legal redress

Southeast Asian governments should further invest in providing capacity building and training to crucial actors such as law enforcement officials, teachers, health and care providers, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders in order to ensure the adequate application of the law and prevent gender-based discrimination across key areas. These measures should be mainstreamed at the national, subnational and local levels to guarantee the protection of all women and girls. Once the national legal framework is updated and protective measures are in place, policy makers should guarantee that the violations against women’s rights are effectively monitored, prosecuted and punished.

**Southeast Asian** countries should sensitise all actors in the judicial system to gender-based discrimination

In the Southeast Asian region, policy makers should run awareness-raising cam-





paigns and capacity-building programmes on understanding and responding to gender-based discrimination, violence and intersectional discrimination for all the actors in the judicial system – including the personnel in justice entities, legal professionals, judges and prosecutors – in order to ensure that the country’s justice system is gender responsive. All the actors within the legal apparatus should implement a gender-sensitive approach and governments should guarantee that judges interpret the legislation in accordance with the principles of equality and international human rights. In Cambodia, for instance, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs trained judicial police officers in legal procedures and reconciliation processes related to women’s rights and domestic violence ([Government of Cambodia, 2019\[70\]](#)).

All the actors in the judicial system should also be aware of the institutional, socio-economic and cultural barriers that women face in accessing justice. Therefore, it is essential to increase the general awareness of the most persistent women’s rights issues in order to deliver justice more effectively. Similarly, in Indonesia, more than 2 000 police officers have received gender-responsive training aimed at increasing capacity and sensitivity when dealing with cases involving women and children ([Government of Indonesia, 2020\[71\]](#)).

**Southeast Asian** countries should develop adequate infrastructure and service provision in remote areas in order to ensure that all women have access to justice and benefit from public programmes

Policy makers should ensure that all groups of women have adequate access to the justice system and create an enabling environment for women. Governments should make legal information, regulations and proceedings available to all women, without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. Institutions and services should be available in urban and rural areas, as the distance to institutions represents an obstacle to women’s attempts to access justice. Language also constitutes a major barrier that impedes women from claiming their rights. Therefore, the language used by legal professionals and justice system personnel should be simplified and should avoid gender stereotypes and biases, particularly towards victims and survivors of gender-based violence and abuse. In addition, guidelines, manuals and key information on legal proceedings, procedures and legal aid services should be available in local languages.

Furthermore, Southeast Asian governments should guarantee the affordability of justice processes and mechanisms. This includes providing the total or partial coverage of direct and indirect costs of litigation, such as the monetary cost of filing a complaint, the lawyer’s fees and the cost of transportation. Policy makers should also take into account the monetary costs for women to start legal proceedings, as well as the opportunity costs (which are not necessarily measured), such as the con-



sequences for women's productivity, and the psychological effects linked to social stigma, as legal redress is not culturally acceptable in certain communities.

## Improve communication and awareness

Communication on gender equality is key to changing social attitudes and practices. Effective communication generates awareness of gender-based discrimination and the benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment. Moreover, campaigns can educate the public, empower them to take a stand in their particular environment and increase the political will for bold action. Examples of effective communication can be found throughout Southeast Asia. For example, in Viet Nam, in order to better address sexual harassment, the 2015 *Code of Conduct on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* included tips and good practices to help employers successfully communicate sexual harassment policies to their staff members, business contacts, contractors, clients and suppliers ([Government of Viet Nam, 2015\[89\]](#)). In Thailand, the "Violence on Thai TV dramas" campaign has used multiple platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, to disseminate videos and infographics on gender-based violence in the media ([Government of Thailand, 2020\[72\]](#)). Finally, in the Philippines, the Philippine Commission on Women developed and implemented the #AgendaNiJuana (Juana's Agenda) campaign ahead of the 2019 elections to spread awareness on the importance of gender balance in political leadership ([Government of the Philippines, 2019\[90\]](#)). These examples show that communication efforts can take multiple forms and seek to achieve a variety of aims, from preventing violence to growing societal support for women's political leadership.

## Roll Call

A committee meeting begins with a roll call, without which quorum cannot be established. A debate cannot begin without a quorum being established. A delegate may change his/her roll call in the next session. For example, if Delegate answers the Present in the First session, he can answer the Present and vote in the next session when the roll call occurs.

During the roll call, the country names are recalled out of alphabetical order, and delegates can answer either by saying Present or Present and voting. Following are the ways a roll call can be responded in -



Present - Delegates can vote Yes, no, or abstain for a Draft Resolution when they answer the Roll Call with Present;

Present and voting - An delegate is required to vote decisively, i.e., Yes/No only if they have answered the Roll Call with a Present and voting. A Delegate cannot abstain in this case.

Abstention - The Delegate may abstain from voting if they are in doubt, or if their country supports some points but opposes others. Abstention can also be used if a delegate believes that the passage of the resolution will harm the world, even though it is unlikely to be highly specific. A delegate who responded with present and voting is not allowed to abstain during a substantive vote. An abstention counts as neither “yes” nor “no vote”, and his or her vote is not included in the total vote tally.

## **Quorum**

In order for the proceedings of a committee to proceed, quorum (also known as a minimum number of members) must be set which is one-third of the members of the committee must be present. Quorum will be assumed to be established unless a delegate’s presence is specifically challenged and shown to be absent during the roll call. The Executive Board may suspend committee sessions if a quorum is not reached.

## **General Speakers List**

After the agenda for the session has been established, a motion is raised to open the General Speaker’s List or GSL. The GSL is where all types of debates take place throughout the conference, and the list remains open throughout the duration of the agenda’s discussion. If a delegate wishes to speak in the GSL, he or she must notify the Executive Board by raising his or her placard when the Executive asks for Delegates desiring to speak in the GSL. Each country’s name will be listed in the order in which it will deliver its speech. A GSL can have an individual speaker time of anywhere from 60-120 seconds. Following their GSL speech, a Delegate has the option



of yielding his/her time to a specific Delegate, Information Points (questions) or to the Executive Board.

Speakers List will be followed for all debate on the Topic Area, except when superseded by procedural motions, amendments, or the introduction of a draft resolution. Speakers may speak generally on the Topic Area being considered and may address any draft resolution currently on the floor. Debate automatically closes when the Speakers List is exhausted.

## **Yield**

A delegate granted the right to speak on a substantive issue may yield in one of three ways at the conclusion of his/her speech: to another delegate, to questions, or to the Director. Please note that only one yield is allowed. A delegate must declare any yield at the conclusion of his or her speech.

- Yield to another delegate. When a delegate has some time left to speak, and he/ she doesn't wish to utilize it, that delegate may elect to yield the remaining speaking time to another delegate. This can only be done with the prior consent of another delegate (taken either verbally or through chits). The delegate who has been granted the other's time may use it to make a substantive speech, but cannot further yield it.
- Yield to questions. Follow-up questions will be allowed only at the discretion of the Director. The Director will have the right to call to order any delegate whose question is, in the opinion of the Director, rhetorical and leading and not designed to elicit information. Only the speaker's answers to questions will be deducted from the speaker's remaining time.
- Yield to the EB. Such a yield should be made if the delegate does not wish his/her speech



to be subject to questions. The moderator will then move to the next speaker.

## Motions

Motions are the formal term used for when one initiates an action. Motions cover a wide variety of things.

Once the floor is open, the Chairs will ask for any points or motions. If you wish to bring one to the Floor, this is what you should do:

- Raise your placard in a way that the chair can read it
- Wait until the Chair recognizes you
- Stand up and after properly addressing the Chair (“Thank you, honourable Chair” or something along these lines), state what motion you wish to propose
- Chairs will generally repeat the motions and may also ask for clarification. Chairs may do this if they do not understand and may also ask for or suggest modifications to the motion that they feel might benefit the debate.

Every motion is subject to seconds, if not otherwise stated. To pass a motion at least one other nation has to second the motion brought forward. A nation cannot second its own motion. If there are no seconds, the motion automatically fails.

If a motion has a second, the Chair will ask for objections. If no objections are raised, the motion will pass without discussion or a procedural vote. In case of objections, a procedural vote will be held. The vote on a motion requires a simple majority, if not otherwise stated.

While voting upon motions, there are no abstentions. If a vote is required, everyone must vote either “Yes” or “No”. If there is a draw on any vote, the vote will be retaken once. In case there are multiple motions on the Floor, the vote will be casted by their Order of Precedence. If one motion passes, the others will not be voted upon any-



more. However, they may be reintroduced once the Floor is open again.

During a moderated caucus, there will be no speakers' list. The moderator will call upon speakers in the order in which they signal their desire to speak. If you want to bring in a motion for a moderated caucus, you will have to specify the duration, a speakers' time, a moderator, and the purpose of the caucus. This motion is subject to seconds and objections but is not debatable.

In an unmoderated caucus, proceedings are not bound by the Rules of Procedure. Delegates may move around the room freely and converse with other delegates. This is also the time to create blocks, develop ideas, and formulate working papers, draft resolutions, and amendments. Remember that you are required to stay in your room unless given permission to leave by a Chair.

During the course of debate, the following points are in order:

- **Point of Personal Privilege:** Whenever a delegate experiences personal discomfort which impairs his or her ability to participate in the proceedings, he or she may rise to a Point of Personal Privilege to request that the discomfort be corrected. While a Point of Personal Privilege in extreme case may interrupt a speaker, delegates should use this power with the utmost discretion.
- **Point of Order:** During the discussion of any matter, a delegate may rise to a Point of Order to indicate an instance of improper parliamentary procedure. The Director may rule out of order those points that are improper. A representative rising to a Point of Order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion. A Point of Order may only interrupt a speaker if the speech is not following proper parliamentary procedure.
- **Point of Enquiry:** When the floor is open, a delegate may rise to a Point of Parliamentary Inquiry to ask the EB a question regarding the rules of procedure. A Point of Parliamentary Inquiry may never interrupt a speaker. Delegates with substantive questions should not rise to this Point, but should rather approach the



committee staff during caucus or send a note to the dais.

- **Point of information:** After a delegate gives a speech, and if the delegate yields their time to Points of Information, one Point of Information (a question) can be raised by delegates from the floor. The speaker will be allotted the remainder of his or her speaking time to address Points of Information. Points of Information are directed to the speaker and allow other delegations to ask questions in relation to speeches and resolutions.
- **Right to Reply:** A delegate whose personal or national integrity has been impugned by another delegate may submit a Right of Reply only in writing to the committee staff. The Director will grant the Right of Reply and his or her discretion and a delegate granted a Right of Reply will not address the committee except at the request of the Director.

## **Draft Resolution**

Once a draft resolution has been approved as stipulated above and has been copied and distributed, a delegate(s) may motion to introduce the draft resolution. The Director, time permitting, shall read the operative clauses of the draft resolution. A procedural vote is then taken to determine whether the resolution shall be introduced. Should the motion receive the simple majority required to pass, the draft resolution will be considered introduced and on the floor. The Director, at his or her discretion, may answer any clarificatory points on the draft resolution. Any substantive points will be ruled out of order during this period, and the Director may end this clarificatory question-answer period' for any reason, including time constraints. More than one draft resolution may be on the floor at any one time, but at most one draft resolution may be passed per Topic Area. A draft resolution will remain on the floor until debate on that specific draft resolution is postponed or closed or a draft resolution on that Topic Area has been passed. Debate on draft resolutions proceeds according to the general Speakers List for that topic area and delegates may then refer to the draft resolution by its designated number. No delegate may refer to a draft resolution until it is formally introduced.



## Amendments

All amendments need to be written and submitted to the executive board. The format for this is authors, signatories and the clause with mentioning the add, delete and replace. There are two forms of amendment, which can be raised by raising a motion for amendment and approval of the chair

**Friendly Amendments:** Amendment, which is agreed upon by all the author's does not require any kind of voting

**Unfriendly Amendments:** Amendments that are introduced by any other need not be voted upon by the council and are directly incorporated in the resolution. You need a simple majority in order to introduce a normal amendment.

### BODY of Draft Resolution

The draft resolution is written in the format of a long sentence, with the following rules:

- Draft resolution consists of clauses with the first word of each clause underlined.
- The next section, consisting of Preambulatory Clauses, describes the problem being addressed, recalls past actions taken, explains the purpose of the draft resolution, and offers support for the operative clauses that follow. Each clause in the preamble begins with an underlined word and ends with a comma.
- Operative Clauses are numbered and state the action to be taken by the body. These clauses are all with the present tense active verbs and are generally stronger words than those used in the Preamble. Each operative clause is followed by a semi-colon except the last, which ends with a period.