1 The Social Institutions and Gender Index in the Southeast Asian region

This chapter presents an overview of the results for the Southeast Asian region based on the fourth edition of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) in 2019 and its four dimensions: “Discrimination in the family”, “Restricted physical integrity”, “Restricted access to productive and financial resources”, and “Restricted civil liberties”. It outlines the main areas of progress and challenges regarding formal and informal laws, social norms, and practices related to gender equality in 11 countries in Southeast Asia. Uncovering the high economic cost induced by discriminatory social institutions, it highlights that reforms aimed at achieving gender equality could “turn lead into gold” and convert existing gender-based discrimination into an opportunity to accelerate economic growth and well-being. The chapter also explores the interaction between women’s empowerment and discriminatory social institutions by examining four core perspectives: health, education, economics and decision making. Finally, building on the evidence uncovered by the SIGI, this chapter provides a set of policy recommendations to enhance Southeast Asian governments’ efforts to deliver on their gender equality commitments and make progress towards achieving SDG 5.

“We cannot achieve ‘the future we want’ if half of our population is not empowered to be part of the journey.”

Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General, SIGI 2019 launch event, March 2019

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.[1] 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, mobilised 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[2] 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 labour 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.

Social Institutions and Gender Index overview

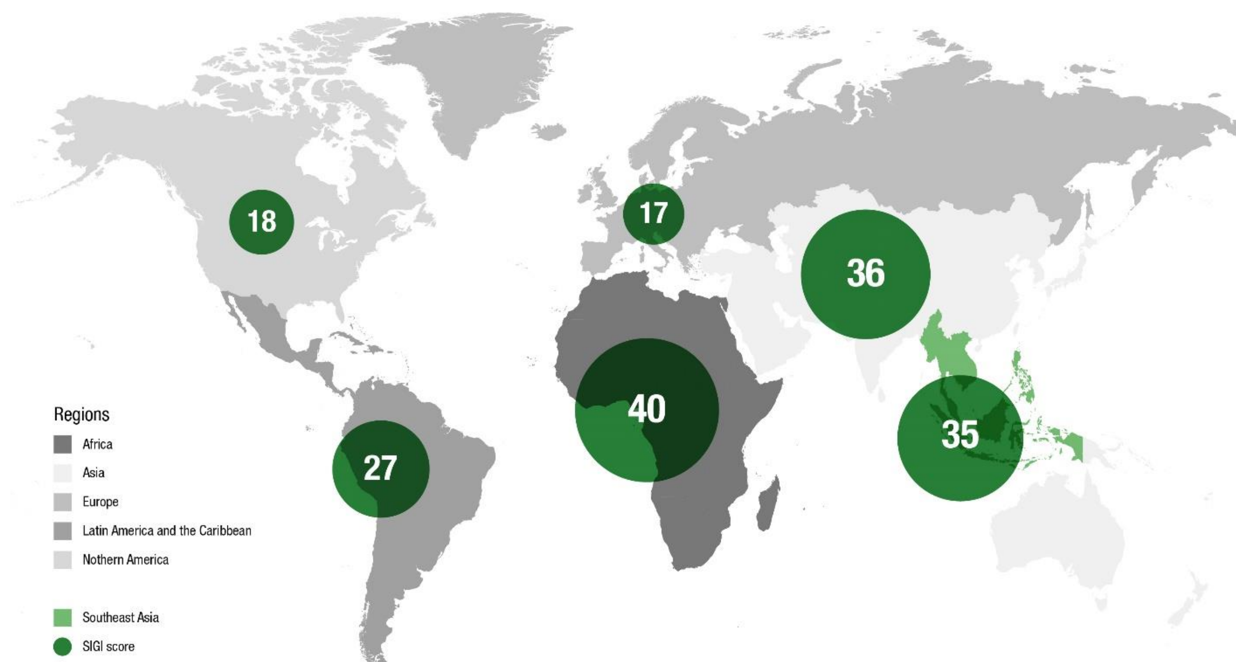
Since its first edition in 2009, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) has been measuring, assessing and analysing the deeply entrenched discrimination and barriers faced by women and girls across the world. Laws, social norms and practices delineate the legally and socially acceptable ways to think, do, express or act in relation to gender. When these social institutions discriminate against women and girls, they establish multiple structural and sometimes violent barriers, which span the entire life course of women and girls. In this regard, discriminatory social institutions intimately connect an individual's set of rights and opportunities with their gender.

SIGI results in Southeast Asia show that discriminatory social institutions remain important

The *SIGI 2021 Regional Report for Southeast Asia* shows that discrimination in laws, social norms and practices in Southeast Asia remain high compared with the rest of the world. The results uncover the progress and setbacks that the region has experienced since 2014 across the four dimensions of the SIGI: "Discrimination in the family", "Restricted physical integrity", "Restricted access to productive and financial resources", and "Restricted civil liberties". The Southeast Asian region's score – denoting its level of discrimination in social institutions – is 35, in line with the score for Asia as a whole (36). However, it remains significantly higher than the level of discrimination encountered in Europe (17), Northern America (18), and Latin America and the Caribbean (27) (Figure 1.1). Within Asia as a whole, Southeast Asia scores better than West Asia (41) and South Asia (48), but it trails behind East Asia, which has a score of 22.

Figure 1.1. Discrimination in social institutions remains high in Southeast Asia compared with other geographical regions

SIGI scores in Southeast Asia and selected regions of the world, 2019



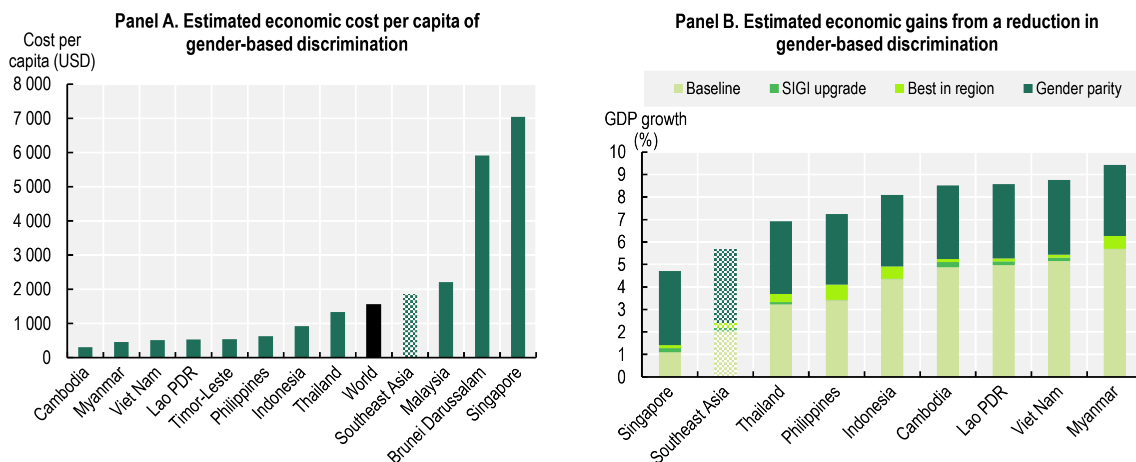
Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.
Source: (OECD, 2019[5]), Social Institutions and Gender Index, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f0c48e52-en.

Discriminatory social institutions yield a high economic cost, whereas increasing gender equality would constitute a tremendous growth opportunity

Overall, the cost of discriminatory social institutions for Southeast Asia amounts to around USD 200 billion, accounting for 7.5% of the regional gross domestic product (GDP) (OECD, 2019[6]). Through its influence on the unequal distribution of power between men and women in the family, in the economic sphere and in public life, gender-based discrimination in social institutions impedes economic growth. The effects go well beyond the limitations placed on human development: by reducing the pool of talent and limiting countries' capacity to innovate and accumulate human and financial capital, discriminatory social institutions limit economic growth. In other words, the regional economy cannot operate at its full potential if systemic constraints hold back half of the population. Controlling for other geographic, economic and institutional factors that also explain economic growth, the current level of discrimination in social institutions in Southeast Asia costs an estimated USD 1 853 per capita (Figure 1.2, Panel A).

The distribution of losses across Southeast Asia is not uniform. Due to different population sizes and differences in terms of GDP per capita, the losses per capita are higher in small, wealthier countries in the region. The estimated cost of discriminatory social institutions ranges from USD 300 per capita in Cambodia to around USD 7 000 per capita in Singapore (Figure 1.2, Panel A).

Figure 1.2. The benefits of reducing gender-based discrimination are potentially substantial for Southeast Asia



Note: Panel A presents the national income losses associated with current levels of gender-based discrimination in social institutions. Income losses are measured in terms of 2017 real income at current Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Countries are ordered by increasing income losses.

Panel B presents the forecasted average annual GDP growth rates between 2018 and 2030 under various scenarios. GDP forecasts are measured in terms of 2010 real GDP per capita at current PPP. GDP forecasts follow four distinct scenarios: 1) "Baseline", using available growth forecasts, and assuming no change in the global level of gender-based discrimination in social institutions between 2018 and 2030; 2) "SIGI upgrade", assuming that each country would decrease gender discrimination enough by 2030 to be classified as the next SIGI classification level; 3) "Best in region", assuming that each country would decrease gender discrimination enough by 2030 to attain the region's best performer's 2019 SIGI score; and 4) "Gender parity", assuming that each country would have eliminated gender-based discrimination in social institutions by 2030. Data are missing for Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Timor-Leste (no SIGI score).

Source: OECD calculations based on (OECD, 2019[5]), *Social Institutions and Gender Index*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f0c48e52-en; (USDA, 2017[7]), *ERS International Macroeconomic Dataset*, https://data.nal.usda.gov/dataset/international-macroeconomic-data-set; and (World Bank, 2020[8]), *World Development Indicators*, https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators.

The main factors affecting the cost associated with discriminatory social institutions are women's human capital, labour force participation and physical capital accumulation. A country's level of economic growth depends on its levels of physical and human capital, as well as on total factor productivity (Mankiw, Romer and Weil, 1992[9]; Solow, 1956[10]). In 2019, the OECD estimated that at the global level, discriminatory laws, norms and practices that women and girls faced lowered the development of women's human capital by 16%, reduced women's labour force participation by 12% and restricted women's physical capital accumulation by 8% (OECD, 2019[6]).

In this regard, reducing gender-based discrimination in social institutions through appropriate policies and programmes could yield substantial economic benefits. In addition to fulfilling fundamental human rights, gender equality in social institutions could generate substantial macroeconomic gains that are not limited to women but would benefit everyone. Estimated economic gains are based on four distinct scenarios (see Annex B for more details). The "Baseline" scenario assumes that Southeast Asia would experience an average annual GDP growth rate of 2% between 2018 and 2030. Under the "SIGI upgrade" scenario – in which each country in the region would slightly decrease the level of gender-based discrimination so that its SIGI score by 2030 would allow it to change its respective SIGI category[3] – Southeast Asia would add 0.2 percentage points to its annual GDP growth. Under the "Best in region" scenario – which assumes that each country addresses its respective gender-based discrimination so that by 2030 its SIGI score reaches that of Southeast Asia's top performer in 2019 (Singapore) – Southeast Asia would add another 0.2 percentage points to its average annual growth rate. Finally, under the "Gender parity" scenario – which assumes that each country fully addresses its respective gender-based discrimination by 2030 and reaches a SIGI score of 0, indicating no discrimination – Southeast Asia would add another 3.3 percentage points to its annual GDP growth (Figure 1.2, Panel B).

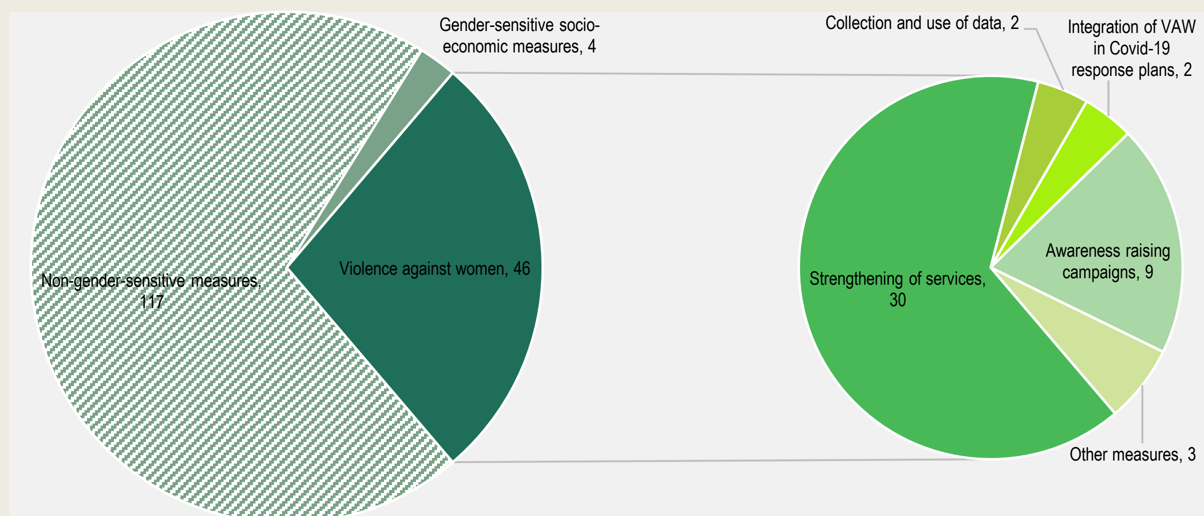
In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, which threatens Southeast Asia's macroeconomic stability with deep socio-economic ramifications, addressing the gender disparities becomes even more important in light of future economic recovery plans (Box 1.1). Early evidence shows that the crisis has exacerbated pre-existing challenges to women's economic empowerment, such as caring responsibilities, reducing the time that women could potentially dedicate to paid activities (OECD, 2020[4]). Moreover, women in developing countries are more likely than men to be in temporary, part-time and precarious employment, with lower pay, weaker legal protections and a lack of access to social protection measures. At the same time, certain sectors of the economy – for example, retail, food and accommodation, and tourism – have been disproportionately hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. In many developing countries, these sectors constitute a key sector of the country's economy and a major employer for women, which further aggravates women's post-crisis economic situation.

Box 1.1. Gender lenses are mostly absent from post-COVID-19 policy measures and recovery plans

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, Southeast Asian governments implemented several policies aimed at addressing the socio-economic effects that the crisis is having on the most vulnerable, and in particular women. Most of these policy measures entail social protection and labour support measures which may benefit women ultimately, although they are not targeted specifically at them. For instance, all Southeast Asian countries have implement conditional and unconditional cash transfer programmes which target the most vulnerable population groups and should disproportionately benefit women. Likewise, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam have put in place measures of tax deferral or tax exemptions aimed at micro and small enterprises which may ultimately benefit women's entrepreneurs and owners of small businesses (UNDP, 2021[11]). The forthcoming OECD's report *Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries* highlights that social assistance interventions have constituted the bulk of the measures implemented by governments, indirectly targeting vulnerable women who are often employed informally (OECD, Forthcoming[12]).

Figure 1.3. Policy measures aimed at tackling the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis lack a gender lens

Number of policy measures implemented in Southeast Asia in response to the COVID-19 crisis by gender-sensitiveness



Note: Gender-sensitive socio-economic measures look at a broad range of social protection, labour market, economic and fiscal measures taken in response to COVID-19 and identified as gender-sensitive. Social protection and labour market measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they target women's economic security or address unpaid care. Fiscal and economic measures are defined as gender-sensitive if they provide support to female-dominated sectors of the economy, on the assumption that this is likely to protect women's employment and thereby their economic security.
Source: (UNDP, 2021[11]), *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*, https://data.undp.org/gendertracker.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934229730

As the COVID-19 crisis is having a regressive effect on gender equality and women's empowerment, a gender perspective is integral to building a strong, resilient, green and inclusive recovery. Yet, despite the

policy measures implemented by the region's governments, too often, a gender lens is missing from recovery plans. The large majority of policies designed to offset the socio-economic effects of the crisis have failed to integrate such a gender lens. As of January 2021, data from the UNDP's COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker show that since the outbreak, 167 policy measures have been implemented by Southeast Asian countries, of which only 50 are classified as gender-sensitive, that is 30% (UNDP, 2021[11]). Moreover, among these 50 measures classified as gender-sensitive, 46 of them directly seek to tackle violence against women and girls in the COVID-19 context. These violence-specific measures include, in particular, the strengthening of services such as hotlines and reporting mechanisms, the operational continuity and expansion of shelters, the provision of psychosocial support, the reinforcement of police and justice responses to address impunity, the operational continuity of health sector response to violence against women and the coordination of accessible services. As a result, across the entire region, only four measures specifically address the other socio-economic negative consequences faced by women and girls in the areas of social protection, labour market, economic inclusion and/or fiscal justice (Figure 1.3).

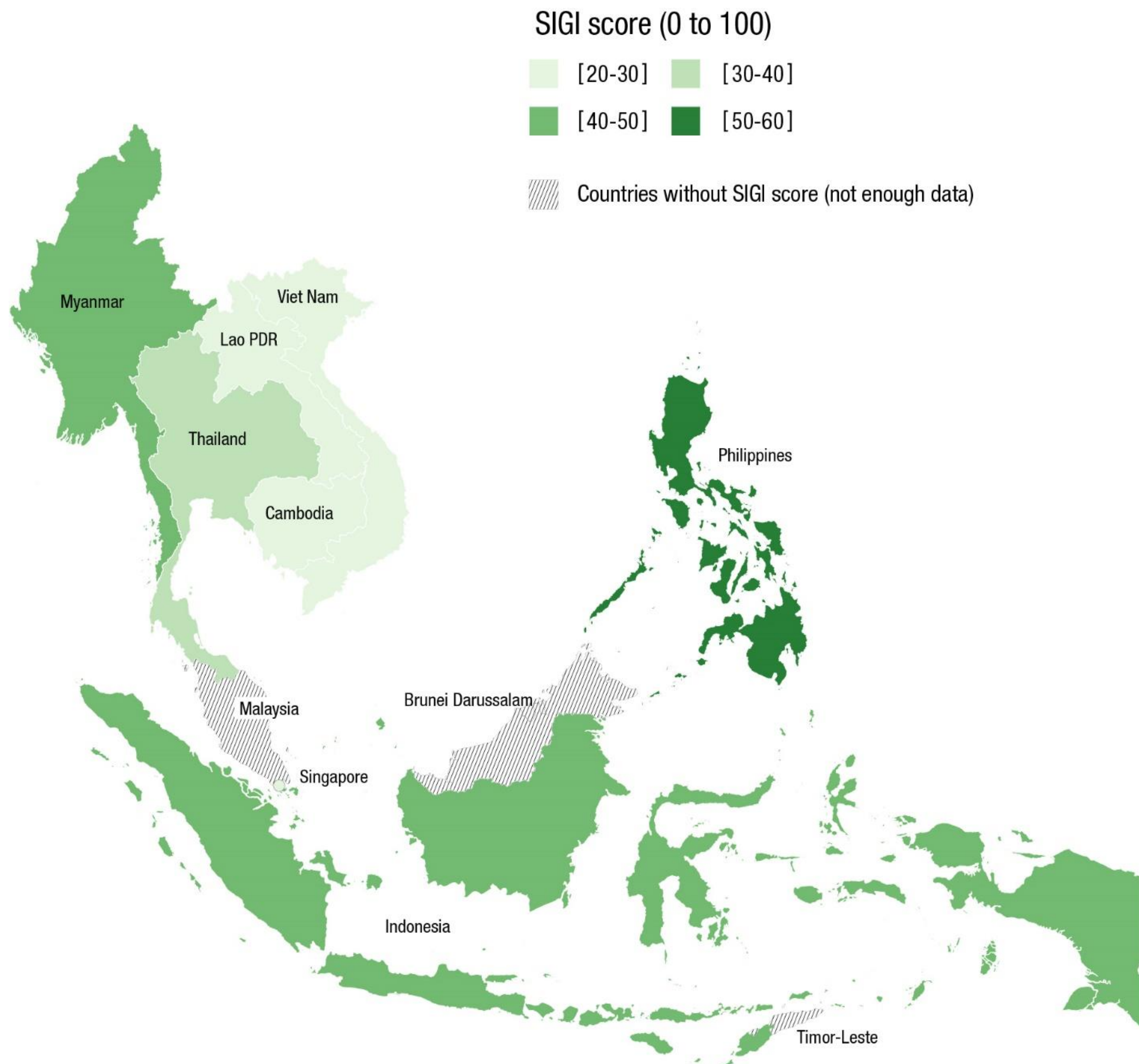
The current state of Southeast Asia's policy response to the COVID-19 crisis therefore calls for governments to take more forceful steps to address gender inequalities. It In particular, integrating a gender lens at the outset of policy design would improve social and economic outcomes for millions of women and girls and boost economic growth. This includes both emergency compensation measures to counteract the negative health and socio-economic effects of the crisis, as well as structural changes to address pre-existing inequalities.

SIGI results highlight wide variations across Southeast Asian countries

Wide variations exist across Southeast Asian countries as levels of discrimination in social institutions range from low to very high. Viet Nam is the region's top performer, with a low level of discrimination and an overall SIGI score of 25. At the global level, the country ranks 60th, underscoring the need for the region as a whole to intensify its efforts to eliminate the discriminatory social institutions faced by women and girls. Viet Nam's relatively good performance primarily stems from rather strong legal frameworks governing household dynamics (including household headship, child marriage among girls, inheritance and divorce), civil liberties and access to productive resources. Yet, the country suffers from weak workplace rights, a worrying environment conducive to high rates of violence against women and evidence of preference towards sons over daughters. Viet Nam is closely followed by Lao People's Democratic Republic (hereafter "Lao PDR"), Singapore and Cambodia, which also exhibit low levels of discrimination (Figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4. SIGI scores vary widely across Southeast Asian countries

SIGI scores by country, 2019



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.
Source: (OECD, 2019[5]), Social Institutions and Gender Index, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f0c48e52-en.

Because of data limitations and the fact that the overall SIGI score can only be computed for countries with data points in every single indicator and variable composing the index, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Timor-Leste did not obtain a score in 2019 (see Reader's guide). Among these countries, Timor-Leste obtained a score in two of the SIGI's four dimensions, while Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia each obtained scores in only the "Discrimination in the family" dimension.

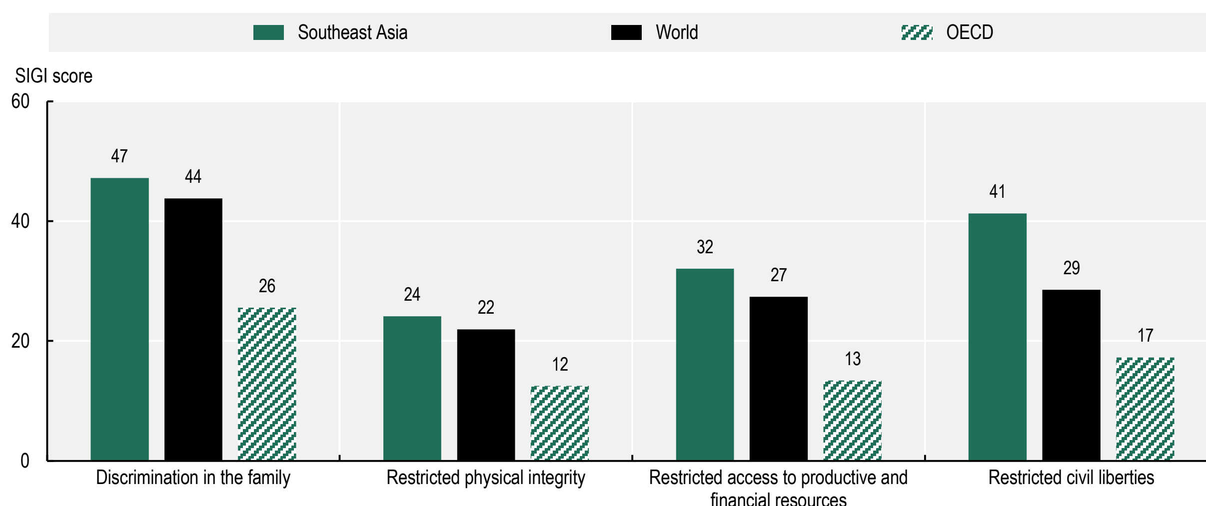
The strongest forms of discrimination are those related to family and civil liberties

"Discrimination in the family" is the most challenging dimension of the SIGI in Southeast Asia – as it is in the rest of the world. Discrimination faced by women and girls in the region in the family sphere stems from

important social institutions governing intra-household dynamics between men and women. The region exhibits a medium level of discrimination in this dimension, with a score of 47; this is in line with the global average of 44 and slightly lower than Asia's average of 53, but is 21 points above the OECD average (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.5. Discrimination in the family sphere is the most acute form of discrimination in Southeast Asia

SIGI dimensions' scores in Southeast Asia, world and OECD, 2019



Note: Scores range from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination.
Source: (OECD, 2019[5]), *Social Institutions and Gender Index*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f0c48e52-en.

In particular, the region displays high levels of discrimination in terms of intra-household dynamics and caregiving roles. Although the majority of countries' legal frameworks guarantee women's equal status in the family sphere, deeply entrenched social norms and practices continue to strongly discriminate against women and girls. Southeast Asian women continue to perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. Between 2014 and 2018, women's time dedicated to unpaid care and domestic work relative to men increased from 2.9 times to 3.8 times longer than men. The consequences for women's social and economic empowerment are far-reaching: reduced labour force participation, lower access to job opportunities, lower revenue and, ultimately, a high cost for the economy as a whole. This gap in unpaid care and domestic work directly stems from discriminatory social norms and expectations that uphold traditional gender roles. While men are expected to be the breadwinner and the primary decision maker in the household, women remain confined to household duties, taking care of the home and children. For instance, in 2018, 73% of the population in Thailand declared that children suffer when a mother works for pay outside of the home, whereas 43% of the population in Singapore agreed with that statement. The COVID-19 crisis has increased the share of women in unpaid care and domestic work. In addition, remittances have also been strongly impacted, implying that women have to undertake more responsibilities in the household with less money, with adverse consequences in terms of stress and anxiety (Mercado, Naciri and Mishra, 2020[13]).

Conversely, Southeast Asia achieves its best dimension-level score in the "Restricted physical integrity" dimension (Figure 1.5). Southeast Asian countries have made important progress to improve legal

frameworks aimed at eradicating violence against women. Over the last decade, and in particular since the third edition of the SIGI in 2014, countries have increasingly made efforts to strengthen their legal frameworks while implementing national strategies to eliminate this issue. Nine countries[4] have laws that criminalise domestic violence, and six countries[5] have laws that protect women from physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. Since 2014, five countries[6] have amended existing laws or established new ones addressing violence against women. During this same period, seven countries[7] have established a national action plan aimed at supporting the implementation of laws addressing violence against women.

Yet, domestic violence continues to be a serious problem in Southeast Asia, which displays high levels of discriminatory attitudes and practices. On average, 25% of women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime, a rate that reaches 59% in Timor-Leste and 44% in Thailand. Furthermore, social attitudes justifying the use of domestic violence are widespread. On average, 30% of women and girls in the region believe that a husband can be justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances: if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to engage in sexual intercourse with him. In four Southeast Asian countries,[8] the share of women and girls justifying domestic violence exceeds 50%.

Important forms of discrimination in the “Restricted civil liberties” dimension primarily stem from limited political representation, a low feeling of safety in public spaces and restrictive laws that prevent women from having full and unhindered access to justice. Although Southeast Asia’s legal frameworks guarantee women’s political participation, their representation in political institutions at the national level remains low. Only 19% of the region’s parliamentarians are women, reflecting significant discriminatory social norms: more than one-half of the region’s population agrees that men make better political leaders than women. At the same time, the low level of public safety remains a key issue for women, not only limiting their day-to-day lives and activities but also constraining their active involvement in public life. On the legal front, in various Southeast Asian countries, women do not hold the same legal rights as men to confer their nationality on their spouse or children. Meanwhile, women’s legal access to justice is hampered in many Southeast Asian countries by legal pluralism (the coexistence of multiple legal systems), highlighting discrimination experienced by women and girls in customary and religious courts and dispute resolution mechanisms.

Southeast Asia has made significant progress in securing women’s right to access productive and financial resources, but critical issues remain regarding their protection in the workplace. Southeast Asian countries have undertaken important legal reforms granting women equal rights to access and control productive and financial resources such as land, houses and bank accounts. However, discriminatory social norms, common gender biases, and traditional practices undermine the reach of such advances. Women are disproportionately underrepresented among the owners of land and houses, which critically undermines their ability to have the collateral necessary in order to mobilise capital and to seek credit. At the same time, although renewed efforts from governments have closed most gender gaps in access to financial services, women’s absolute levels of access to bank accounts remain too low in one-half of the region’s countries. Furthermore, women continue to face severe discrimination regarding their rights in the workplace. Many laws or legal provisions bar them from accessing certain professions or working on an equal footing with men; fail to adequately protect them regarding non-discrimination in employment; and fail to establish comprehensive maternity and paternity leave policies. As discriminatory social norms superimpose themselves – 22% of the Southeast Asian population holds negative attitudes towards working women and believes it is not acceptable for a woman to have a paid job outside her home if she wants one – women’s access to the labour market and to quality employment constitute pressing issues for Southeast Asia.

Discriminatory social institutions constitute major barriers to women's empowerment

> "Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets."

(United Nations, 2015[14]), 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.

Low health status resulting from discriminatory practices and social norms constrains women's empowerment

Guaranteeing women's health is fundamental to achieving women's empowerment, as it improves women's well-being, educational level, employment opportunities and productivity. The main channel through which health interacts with women's economic empowerment is human capital. Good health is a

key determinant of human capital. Malnutrition, early pregnancies, illnesses, violence against women and lack of access to reproductive services can severely affect women's and girls' educational outcomes, economic autonomy and career prospects, which all strongly influence their empowerment. Moreover, human capital development is a cumulative and long-term process that occurs throughout a person's lifetime. Therefore, it strongly depends on individuals' ability to survive and to reach working age in a healthy condition. In this regard, maternal health is critical, as it affects the health status of both mothers and their children. For instance, by reducing women's life expectancy, maternal mortality directly hampers women's human capital development and interrupts the process of human capital accumulation. Similarly, downstream consequences of poor maternal health – such as low birthweights or infant mortality – affect the next generation and further reduce future levels of human capital.

Discriminatory social norms and practices can play a critical role in lowering women's health status. For instance, the practice of child marriage among girls is strongly associated with adolescent pregnancies, which carry severe health risks for young women. Likewise, women's lack of reproductive autonomy and constraints placed on their rights to safely abort lead to increased risks of health complications. Meanwhile, violence against women is an epidemic in itself with long-term and profound psychological and health consequences and carries a significant economist cost to society. Finally, discriminatory social norms and practices that constrain women's access to and decision-making power over their own healthcare, as well as resources such as land or household finances, affect maternal health and have adverse consequences on women's nutrition and that of their children.

Poor maternal health in Southeast Asia partly derives from discriminatory barriers

In Southeast Asia, poor maternal health remains an issue of concern. One-half of the region's countries continue to display high maternal mortality rates. Although important progress have been achieved since 2010, rates were higher than 100 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2017 in six Southeast Asian countries,[9] and reached 250 deaths per 100 000 live births in Myanmar (Figure 1.6, Panel A). The high proportion of newborns with low birthweight also points towards evidence of poor performance in maternal health and nutrition across the region, which affects the next generation. In 2015, 24% of Southeast Asian newborns had a low birthweight, compared with 15% at the global level (WHO, 2020[17]). Poor maternal health outcomes often stem from gender-based discrimination, including insufficient or inadequate access to basic healthcare, lack of access to family planning and reproductive healthcare services, the prevalence of child marriage among girls, and episodes of violence against women. In this regard, addressing these underlying causes is critical to the empowerment of women (Amnesty International, 2011[18]).

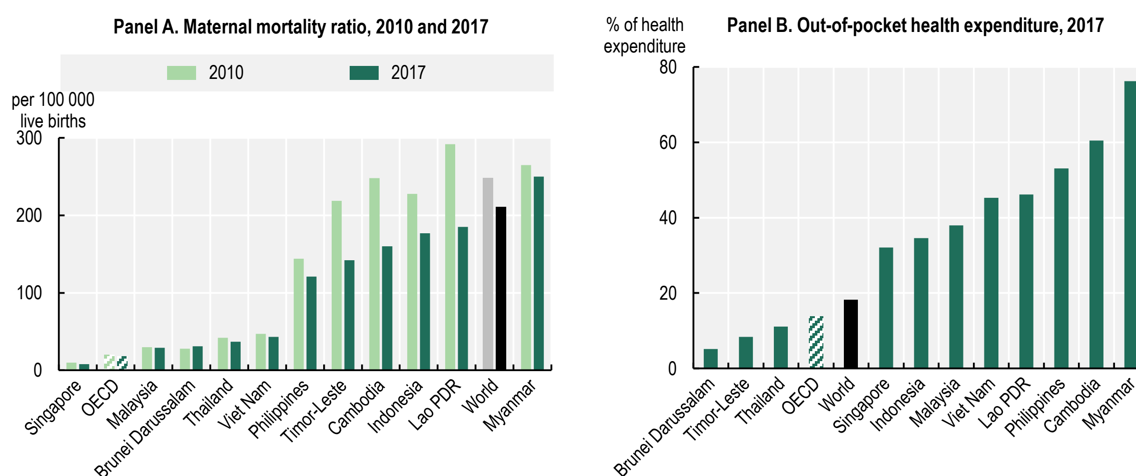
Discriminatory social institutions are strong determinants of women's poor maternal health outcomes. In the four Southeast Asian countries with data available, a significant percentage of women report that their husband is the primary decision maker over their healthcare, ranging from 31% of women reporting this in Timor-Leste to 47% in the Philippines (DHS, n.d.[19]). The norms of restrictive masculinities that position men as the decision makers over household choices, including over their partner's access to healthcare, may result in suboptimal decisions in this area, especially when men do not understand female anatomy or pregnancy (Blanc, 2001[20]). In order to make informed healthcare decisions and promote better outcomes, it is crucial that women are empowered to be agents in making decisions regarding their own healthcare. Indeed, evidence from other regions shows that when women have decision-making power over their own healthcare, they are more likely to seek out pregnancy care services (Mistry and Galal, 2009[21]) and maternal and child health outcomes improve (Singh, Bloom and Brodish, 2013[22]).

Furthermore, discriminatory norms and practices that constrain women's control over resources such as household finances and assets have important implications. Evidence from Indonesia shows that women's ownership over assets influences reproductive decision making within the household and may lead to better reproductive health outcomes (Beegle, Frankenberg and Thomas, 2001[23]). This operates through at least two mechanisms. Ownership over assets may give women more bargaining power within their

household, which can translate into more autonomy in decision making. Second, ownership over assets may prove fundamental in women's ability to access quality healthcare services, as the cost of seeking maternal healthcare services – including the costs of both utilisation and travel – may also constitute a significant barrier. Moreover, the opportunity costs of seeking healthcare, including taking time off from productive work and unpaid care responsibilities, further impede access to maternal healthcare services for poor women. In Southeast Asia, high healthcare costs and out-of-pocket health-related expenses (Figure 1.6, Panel B) tend to exacerbate these cost-related barriers (UN ESCAP, 2018[24]). Women's inability to afford these costs on their own partly stems from women's low economic empowerment, which is strongly linked with discriminatory social norms and practices. Finally, women's maternal health is hampered by a general lack of awareness of gender issues among national healthcare systems and providers (Qureshi and Shaikh, 2007[25]).

Figure 1.6. Maternal mortality remains high although progress have been achieved and households bear a large share of health-related costs

Maternal mortality ratios and share of out-of-pocket payments of total current health expenditures



Source: (World Bank, 2020[8]), *World Development Indicators*, https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators.

Southeast Asia's poor performance in maternal health also stems from issues related to chronic malnutrition, which themselves take root in discriminatory social norms and practices that prevent women from accessing, and from making decisions about, land and other assets. Chronic malnutrition is a critical issue in Southeast Asia. In 2019, 25% of Southeast Asian children under the age of five were stunted – that is, they were too short in height for their age – with this share ranging from 4% in Singapore to 52% in Timor-Leste. Likewise, proportions of wasted or underweight children are high, pointing towards systemic malnutrition (Figure 1.7, Panel A). The high proportion of newborns with low birthweight is both a cause and a consequence of poor maternal and child nutrition: girls who suffered from child malnutrition reach their childbearing years with short stature, which increases the risk of low birthweight in their children, thus continuing the intergenerational transmission of malnutrition (Chaparro, Oot and Sethuraman, 2014[26]; Han et al., 2012[27]). Discriminatory social institutions have an effect on women's nutritional status through a number of channels. Legal restrictions on access to land ownership, as well as social norms preventing women from controlling and using land, directly affect women's food security. The SIGI, which captures an extremely large and comprehensive array of these discriminatory social institutions, shows

that, although weak, there is a positive correlation between high discrimination in social institutions and poorer nutritional outcomes (Figure 1.7, Panels B, C and D).

Figure 1.7. Chronic malnutrition is a critical issue in Southeast Asia

Share of children aged under 5 years old who are stunted, underweight and wasted in Southeast Asian countries; and correlation between anthropometric scores and SIGI scores

Note: "Child stunting" refers to a child who is too short for his or her age. A child is identified as stunted when his or her height-for-age ratio is lower than two standard deviations from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards. "Child underweight" refers to a child who is not heavy enough for his or her age. A child is identified as underweight when his or her weight-for-age ratio is lower than two standard deviations from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards. "Child wasting" refers to a child who is not heavy enough for his or her height. A child is identified as wasted when his or her weight-for-height ratio is lower than two standard deviations from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards.
Panel A: Data cover different years depending on the country, as follows: Indonesia and the Philippines (2018); Lao PDR and Viet Nam (2017); Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand (2016); Cambodia (2014); Timor Leste (2013); Brunei Darussalam (2009); and Singapore (2000). Countries are ordered by increasing shares of stunted children.
Panels B, C and D: Data cover 93 countries for stunting and 92 countries for underweight and wasting.
Source: (OECD, 2019[5]), *Social Institutions and Gender Index*, https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/f0c48e52-en; and (WHO, 2020[17]), *Global Health Observatory data repository*, https://apps.who.int/gho/data.

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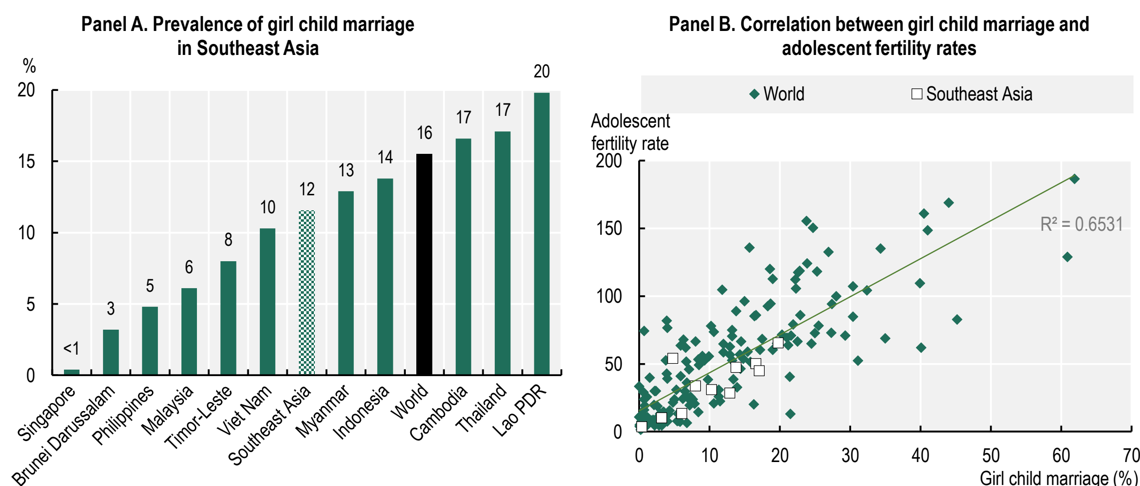
High rates of adolescent pregnancies are closely intertwined with persisting practices of child marriage among girls

Adolescent pregnancy remains a critical issue in Southeast Asia, affecting young women's empowerment early on in their life cycle. The region exhibits a high prevalence of adolescent births, with an average rate of 43 births per 1 000 women aged 15-19 years (see Chapter 2 for more details). The implications are very important and generally well documented. The main adverse effects include not only future health problems, increased likelihood of maternal mortality and low birthweights, but also lower quality of life and increased school dropout rates (WHO, 2015[28]), all of which negatively affect young women's empowerment and human development. For instance, globally, adolescent pregnancies and subsequent childbirth complications constitute the leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19 years (WHO, 2020[29]). Moreover, adolescent pregnancies often force young mothers to discontinue their education, which hampers their future economic opportunities, employment options and career choices. In this regard, the Human Capital Index (HCI) for women, a composite measure of women's human capital level computed by the World Bank, shows that a strong negative correlation exists between higher adolescent fertility rates and lower human capital development.

Figure 1.8. Adolescent pregnancies originate in discriminatory social institutions such as girl child marriage

Share of women aged 15-19 years who have been or are still married, divorced, widowed or in an informal union, 2018; and correlation between child marriage among girls and adolescent fertility rates



Note: Girl child marriage is calculated as the share of women aged 15-19 years who have been or are still married, divorced, widowed or in an informal union. Adolescent fertility rate is calculated as the number of births per 1 000 women aged 15-19 years.
Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2019[30]), *Gender, Institutions and Development Database*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba5dbd30-en; and (WHO, 2020[17]), *Global Health Observatory data repository*, https://apps.who.int/gho/data.

StatLink https://doi.org/10.1787/888934229806

Adolescent pregnancies appear to be closely intertwined with discriminatory laws, norms and practices, notably through the acceptance and prevalence of child marriage among girls. For instance, evidence shows that higher adolescent fertility is closely associated with higher prevalence rates of child marriage among girls (OECD, 2019[6]). Although lower than the global average and other developing regions, child marriage continues to affect 11.6% of Southeast Asian women between the ages of 15 and 19 years,

ranging from less than 1% in Singapore to 20% in Lao PDR (Figure 1.8, Panel A). The social acceptance and practice of child marriage among girls is itself linked with discriminatory social institutions and with cultural norms and traditions (UNESCO, 2018[31]). Data from the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB) show that there is a strong and significant positive correlation between the practice of child marriage among girls and higher adolescent fertility rates (Figure 1.8, Panel B). Beyond child marriage among girls, a wide range of discriminatory social institutions also plays a role in perpetuating this high incidence of adolescent pregnancies, including women's lack of decision-making power within the household, an asymmetrical balance of power, lack of education, unequal access to justice, etc.

Lack of reproductive autonomy and restrictive laws on abortion jeopardise women's health

Reproductive autonomy is a critical component of women's sexual and reproductive health. Legal and social barriers hindering women's access to basic contraception methods and control over their own body can have dramatic adverse health effects, including an increased risk of unplanned pregnancies and increased risk of clandestine and unsafe abortions that often lead to further health complications (WHO, 2011[32]).

Guaranteeing women's reproductive autonomy is fundamental to achieving women's empowerment, as it improves women's well-being, educational level, employment opportunities and productivity. Unintended and unplanned pregnancies constrain women's and girls' future educational and economic opportunities. Lower fertility rates can reduce the risks associated with pregnancy and contribute to increasing women's life expectancy. From a human capital perspective – a lifetime cumulative process – it proves critical, expanding women's economic prospects and increasing the potential returns on girls' and women's education. At the same time, smaller family size is associated with higher educational attainment and greater investment in girls, compounding the effects of reproductive autonomy on women's empowerment in the next generation (UN ESCAP, 2018[24]).

In Southeast Asia, women's limited reproductive autonomy rights are rooted in discriminatory laws and social norms. No country in the region legally guarantees universal access to contraception. In 2018, 13% of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) reported having an unmet need for family planning, which was a slight increase compared with 2014 (12%). Meanwhile, important legal limitations constrain women's power to control their own body and their rights to safely abort. As evidenced by the SIGI, in seven Southeast Asian countries,[10] abortion is illegal unless it is performed to save a woman's life (see Chapter 2 for more details). Apart from restrictive laws, barriers to contraception also stem from discriminatory social norms that deny women the power to make decisions about and control their own contraceptive use, pregnancy and childbearing.

Violence against women has deep long-term psychological and health consequences for women

Violence against women is one of the major barriers to women's empowerment. In Southeast Asia, on average, 25% of women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime in the nine countries[11] where such data are available (see Chapter 2 for more details). Moreover, the increased stress levels, economic insecurity and fear due to the COVID-19 crisis as well as the implementation of lockdown measures might put many women at risk of increased domestic violence with fewer support resources for survivors (Box 1.2). The causal relationship and interplay between women's empowerment and gender-based violence is complex and may run both ways. The prevalence of gender-based violence has far-reaching implications for women's empowerment. Violence, or the fear of it, can prevent women from pursuing education, working, earning an income, making decisions about their health or their children's education, and exercising their political rights and voice (Jahan, 2018[33]; Vyas and Watts, 2009[34]). At the same time, women's empowerment may influence gender-based violence, either positively or negatively. Women who are more educated, who have higher incomes and

who have more decision-making power within the household or their community are found to be less vulnerable to gender-based violence. Yet, challenging the established balance of power may also increase the risk of gender-based violence. A growing body of evidence shows that the process of women's empowerment can trigger a backlash from male partners who seek to reassert their control by resorting to violence (Jahan, 2018[33]; Alonso-Borrego and Carrasco, 2017[35]; Vyas and Watts, 2009[34]).

Gender-based violence in Southeast Asia – including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, as well as violence in the private and public spheres – is deeply rooted in discriminatory social norms and attitudes that consider violence a private matter. On average, 30% of Southeast Asian women and girls hold attitudes justifying the use of domestic violence (see Chapter 2 for more details). Likewise, female genital mutilation, a particular form of violence against young girls and adolescents, continues to exist in several countries in the region as a result of customary, religious or traditional practices or laws that allow and encourage this harmful practice.

Box 1.2. The implications of the COVID-19 crisis on the health of Southeast Asian women

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has had drastic health, social and economic consequences for the world's well-being, including in Southeast Asia. More specifically, the crisis is having a disproportionate impact on women's health access and outcomes, which will in turn have long-lasting impacts on their empowerment and threaten a reversal of the progress achieved over the last decades.

Women are the primary formal and informal frontline healthcare workers, which disproportionately exposes them to COVID-19

Women constitute the bulk of the healthcare workforce in Southeast Asia. In particular, they account for 79% of the region's nurses (Boniol et al., 2019[36]). Coupled with women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work – which entails caring for the sick at home – women are at the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic, which increases their risk of infection and their vulnerability to the disease (OECD, 2020[4]).

The pressure of the pandemic on healthcare systems and the diversion of resources puts pressure on women's health

The COVID-19 crisis is putting increasing pressure on Southeast Asian countries' healthcare capacities. The mobilisation and diversion of resources towards the fight against the pandemic reduces the healthcare access of non-COVID-19-affected patients who are seeking care for other diseases or for non-emergency healthcare procedures – such as routine prenatal check-ups. The region's limited pre-crisis capacities, coupled with the current crisis, means that there is a greater risk of care shortages. On average, all Southeast Asian countries have fewer hospital resources per capita than the OECD average (OECD, 2020[37]). Moreover, prior to the crisis, Southeast Asian countries already faced shortages of medical workers, including doctors and nurses (OECD, 2020[37]).

The health consequences for women are wide-ranging. Evidence from past health-related crises and epidemics has shown that the diversion of resources to the emergency response may contribute to a rise in maternal mortality, especially in regions where healthcare capacities are weak or already under strain (OECD, 2020[4]; Wenham, Smith and Morgan, 2020[38]). Moreover, the fear of becoming infected with COVID-19 in medical settings may deter individuals, including women, from seeking care in the first place. Finally, constraints put on households' economic resources limit their ability to seek care and cover the associated fees, and thus may threaten their access to critical reproductive and sexual health services (United Nations, 2020[39]). In the context of gender-based discrimination, this often implies that the first individuals within households to experience the discontinuation of healthcare services are

women. This becomes particularly critical for pregnant women who might not receive the appropriate prenatal care, leading to potential future health complications for both the mother and the child.

The COVID-19 pandemic puts many women at risk of increased domestic violence with fewer support resources for survivors

The COVID-19 crisis has increased stress levels, economic insecurity and fear; moreover, most people are spending more time at home than they were before the pandemic, with businesses closing, lockdowns being instituted and many employers moving to teleworking. In this setting, especially with interruptions of work and job losses, violence at home may be a reaction to this instability. Indeed, paid work is a fundamental part of constructions of "ideal masculinity", and being the breadwinner constitutes a source of authority in the household. With this role in question, violence may arise as a reaction, and instances of domestic violence have increased (OECD, 2020[4]). Indeed, early evidence in different Southeast Asian countries has pointed towards an increase in calls and complaints reporting episodes of domestic violence during the lockdowns implemented in March and April 2020 (United Nations, 2020[39]; Setianto, 2020[40]). Moreover, the emergency situation and the strains put on resources severely affects survivors' ability to escape violent homes. Likewise, the potential downstream economic consequences of COVID-19 – including losses of employment, reduced economic activity and increased unpaid care work – are particularly dangerous for women who are victims of violence, as economic control is a key tool of abusers. This financial insecurity may force victims to remain with their abusers.

Parity in education supports Southeast Asian women's empowerment, but discriminatory social institutions and biases continue to shape educational choices

Education is a critical component of women's empowerment, with long-lasting impacts not only on their economic status but also on the sociocultural, interpersonal, political and psychological dimensions of their empowerment (Aslam, 2013[41]). The most evident relationship between education and women's empowerment is the impact of education on women's income, employment status and skills development. In this regard, not only does education itself matter, but the type of education as well. The fields of study chosen by girls and boys often differ significantly, which yields important consequences for future employment and income level (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin, 2019[42]). Beyond economic and labour market outcomes, women's education is also essential to their socio-political and interpersonal empowerment – that is, their ability to gain knowledge and decision-making power both within the household and in the public sphere. Education plays a central role in shaping the perception of women in a number of areas, ranging from decision making regarding family size, to satisfaction with life, to their role in society. Yet, evidence shows that to be truly empowering, education needs to be both sufficient – that is, women need to reach a high level of educational achievement – and of high enough quality (Aslam, 2013[41]; Kabeer, 2009[43]).

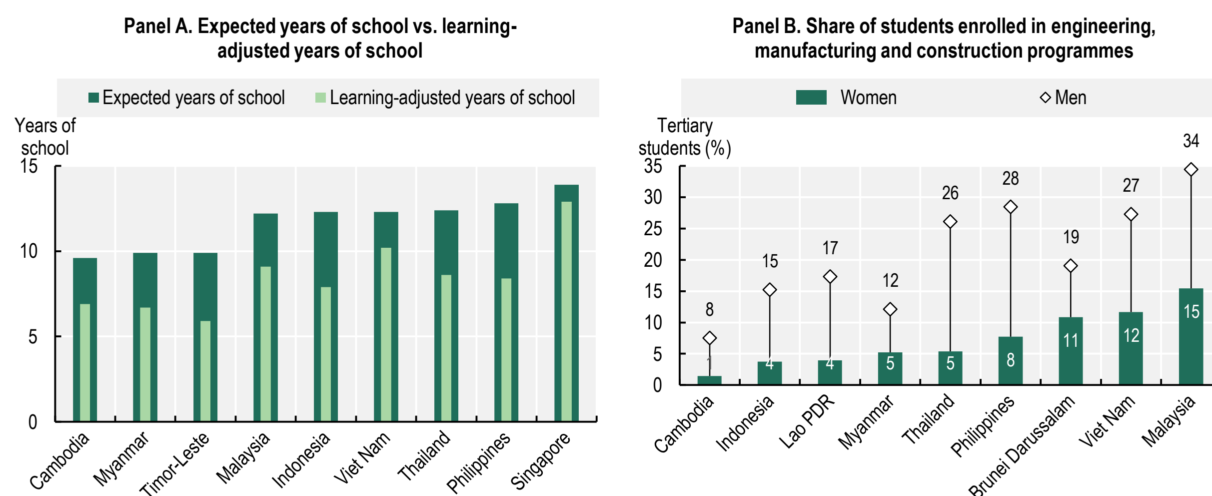
Southeast Asia has achieved gender equality in education, but quality remains low, which triggers downstream consequences for women's empowerment

Southeast Asia has achieved gender parity in education. In all countries in the region for which data are available, as many girls as boys are enrolled in primary and secondary education. On average, the gender parity index (GPI) – which measures the quotient of the number of girls divided by the number of boys enrolled – stood at 1 in 2018 for net primary education enrolment in Southeast Asia. That same year, the GPI for net secondary education enrolment stood at 1.1, meaning that slightly more girls were enrolled than boys. This trend is even more pronounced at the tertiary level: in 2018, the GPI for tertiary education was 1.2 for Southeast Asia as a whole, reaching 1.6 in Brunei Darussalam. Overall, all Southeast Asian

countries but Cambodia (and Timor-Leste, which does not have data) displayed a GPI above 1 for tertiary education enrolment (UNESCO, 2020[44]).

However, the quality of education remains limited for both girls and boys. Results from the 2018 edition of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, apart from Singapore, all Southeast Asian countries for which data are available[12] severely trail behind the rest of the world in all three core subjects assessed – reading, mathematics and science. Southeast Asia's average scores in reading – calculated using the sample of countries for which data existed in 2018 – stood at 413 compared with 453 at the global level and 487 in OECD member countries. Likewise, the region's average scores in mathematics and science stood at 432 and 433, respectively, compared with 459 and 458 at the global level and at 489 and 489 in OECD member countries. Similar analysis carried out for the HCI showed that Southeast Asian countries suffer from wide gaps between the theoretical and expected years of schooling and the actual years of schooling when adjusted by harmonised school test scores (World Bank, 2018[45]). For instance, in Indonesia and the Philippines, this difference is 4.4 years. In other words, in Indonesia, while students are expected to complete 12.3 years of schooling, they complete 7.9 learning-adjusted years of schooling; and in the Philippines, instead of 12.8 expected years of schooling, students complete 8.4 learning-adjusted years (Figure 1.9, Panel A).

Figure 1.9. The quality of education remains limited in Southeast Asia, while gender segregation by field of study is important



Note: Panel A: Data are missing for Brunei Darussalam and Lao PDR. Countries are ordered by increasing expected years of school.
Panel B: Data cover different years depending on the country, as follows: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Myanmar (2018); the Philippines (2017); Thailand and Viet Nam (2016); Brunei Darussalam (2014). Data are missing for Singapore and Timor-Leste. Countries are ordered by increasing shares of women enrolled in engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes.
Source: (World Bank, 2018[45]), *Human Capital Index*, https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/dataset/human-capital-index; and (UNESCO, 2020[44]), *UNESCO Institute for Statistics* (UIS), http://data.uis.unesco.org.

Quality of education is a critical issue, as it may strengthen women's empowerment and it plays a role in addressing the root causes of discriminatory social norms and unconscious biases from an early age. Providing good-quality education for girls entails access to gender-sensitive, safe and supportive educational environments and infrastructures. These are identified as critical factors to foster the development of the necessary self-awareness and confidence among girls and women to overcome the challenges and discrimination they currently or will face as a result of gender inequality (McCracken et al.,

2015[46]). At the same time, quality education is paramount to ensuring that discriminatory attitudes and biases among both girls and boys are addressed from a very early age. High-quality education that incorporates gender-sensitive material and learning processes contributes to shaping understandings of masculinities and cultivating gender-equitable attitudes.

Deeply embedded social norms lead to higher gender segregation in tertiary education, which undermines women's empowerment

Gender segregation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields across Southeast Asia remains very high. Although more women than men are enrolled in tertiary education, the share of men enrolled in tertiary-level engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes is consistently and markedly larger than the share of women across all Southeast Asian countries (Figure 1.9, Panel B). In the Philippines and Thailand, the gap is a full 21 percentage points. Overall, in six[13] out of the nine Southeast Asian countries for which data are available, the gender gap in STEM enrolment is larger than ten percentage points.

Discriminatory social norms and attitudes, which lead men to enrol in STEM fields, play a critical role in shaping these educational choices. There are multiple underlying factors that relate to both social norms and learning processes. On the one hand, social norms, stereotypes and very strong unconscious biases lead people to perceive STEM fields as masculine and play a critical role in dictating the types of programmes in which women enrol compared with men. The self-selection bias is considered one of the main reasons why girls opt out of STEM fields, which comes directly from stereotypes about gender roles and cognitive abilities (Llena-Nozal, Martin and Murtin, 2019[42]; UNESCO, 2017[47]). On the other hand, from as early as primary or secondary education, learning materials perpetuate gender stereotypes by assigning certain functions and skills to girls and boys. The lack of female teachers in STEM as the level of education increases, combined with the low labour force participation of women in STEM fields, results in fewer female role models in STEM, which plays a role in shaping young girls' expectations and further reduces girls' engagement in these fields (UN ESCAP, 2018[48]; UNESCO, 2015[49]). Furthermore, women and girls have less access to information and communication technology (ICT) than men and boys in Southeast Asia, which in turn decreases girls' and women's enrolment and representation in STEM fields (OECD, 2019[50]).

These distinct educational choices have far-reaching implications for women's empowerment through effects on their integration and prospects within the labour market. Educational choices have a direct impact on women's and men's choice of labour sector and status. The lack of representation of women in STEM fields leads to their lower representation in positions such as engineers, scientists or architects, which are often high-status and high-paying careers (UNESCO, 2015[51]). This has further consequences not only on women's self-esteem and representation in positions of power, but also on their level of income and on their economic empowerment in general.

The economic empowerment of Southeast Asian women is hampered by discriminatory norms and practices that curtail their labour participation, access to resources and skills development

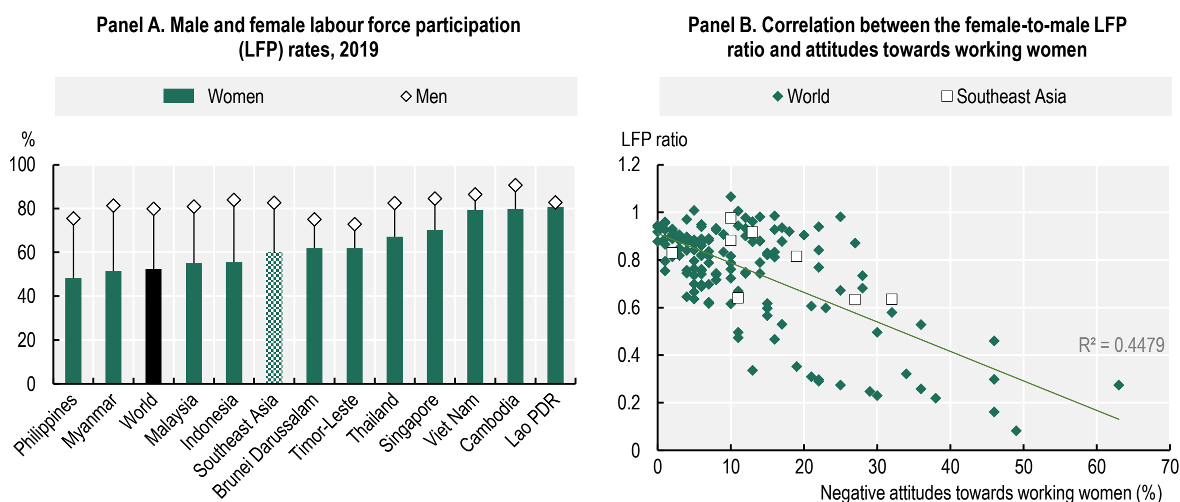
The economic dimension is central to women's empowerment and includes women's ability to participate in the labour market and to earn an income, as well as their ability to access and control productive and financial resources. However, it also encompasses a wider set of issues, including their control over their own time, lives and bodies, and their meaningful participation and representation in economic decision-making processes at all levels – from within the household to the highest economic and political positions (UN Women, 2020[52]). Women's economic empowerment evidently focuses primarily on women's capacity to make strategic choices and have agency in the economic sphere, but it also paves the way for changes

in other dimensions of their lives, such as well-being, social empowerment, health or education (Kabeer, 2009[43]).

Women’s labour force participation is strongly shaped by expectations towards their social role

Important gender imbalances exist in Southeast Asia’s labour markets, which have far-reaching implications for women’s economic empowerment as well as for the economy as a whole. On average, the labour force participation rate is 23 percentage points lower for women than for men (Figure 1.10, Panel A). In four Southeast Asian countries[14] – which are also the ones with the lowest female labour force participation – the discrepancy exceeds 25 percentage points. Women’s inclusion in the labour market and their ability to have their own source of income is essential to their empowerment. Economic empowerment puts women in a position to make meaningful and strategic decisions on their own that have further impacts on other dimensions of their empowerment and human capital, such as investing in their health or in their education. A growing body of evidence indicates that these effects are not only limited to women themselves, but also have knock-on effects on their communities, households and children, notably through greater investment in children’s education, improved nutrition and reduced gender-based violence. At the same time, women’s labour inclusion yields significant economic benefits for society as a whole. Given a similar distribution of innate abilities among women and men, gender-driven labour imbalances artificially reduce the pool of skilled workers from which economic actors can draw, thereby reducing the overall economic growth of a given region (Ferrant and Kolev, 2016[53]).

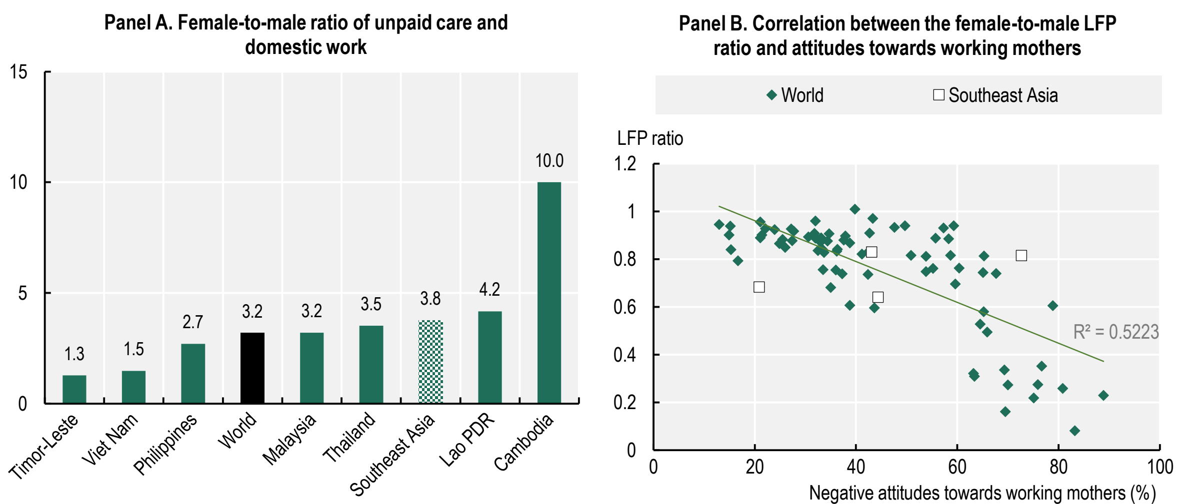
Figure 1.10. Women are less integrated than men in the labour market in all Southeast Asian countries



Note: Panel A: The labour force participation rate is calculated as the labour force divided by the total working-age population. The working-age population refers to people aged 15-64 years.
Panel B: Negative attitudes towards working women are defined as the share of the population that disagrees with the statement: “It is perfectly acceptable for any woman in your family to have a paid job outside the home if she wants to.” The female-to-male labour force participation ratio is calculated as women’s labour force participation rate divided by men’s labour force participation rate. Attitudinal data cover 146 countries; data are missing for three Southeast Asian countries: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Timor-Leste. R^2 is 0.4479.
Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2019[30]), Gender, Institutions and Development Database, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba5dbd30-en; (OECD, 2020[54]), Labour Force Statistics, https://oe.cd/ds/2Sp; and (ILO, 2020[55]), ILOSTAT, https://ilostat.ilo.org/data.

Discriminatory social institutions – in particular social norms within society and the household – have a strong effect on women's economic empowerment and labour force participation. OECD research has shown that discrimination in social institutions has a strong, significant and negative effect on the gender gap in labour force participation (Ferrant and Kolev, 2016[53]). Evidence from the SIGI shows that in all Southeast Asian countries except Lao PDR and Singapore, discriminatory customary and traditional practices continue to undermine legal frameworks and restrict women's work-related rights. Attitudes related to women's paid employment are also important. Social norms that discourage women from making the choice to have a paid job outside the household are highly and negatively correlated with lower female-to-male labour force participation ratios (Figure 1.10, Panel B). In Southeast Asia, 22% of the population holds such negative views, ranging from 2% in Singapore to 32% in Indonesia (see Chapter 2 for more details).

Figure 1.11. Women's heavier burden of unpaid care and domestic tasks hampers their labour force participation



Note: Panel A: The female-to-male ratio of unpaid care and domestic work is calculated as the average number of hours dedicated by women to unpaid care and domestic tasks divided by the average number of hours dedicated by men to the same tasks. Data are missing for Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Myanmar and Singapore.
Panel B: Negative attitudes towards working mothers are defined by the share of the population that agrees with the statement: "When a mother works for pay, the children suffer." The female-to-male labour force participation ratio is calculated as women's labour force participation rate divided by men's labour force participation rate. Attitudinal data cover 80 countries, including 4 Southeast Asian countries: Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. R^2 is 0.5223.
Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2019[30]), Gender, Institutions and Development Database, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba5dbd30-en; (OECD, 2020[54]), Labour Force Statistics, https://oe.cd/ds/2Sp; and (ILO, 2020[55]), ILOSTAT, https://ilostat.ilo.org/data.

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Moreover, women's high burden of unpaid care and domestic work reinforces their low participation in the labour market and limits their economic empowerment. Women in Southeast Asia continue to assume the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work. In 2018, in the seven Southeast Asian countries[15] for which data are available, women spent, on average, 3.8 times more time than men did on unpaid care and domestic work, including raising children, caring for sick or elderly family members, and managing household tasks (Figure 1.11, Panel A). The ongoing COVID-19 crisis exacerbates these imbalances with lockdown measures often leading to additional unpaid care and domestic work falling on women's shoulders (Box 1.3). Women's disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities has far-reaching

implications for their economic empowerment that have been thoroughly documented. Among others, it constrains the allocation of their time, their mobility, their employment opportunities and their ability to engage in political activities. It also pushes women to seek work arrangements that are more flexible, often part-time and closer to home, all of which results in the segregation of women into the informal sector and low-status jobs (UN ESCAP, 2018[48]; Kabeer, 2009[43]).

The unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work in households is the product of discriminatory social norms and traditional views of gender roles that confine women to domestic tasks within the home. In 2018, for instance, 73% of respondents in Thailand declared that children will suffer when a mother works for pay outside the home. Similarly, the share of the population holding such views stood at 44%, 43% and 21% in the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia, respectively. These social norms data reveal the deeply entrenched and gender-differentiated social expectations faced by women and men. These expectations are indeed relational; women's paid labour is not viewed as favourably as men's because paid work is a fundamental aspect of masculine identity (OECD, 2021[56]). Indeed, men are often expected to be breadwinners and financial providers for their family in order to be considered "real" men. In turn, caring for family members and the home – through unpaid labour – is a primary social expectation of women. By confining women to domestic tasks within the home, these rigid social norms and restrictive masculinities have a profound impact on women's participation in the labour market (Figure 1.11, Panel B).

Box 1.3. The economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Southeast Asian women

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the deepest global economic recession in nearly a century, disrupting economic activity and negatively affecting well-being and jobs. In Southeast Asia, economic output is projected to contract by 2.8% as a result (OECD, 2020[37]).[16] The crisis is having disproportionate economic impacts on women that, if not mitigated, may induce a long-term worsening of their economic empowerment and increase in gender inequality.

The economic crisis primarily affects sectors in which women are overrepresented

The COVID-19 crisis, through lockdown and confinement measures as well as the disruption of international supply chains and tourism, has severely affected some specific sectors, such as retail trade, accommodation and food services, and domestic services. In Southeast Asia, women are overrepresented in these sectors (United Nations, 2020[39]). Across the region, women account for 54% and 60% of the workers employed in the wholesale and retail trade sector and in the accommodation and food services sector, respectively. Women also account for a disproportionate share of the workers involved in household and domestic services, which suffered heavily from the crisis (ILO, 2020[57]). Domestic workers often do not benefit from any social protection schemes, which might even increase their hardship when faced with job uncertainty. Informality, which characterises women's employment more so than men's in Southeast Asia, further adds to their vulnerability and limits women's ability to benefit from social protection (Lai, 2020[58]).

Lockdown and confinement measures exacerbate the unpaid care and domestic work burden of women

The overload of healthcare systems, combined with the reduced functioning of essential services like schools or day-care centres, increase the burden of unpaid care and domestic work that falls on Southeast Asian women, accentuating the gender imbalances that already existed prior to the crisis. Evidence in several countries in the region, such as the Philippines and Thailand, indicates that women's unpaid care and domestic work burden increased as a result of COVID-19 mitigation measures. Beyond direct consequences for their employment, skills development and economic empowerment, this increased burden also exacerbated women's vulnerability to mental and emotional health complications (United Nations, 2020[39]).

Women's restricted access to critical economic resources is rooted in norms of restrictive masculinities and discriminatory practices that perpetuate men's economic dominance

Access to, and control and decision-making power over, productive resources such as land and financial assets is critical to women's economic empowerment. In rural areas, and specifically in countries where economies are dominated by the agricultural sector, both statutory and customary land tenure systems that undermine women's status constitute major barriers to their economic empowerment. No less important is women's right to housing, which, when restricted, can severely increase women's economic insecurity, as well as their social and personal insecurities. In instances of divorce or death of their spouse, discriminatory practices preventing women from claiming their rights to property or land can put them at risk of losing all the benefits and rights they enjoyed, thus directly affecting their ability to make strategic choices and meaningful decisions. Securing these rights and exercising their decision-making power over these assets is therefore paramount to women's empowerment. Indeed, evidence also shows that enhanced access to land and housing for women leads to greater self-esteem as well as greater respect from other family and community members. The returns are far-reaching and include improved outcomes for their children through higher survival rates, better nutrition and higher school attainment (UN ESCAP, 2018[48]).

In Southeast Asia, women's weak access to land and non-land assets threatens their ability to take control over their lives. Sex-disaggregated data on ownership of land or houses remain scarce around the world, and Southeast Asia is no exception. Nevertheless, across the seven Southeast Asian countries[17] for which data on land ownership are available, women represent only 13% of landowners on average – whereas they account for 39% of the agricultural workers across the overall region (see Chapter 2 for more details). These outcomes are induced, at least in part, by the existence of legal frameworks that discriminate against women's ownership and administration of productive assets. These laws, present in some Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia or the Philippines, grant decision-making power to husbands and thus limit women's ability to claim their rights in cases of disagreement. These legal frameworks are rooted in the powerful social expectation that part of men's identity, as men, involves being the primary decision makers in important family matters, especially when it comes to large family assets such as property. Similarly, social practices governing household assets in marriage and inheritance also prevent women's land ownership. There are many examples of cases in which, following marriage, the administration of the household finances is customarily transferred to the husband. Meanwhile, women's ability to inherit assets is intrinsically linked with customary practices which favour boys' inheritance rights over girls'. For instance, in Viet Nam, patrilineal inheritance customs favouring sons over daughters continue to prevail in some ethnic communities (see Chapter 2 for more details).

Discriminatory social norms and expectations perpetuate women's limited access to land and non-land assets. Individuals obtain access to assets through purchase, inheritance or state intervention (Kabeer, 2009[43]). In each of these three channels, evidence shows that strongly embedded discriminatory social norms and practices prevent women from accessing assets on an equal footing with men. Women's ability to purchase assets is directly hampered by constraints placed on their ability to work and to earn an income, which in turn, as previously mentioned, stem from discriminatory social norms and traditional views of gender roles. These social norms include strong beliefs regarding women's and men's roles in the household and in broader society. According to binary gender roles, men are expected to provide financially for their families whereas women are expected to take care of the home and family members through unpaid care and domestic work. This division of work and the remuneration of men's but not women's work underpins the devaluation of women's labour. Social norms that expect men to be the main breadwinner undermine women's access to work, promotions and equal remuneration for work of equal value. These forces, in turn, lead to very few women having the resources necessary to purchase assets on their own, which further reinforces men's economic dominance.

Finally, even when state interventions are designed to correct ownership imbalances, social norms and biases may undermine their effects. Attempts by Southeast Asian governments to reform land titling in order to endow women with formal land titles show that traditional practices can ignore multiple interests and favour sole registration under the husband's name, effectively depriving women of the control over land they previously had in practice (Liamzon, Arevalo and Naungayan, 2016[59]; Rao, 2011[60]). In Viet Nam, for example, the initial design of the land titling reform failed to provide for joint titling by allowing only one name to be registered on the title issued. Although the issue was addressed in a further reform, the immediate consequence was that certificates were only issued under the name of the man of the household, highlighting the strength of social norms and practices (see Chapter 2 for more details).

The interaction between economic empowerment and education suggests that women's empowerment is constrained by lower skills development

The integration of women in the workplace is critical for skills development – a particular form of education – which contributes to raising their employment status and empowering them. A major part of individuals' human capital development occurs beyond formal learning in the education system and takes place directly within the work environment, either through informal on-the-job skills acquisition or through formal training and retraining. In a rapidly evolving global economy, it becomes crucial for companies and their employees to keep abreast of structural changes and to constantly update their skills in order to maintain their employability (OECD, 2019[61]). In this regard, acquiring new skills is an essential component of women's economic empowerment that leads to better job status, higher income and more decision-making power, both in the professional environment and within the household.

In Southeast Asia, labour imbalances and gender-based segregation deter women's skills development in two ways: fewer opportunities to build skills through on-the-job training and in informal settings on the one hand, and lower incentives to invest in skills development on the other hand. First, formal training programmes increase the skills of employees or endow them with new ones. While critical in a rapidly evolving professional environment characterised by rapid innovation and new digital tools, formal training is also an essential factor for employees seeking better job opportunities, higher labour status and increased income. In Southeast Asia, 32% of managers are women. While this is a higher percentage than the global average of 24%, gender-equal representation in managerial positions remains a distant goal and unequal representation contributes to limiting women's training and advancement opportunities, effectively hampering their human capital development and empowerment. Second, women's relatively low labour force participation – partly based on discriminatory social norms and practices – acts as a powerful deterrent to their investment in skills development, particularly through education. Skills development strongly depends on perceptions of the labour market and the expected returns on investments aimed at raising human capital. Labour markets that present strong imbalances, such as Southeast Asia, do not provide an adequate signal for women to sacrifice resources and to invest in skills development.

Women's empowerment requires amplifying women's voices in decision-making bodies

Opportunities for women to participate in decision making, whether this is in the workplace, in their communities or in government, are critical for women's empowerment. Having a voice in decision-making processes ensures that women have opportunities to shape their environments, assert their agency and advocate for their further empowerment. Without more women at decision-making tables, it is less likely that the perspectives of women and girls will be taken into account within policy processes, or that actions to eliminate the barriers to their participation will be taken (Box 1.4). Conversely, gender-equal representation can also have a self-reinforcing effect by inspiring more women and girls to aspire to these roles, encouraging societies to support women's leadership and creating opportunities for a gender lens

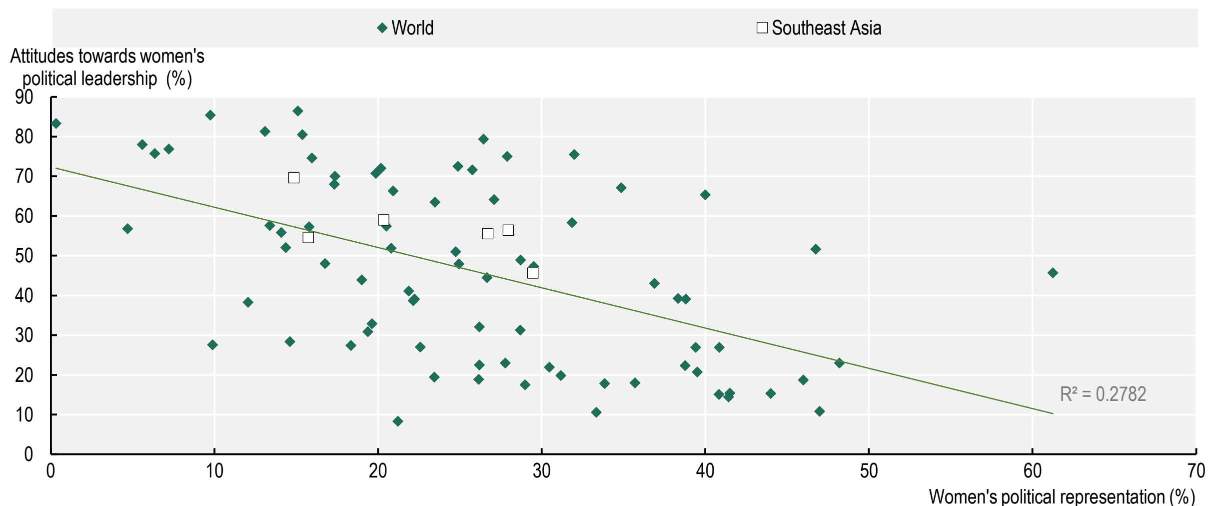
to be applied in policy making. Ultimately, women's empowerment and participation in decision making are "fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace" (United Nations, 1995[62]).

Nevertheless, data show that women's inclusion in diverse decision-making bodies remains limited in the Southeast Asian region. In politics, women's representation has improved since the early 2000s; however, in 2020, women accounted for just 20% of members of parliament in the region's single or lower houses of parliament (IPU Parline, 2020[63]). When it comes to corporate decision making, women are also underrepresented among the five Southeast Asian countries[18] with available data; the percentage of board seats held by women ranged from 10% in Indonesia to 25% in Malaysia in 2019 (Emelianova and Milhomem, 2019[64]). Also striking is the small percentage of women chief executive officers (CEOs) in these countries. In 2019, among Southeast Asian countries with available data, Thailand was home to the highest percentage of women CEOs (14%) (Emelianova and Milhomem, 2019[64]).

Persistent discriminatory social institutions induce these unequal outcomes and hinder women's ability to exercise their voices or to advocate for their empowerment. Among these institutions are social norms. In Southeast Asia, 57% of the population across six countries[19] reportedly agrees that "on the whole, men make better political leaders than women" (OECD, 2019[6]). These discriminatory social norms which view women as less capable of this type of leadership are a key driver behind women's underrepresentation in politics (Figure 1.12). Other social institutions, namely legal frameworks and socially accepted practices, define and uphold the "rules of the game" which create an unequal playing field for women's participation in decision making (see Chapter 2 for more details). These institutions include the social norms that place the bulk of unpaid care work on women's shoulders, the practice of political violence against women, and legal frameworks that fail to provide mechanisms to encourage gender-equal participation in decision-making bodies.

Figure 1.12. Gender-based discriminatory norms hinder women's political participation

Correlation between attitudes towards women's political leadership and women's representation in parliaments



Note: Attitudes towards women's political leadership are defined as the share of the population that agrees with the statement: "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do". Women's political representation is defined as the percentage of women in the total number of representatives in the lower or single house of parliament. Attitudinal data are missing for Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Timor-Leste.
Source: (OECD Development Centre/OECD, 2019[30]), *Gender, Institutions and Development Database*, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba5dbd30-en.

Box 1.4. Women must be included at the decision-making level if COVID-19 recovery strategies are to take gender into account

While women across Southeast Asia are at the forefront of the measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic, they are underrepresented at the decision-making table when it comes to responding to and planning crisis recoveries. In the healthcare sector, for example, women make up nearly 70% of the healthcare workforce, facing exposure as a result; yet, women remain underrepresented in the sector's leadership positions (OECD, 2020[4]). In order to ensure that the COVID-19 crisis does not continue to exacerbate existing inequalities, including gender inequality in particular, the decision-making bodies creating and leading responses and recovery efforts must include the voices of women and girls. Without their voices, the possibility for gender-responsive responses and recoveries remains increasingly remote (OECD, 2020[4]).

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

Adopt a holistic and intersectional approach, taking into account women's diversity while engaging men and boys as positive agents of change

Policy makers must systematically incorporate a holistic and intersectional approach into both legislation and programmes, as most of the challenges faced by women and girls cannot be dealt with in isolation. In

order to implement a successful whole-of-society approach in the Southeast Asian region, policy makers must work along three main axes.

Address gender-based discrimination at all social and political levels

To reduce gender-based discrimination, policy makers need to develop comprehensive national strategies that address gender-based discrimination at different levels, which requires mobilising a wide range of actors. Gender-based discriminatory social institutions manifest themselves in different environments: at the individual level, at the household level, at the community level and, finally, at the societal level. A whole-of-society shift, therefore, requires developing programmes and interventions at each of these levels. A holistic approach entails mobilising different actors depending on the level of intervention. For instance, grassroots organisations are essential to spur change at the household and community levels, while national legislative bodies and religious authorities can have a critical impact at the societal level. For example, in Indonesia, ahead of the 2019 elections, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection provided a module to support women candidates with the aim of bolstering women's political representation. The training covered the meaning of representation, the electoral system, vote calculations, mapping voter networks and competitors' support, as well as winning strategies. Furthermore, the module provided capital in order to enable female candidates to mount competitive campaigns (Government of Indonesia, 2020[71]).

Integrate the problem of intersectional discrimination faced by certain women and girls into policy responses

Policy makers need to target interventions by taking into account women's diversity and the fact that women can face multiple forms of discrimination that superimpose themselves. The socio-economic characteristics of women and girls are strong determinants of the types of discrimination they face. Disability, poverty, rural status, job informality, migration status, etc. constitute a large array of potential discriminatory factors that intersect with gender-based discrimination and that need to be integrated into the design of policies. For example, Thailand developed the 2nd Women with Disability Development Plan (2017-2021) in order to address the issue of violence against women with disabilities (Government of Thailand, 2020[72]). Many workplace-related laws that govern maternity leave and benefits or social and health insurance schemes increasingly seek to address the issue of covering informal sector workers, where women are often overrepresented. Recent examples include new laws in Lao PDR and the Philippines (Government of the Philippines, 2018[68]; Addati, Behrendt and Wagenhäuser, 2016[73]). Meanwhile, in Malaysia, the Department of Women's Development has created legal clinics to help women by enhancing their knowledge of their rights and available means of legal redress. In addition to these clinics, low-cost legal services targeting low-income women are available through various channels, including the Legal Aid Bureau (Government of Malaysia, 2019[74]). Likewise, in Cambodia, the government increased budget allocations for justice services and legal aid for low-income women (Government of Cambodia, 2019[70]). In Timor-Leste, in order to improve rural women's access to justice, mobile courts have been established and make their rounds to different locations (Cummins, 2018[75]). Moreover, Decree No. 11/2017 recognised Tetum as an official language in the judicial sector, thus improving the accessibility of the formal justice system to non-Portuguese-speaking women (Government of Timor-Leste, 2019[76]).

Engage men and boys as positive agents of change

Shifting social norms requires a whole-of-society approach; this includes engaging men and boys. Studies show that challenging patriarchal norms, such as the social expectation for men to be the breadwinners or that men need to be tough, can have far-reaching positive implications for men's health and happiness and for women's well-being and empowerment across multiple areas (Barker, 2007[77]; MenEngage, n.d.[78]; van der Gaag et al., 2019[79]). However, these studies have also shown that attitudinal and

behaviour change is possible. Policy makers must implement and scale up evidence-based approaches to challenge the negative aspects of masculine norms while promoting greater awareness of the multiple ways that women and men benefit from addressing restrictive gender norms. In this regard, the Philippines has numerous examples of programmes aimed at engaging men and boys in gender equality, including the Men's Responsibilities in Gender and Development (MR GAD) programme, Men Faithful to their Family Responsibilities and Obligations (*Kalalakihang Tapat sa Responsibilidad at Obligasyon sa Pamilya*) (KATROPA) programme and the Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Paternal Abilities (ERPAT) programme (Republic of the Phillipines, n.d.[80]; DSWD, n.d.[81]). The ERPAT programme for example, is integrated in a conditional cash-transfer programme and includes modules on family development that teach recipient parents about shared household and care responsibility (DSWD, n.d.[81]).

Strengthen the scope and the quality of sex-disaggregated data collection at all geographical levels

Southeast Asian countries must invest in statistical capabilities to produce more and better sex-disaggregated data at all geographical levels, from local to national levels. In order to ensure that statistics are produced at the most accurate levels of analysis and to help build the business case in favour of gender equality, policy makers must work along two main axes.

Invest in statistical capabilities to produce more and better sex-disaggregated data at various geographical levels

High-quality data are essential to ensure that policy makers understand the scope and the drivers of gender inequality. To grasp all of the dimensions of gender-based discrimination and the full extent of their socio-economic consequences, governments and civil society organisations need to commit to systematically collecting sex-disaggregated data. These efforts should not be limited to areas that are traditionally identified as "gender sensitive" (e.g. sex-disaggregated data on labour force participation), but should be extended to all statistical activities (e.g. sex-disaggregated data on land or homeownership). The availability of a large array of sex-disaggregated data would support further research and help uncover unknown interlinkages between gender-based discrimination and other socio-economic phenomena, as well as capture intersectional discrimination. For example, Myanmar recently launched a statistical programme on data related to violence against women. In co-operation with the United Nations Population Fund and civil society organisations, the three-year National Study on Violence against Women and Girls (2019-2021) aims to collect statistics to estimate the prevalence, frequency and forms of gender-based violence experienced by women, in line with SDG indicators 5.2.1 and 5.2.2. Beyond these traditional statistics, the extent of the data collected should also reveal the association between violence, health and economic outcomes; the identification of factors that either protect or put women and girls at risk of gender-based violence; the documentation and comparison of strategies and services that women and girls use to deal with gender-based violence; and the provision of novel estimates of the economic cost of violence (Government of Myanmar, 2019[82]).

Strengthen statistical co-operation across Southeast Asian countries to guarantee comparability and support the monitoring of SDG 5

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the collection of quality sex-disaggregated data across a wide range of issues is critical in order to monitor the achievement of the SDGs. Beyond the indicators of SDG 5 on gender equality, the OECD estimates that 45% of the indicators contained in the *UN Global Indicator Framework* (that is, 102 indicators out of 247) can be identified as gender relevant (Cohen and Shinwell, 2020[83]). In 2018, **Cambodia** finalised the Cambodian Sustainable Development

Goals Framework (2016-2030), aligning its national statistical framework with the SDG framework (Government of Cambodia, 2018[84]). The framework is the product of an extensive collaborative process involving a Rapid Integrated Assessment from the United Nations Development Programme in 2016 (UNDP, 2016[85]), an SDG assessment from the United Nations Statistics Division in 2017 and an EU-ASEAN Capacity Building Project for Monitoring Integration on Progress and Statistics (COMPASS) in 2017 (European Union and ASEAN, 2017[86]). The framework consists of nationalising the SDGs to Cambodia's specific context and challenges, and comprises 18 goals, 88 targets and 148 indicators. Of the 148 indicators included in Cambodia's national framework, 47 are gender specific (Government of Cambodia, 2019[70]; Government of Cambodia, 2019[87]).

Invest in data collection on gender norms, including on the norms of masculinities

In order to identify progress towards transforming masculinities, it is essential to understand these context-specific norms. Data that can measure societies' expectations of men and boys should be collected. This requires that data take into account not just men's beliefs but the beliefs of men and women together, because norms of masculinities are not self-directed by individual men, but are passed down and reinforced within communities (OECD, 2021[56]). These data should also recognise that men have some degree of agency in accepting or rejecting the norms of masculinity in their communities, but must face social sanctions if they choose to deviate significantly from social expectations. Data on what men think their community believes – for example, the percentage of men and boys reporting that "society as a whole tells me that a husband shouldn't have to do household chores" – are critical for understanding why men do not adopt more gender-equitable norms (Heilman, Barker and Harrison, 2017[88]). This data is crucial in the planning and evaluating of policies and programmes to engage men and boys in gender equality, such as SRH Module for Boys implemented by the National Population and Family Development Board in **Malaysia** (Government of Malaysia, 2019[66]).

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.

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Notes

[1] SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16 and 17.

[2] Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (hereafter: Lao PDR), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

[3] The SIGI classifies countries into five categories based on their global SIGI score: very low level of discrimination (SIGI <20); low level of discrimination (SIGI 20-30); medium level of discrimination (SIGI 30-40); high level of discrimination (SIGI 40-50); and very high level of discrimination (SIGI >50).

[4] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Timor-Leste, Thailand and Viet Nam.

[5] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

[6] Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.

[7] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Timor-Leste.

[8] Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Timor-Leste.

[9] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines and Timor-Leste.

[10] Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Timor-Leste.

[11] Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

[12] Data are missing for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

[13] Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

[14] Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and the Philippines.

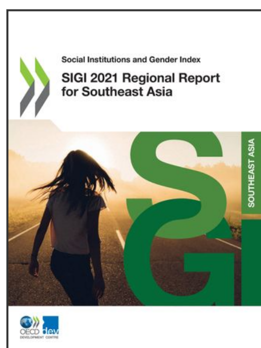
[15] Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam.

[16] Projections from the OECD exclude Timor-Leste.

[17] Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

[18] Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. It is also important to note that all of the data from this source are collected only from companies on the MSCI ACWI Index, and the sample sizes differ among countries.

[19] Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.



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